

Happy Thanksgiving!!!

Na-Huihui-O-Makali'i, "Cluster of Little Eyes" (Makali'i) (a faint group of blue-white stars) marks the shoulder of the Taurus (Bull) constellation. Though small and dipper-shaped, it is not the Little Dipper. (Makali'i is also known as the Pleiades; its common name is the Seven Sisters.)

Traditionally, the rising of Makali'i at sunset following the new moon (about the middle of October) marked the beginning of a four-month Makahiki season in ancient Hawai'i (a sign of the change of the season to winter.)

In Hawai'i, the Makahiki is a form of the "first fruits" festivals common to many cultures throughout the world. It is similar in timing and purpose to Thanksgiving, Oktoberfest and other harvest celebrations.

Something similar was observed throughout Polynesia, but it was in pre-contact Hawai'i that the festival. Makahiki was celebrated during a designated period of time following the harvesting season.

As the year's harvest was gathered, tributes in the form of goods and produce were given to the chiefs from November through December.

The First Thanksgiving

The site and date of origin of Thanksgiving are matters of dispute, with regional claims being made by widely disparate locations in North America. The chief claims are: Saint Augustine, Florida - 1565; Baffin Island, Canada - 1578; Jamestown, Virginia - 1619 and Plymouth, Massachusetts - 1621.

Mayflower Pilgrims Settling in at Plymouth

After the Mayflower came to anchor in what is today Provincetown harbor in the Cape Cod region of Massachusetts, a party of armed men under the command of Captain Myles Standish was sent to explore the immediate area and find a location suitable for settlement.

In December, they went ashore in Plymouth, where they found cleared fields and plentiful running water; a few days later the Mayflower came to anchor in Plymouth harbor, and settlement began.

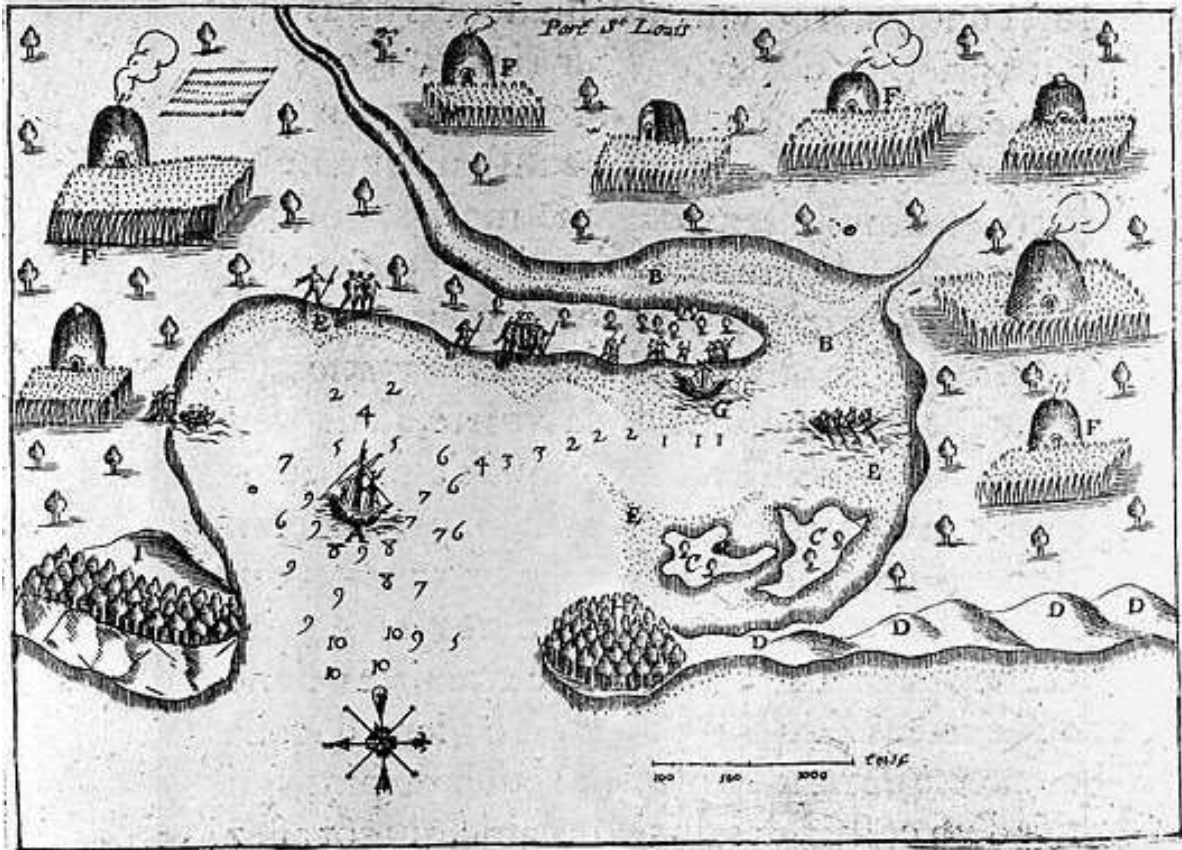
When the Mayflower arrived at Plymouth Harbor on December 16, 1620, the Pilgrims settled in an area that was once Patuxet, a Wampanoag village abandoned four years prior after a deadly outbreak of a plague, brought by European traders who first appeared in the area in 1616. The plague, however, killed thousands, up to two-thirds, of them.

And yet, when the Wampanoag watched the Mayflower's passengers come ashore at Patuxet, they did not see them as a threat.

"The Wampanoag had seen many ships before," explained Tim Turner, Cherokee, manager of Plimoth Plantation's Wampanoag Homesite and co-owner of Native Plymouth Tours.

“They had seen traders and fishermen, but they had not seen women and children before. In the Wampanoag ways, they never would have brought their women and children into harm. So, they saw them as a peaceful people for that reason.”

But they did not greet them right away either.



Patuxet Harbor by Samuel de Champlain-1605

The English, in fact, did not see the Wampanoag that first winter at all, according to Turner. “They saw shadows,” he said.

The first direct contact was made by Samoset, a Monhegan from Maine, who came to the village on March 16, 1621.

The next day, he returned with Tisquantum (Squanto), a Wampanoag who befriended and helped the English that spring, showing them how to plant corn, fish and gather berries and nuts.

On December 25, 1620, the Pilgrims began construction of their first buildings. The men of the colony set to building a common building while the women and children continued their residence on the ship.

After it was finished, the men slept there while the women and children slept on the boat.



Squanto

The captain was convinced to stay through to the spring, when the weather would be better for the return crossing. This was fortunate, as the new common house burned to the ground on January 14, 1621 and the ship was the only shelter the colonists had.

The Pilgrims planned to build houses along one main street that ran alongside the town brook. It was the only street in the colony, so it was just named 'the Street.'



Plymouth Patuxet

The houses were not log cabins, as you might think. They were frame houses just like the ones where the Pilgrims had lived in England. The houses were built close together for safety.

The hall was the main room in the house. It had a very big fireplace where the cooking was done. In this room the Pilgrims cooked, ate, played, and worked. The chamber was a small room in the back of the house for sleeping.

Young children often slept in trundle beds, which slid under the parents' bed during the day. Food was stored in the loft, and older children slept up there. Mattresses were stuffed with straw, corn husks, leaves, or cattails.

There weren't any bathrooms. Chamber pots were used, and they had to be emptied outside. Washing up was done with a bucket of water carried from the brook behind the houses.

The Mayflower returned to England on April 5, 1621.

Not one of the colonists left to go back with it. All through the summer the colony began to rebound, finishing their small encampment, gathering food, and tending crops. The colonists regained their strength and found the land provided them with plenty.

General Sickness

Not long after the common house burned, the “General Sickness” swept through the group, devastating colonists and crew alike. No one knows what this illness was, though it may have been pneumonia. Regardless, it was devastating.

Seven of the company of near 150 remained well enough to tend to the rest, fetching wood for fires, making food, bathing and dressing the sick. Others who were well refused to help, afraid they would catch the disease.

The captain at first ordered all the sick to land and refused to give them beer (the group’s main beverage) - but then his crew came down with the same sickness and began to die. The boatswain, who had always cursed and insulted the Pilgrims, got sick and was ministered to by those he hated, causing him great shame and bringing him to gratitude.

Of the original 102 Mayflower passengers, four died before reaching Plymouth.

By the summer of 1621 there were another 46 deaths among the passengers, and about 25 deaths among the crew.

After the General Sickness, only 12 of 26 men with families and 4 of the 12 single men and boys survived. Eleven of the thirty-one children died the first winter.

Fewer of the children died because of the good care of their mothers. Although the mothers were weak, sick, and hungry, they gave their children food and medicines they made from herbs. Fourteen of the eighteen adult women died the first winter.

Two baby boys were born on the Mayflower. Oceanus Hopkins was born at sea, just before they reached land. He died at the age of two. Peregrine White was born just nine days after they landed, and he lived to be eighty-three.

William White died in the sickness, though Susanna survived. (Susanna must have been a very strong woman, having survived the ocean crossing while very pregnant, then the General Sickness shortly after giving birth to Peregrine.)

Only four adult women were left alive for the Thanksgiving.

In order to hide the number of deaths from the Native Americans, the Pilgrims buried their dead in the night on what is now called Copt’s Hill. (In 1920, the remains of all the buried who could be found were placed inside a monument on top of the hill.) Bradford calls this period “The Starving Time.”

Of the 132 Pilgrims and crew who left England, only fifty-three of them survived the first winter.

Wampanoag Relationship with the Pilgrims

Samoset told the Pilgrims that he knew of a Patuxet who could speak better English than he and that he would bring him and others to them.

In the next few days the colonists were visited by several representatives of the Wampanoag, the main Native people in the area.

The Wampanoag returned some tools they had stolen from the Pilgrims and told them their great leader Massasoit was on his way. Several days later, the sachem Massasoit arrived with his brother, sixty warriors, and Squanto, the Patuxet whom Samoset had mentioned.

Squanto was the sole survivor of the Patuxet people.

Without Squanto's help and guidance, the Plymouth Colony would not have survived.

The English considered him "a special instrument sent of God for their good beyond their expectation." He acted as interpreter between the colonists and Massasoit, taught the Pilgrims how to fish and plant corn, how to live in harmony with the land, "and never left them till he died" in 1654.

The Pilgrims would have starved without his help. In addition to Squanto, another Wampanoag named Hobbamock came and lived with the colonists "and was of great assistance to them." Plymouth Colony notes that the Separatists enforced strict sexual morals, including upon the Native Americans who lived with them.

In the spring of 1621, Ousamequin, the Massasoit (a title meaning head chief) of the Wampanoag Indians, made a treaty with the English who settled at Patuxet (in what is now Plymouth, Massachusetts).



Massasoit

Chief Massasoit (ca. 1581- 1661) was born in present-day Rhode Island. As chief sachem of the Wampanoag nation, he befriended the Pilgrims at Plymouth, taught them farming methods.

Peace Treaty between Wampanoag and the Pilgrims (1621)

Massasoit, who led the Wampanoags for about a half-century, is best remembered for his diplomatic skills and for his successful policy of peaceful co-existence with the English settlers. They entered into a treaty.

The main terms of the treaty: the Wampanoag promised to defend the Plymouth settlers against hostile tribes. The settlers promised to step in if the Wampanoag were attacked.

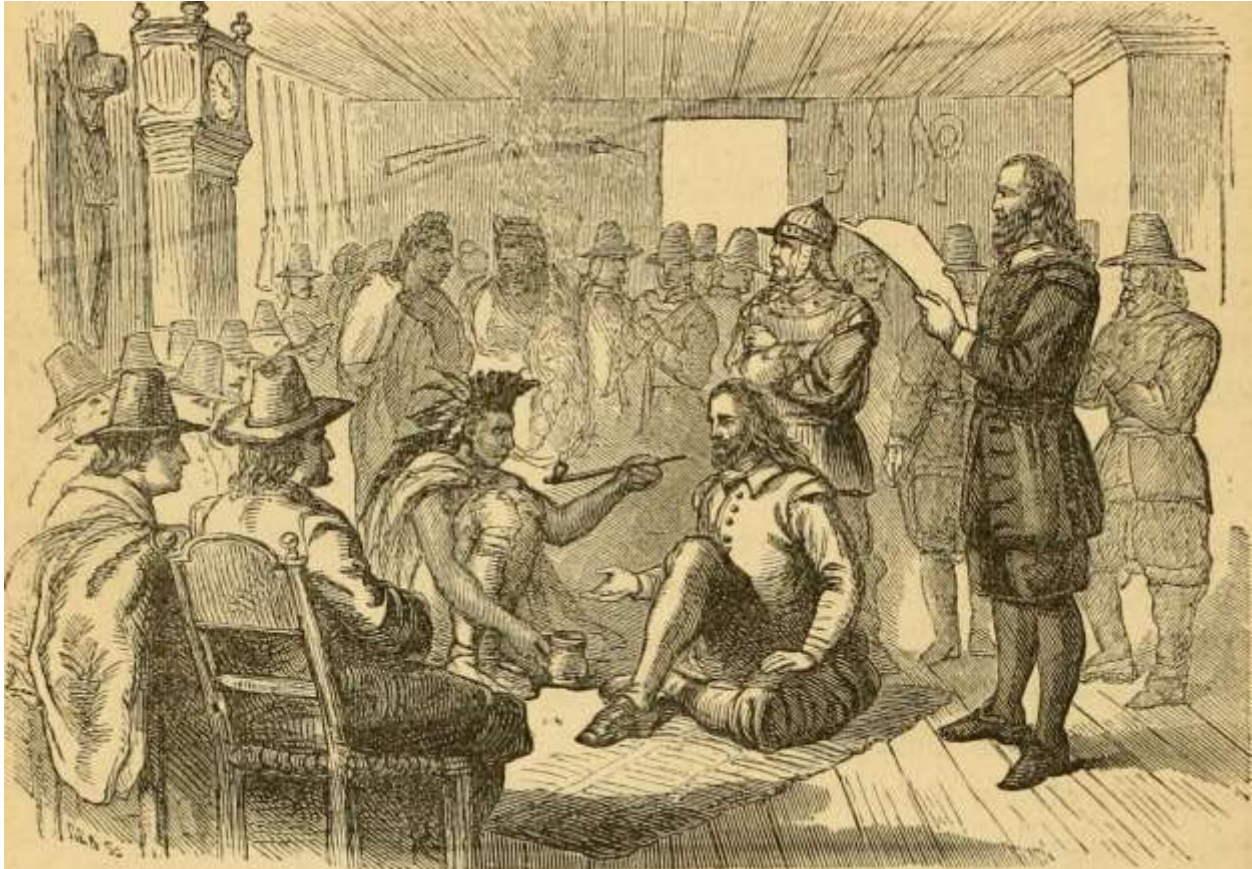
Three Wampanoag men, who represented Ousamequin, spent much time with the settlers. Tisquantum (also known as Squanto), Samoset, and Hobbamack gave the settlers invaluable tips on survival.

The Plymouth settlers honored the treaty later that summer by coming to Ousamequin's rescue when they thought he had been captured by enemies.

The Pilgrim-Wampanoag Peace Treaty is the document drafted and signed on March 22, 1621 CE between governor John Carver (l. 1584-1621 CE) of the Plymouth Colony and the sachem (chief) Ousamequin (better known by his title Massasoit, l. c. 1581-1661 CE) of the Wampanoag Confederacy.

The treaty established peaceful relations between the two parties and would be honored by both sides from the day of its signing until after the death of Massasoit in 1661 CE.

Although the treaty reads as though it favors the settlers, the provisions were understood as applying to both sides even when not specified.



The Pilgrim-Wampanoag Peace Treaty between Plymouth Colony governor John Carver & Wampanoag chief Massasoit, 1621 CE.

The agreement, in which both parties promised to not “doe hurt” to one another, was the first treaty between a Native American tribe and a group of American colonists.

According to the treaty, if a Wampanoag broke the peace, he would be sent to Plymouth for punishment; if a colonist broke the law, he would likewise be sent to the Wampanoags.

The peace treaty lasted for more than 50 years.

Thanksgiving in Plymouth

The Mayflower arrived in Plymouth in December of 1620. No further ships arrived in Plymouth until immediately after the first Thanksgiving at Plymouth - the Fortune arrived in November of 1621.

One of the passengers on the Fortune, William Hilton, wrote a letter home that November. His words help set some context to the time:

(The letter was written in November of 1621 - From Alexander Young's Chronicles of the Pilgrim Fathers. Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1841.)

Loving Cousin,

At our arrival in New Plymouth, in New England, we found all our friends and planters in good health, though they were left sick and weak, with very small means; the Indians round about us peaceable and friendly; the country very pleasant and temperate, yielding naturally, of itself, great store of fruits, as vines of divers sorts in great abundance.

There is likewise walnuts, chestnuts, small nuts and plums, with much variety of flowers, roots and herbs, no less pleasant than wholesome and profitable. No place hath more gooseberries and strawberries, nor better.

Timber of all sorts you have in England doth cover the land, that affords beasts of divers sorts, and great flocks of turkey, quails, pigeons and partridges; many great lakes abounding with fish, fowl, beavers, and otters.

The sea affords us great plenty of all excellent sorts of sea-fish, as the rivers and isles doth variety of wild fowl of most useful sorts. Mines we find, to our thinking; but neither the goodness nor quality we know.

Better grain cannot be than the Indian corn, if we will plant it upon as good ground as a man need desire. We are all freeholders; the rent-day doth not trouble us; and all those good blessings we have, of which and what we list in their seasons for taking.

Our company are, for most part, very religious, honest people; the word of God sincerely taught us every Sabbath; so that I know not any thing a contented mind can here want. I desire your friendly care to send my wife and children to me, where I wish all the friends I have in England; and so I rest

Your loving kinsman,
William Hilton

According to the Pilgrim Hall Museum, there are two (and only two) primary sources for the events of autumn 1621 in Plymouth that suggest the first Thanksgiving at Plymouth: Edward Winslow writing in Mourt's Relation and William Bradford writing in Of Plymouth Plantation:

Edward Winslow, Mourt's Relation:

"our harvest being gotten in, our governour sent foure men on fowling, that so we might after a speciall manner rejoyce together, after we had gathered the fruits of our labours;"

"they foure in one day killed as much fowle, as with a little helpe beside, served the Company almost a weeke, at which time amongst other Recreations, we exercised our Armes ..."

"many of the Indians coming amongst us, and amongst the rest their greatest king Massasoyt, with some ninetie men, whom for three dayes we entertained and feasted ..."

“and they went out and killed five Deere, which they brought to the Plantation and bestowed on our Governour, and upon the Captaine and others. “

“And although it be not always so plentifull, as it was at this time with us, yet by the goodness of God, we are so farre from want, that we often wish you partakers of our plentie.”

William Bradford, Of Plimoth Plantation:

“They begane now to gather in ye small harvest they had, and to fitte up their houses and dwellings against winter, being all well recovered in health & strenght, and had all things in good plenty ...”

“for as some were thus employed in affairs abroad, others were excersised in fishing, aboute codd, & bass, & other fish, of which yey tooke good store, of which every family had their portion.”

“All ye somer ther was no want. And now begane to come in store of foule, as winter approached, of which this place did abound when they came first (but afterward decreased by degrees).”

“And besids water foule, ther was great store of wild Turkie, of which they tooke many, besids venison, &c. ...”

“Besids, they had about a peck a meale a weeke to a person, or now since harvest, Indean corn to yt proportion. Which made many afterwards write so largely of their plenty hear to their freinds in England, which were not fained, but true reports.”

As noted, at the end of the 1621 summer, when harvest was in, Governor John Carver called for a special celebration. The colonists began to gather food for a traditional English “harvest home.”

This festival was held throughout England at harvest’s end to give thanks for the bounty and celebrate the end of the most intense period of work for farmers. The Pilgrims’ celebration had a special poignancy, of course, as a counterpoint to years of terrible hardships and a testament to the creation of the kind of religious environment they desired. The Native Americans traditionally celebrated a harvest festival similar to the harvest home.

Turner said what most people do not know about the first Thanksgiving at Plymouth is that the Wampanoag and Pilgrims did not sit down for a big turkey dinner and it was not an event that the Wampanoag knew about or were invited to in advance. In September/October 1621, the Pilgrims had just harvested their first crops, and they had a good yield.

They “sent four men on fowling,” which comes from the one paragraph account by Pilgrim Edward Winslow, one of only two historical sources of this famous harvest feast. Winslow also stated, “we exercised our arms.”

“Most historians believe what happened was Massasoit got word that there was a tremendous amount of gun fire coming from the Pilgrim village,” Turner said. “So he thought they were being attacked and he was going to bear aid.”



The First Thanksgiving at Plymouth (1914) By Jennie A. Brownscombe

When the Wampanoag showed up, they were invited to join the Pilgrims in their feast, but there was not enough food to feed the chief and his 90 warriors.

“He [Massasoit] sends his men out, and they bring back five deer, which they present to the chief of the English town [William Bradford].”

“So, there is this whole ceremonial gift-giving, as well. When you give it as a gift, it is more than just food,” said Kathleen Wall, a Colonial Foodways Culinarian at Plimoth Plantation.

The harvest feast lasted for three days.

What did they eat? Venison, of course, and Wall said, “Not just a lovely roasted joint of venison, but all the parts of the deer were on the table in who knows how many sorts of ways.”

The first Thanksgiving at Plymouth included a blessing on the harvest and thanks to God, but it was also a party rather than a serious religious meditation, with five or six days of recreation.

The invitation of the Wampanoag was not just about being neighborly; it was also to recognize the special role which the Native Americans played in ensuring the Pilgrims' survival.

Was there turkey? “Fowl” is mentioned in Winslow’s account, which puts turkey on Wall’s list of possibilities. She also said there probably would have been a variety of seafood and water fowl along with maize bread, pumpkin and other squashes. “It was nothing at all like a modern Thanksgiving,” she said.

The 53 Pilgrims at the First Thanksgiving at Plymouth (listing the Family groups & breakdown):

Alden: John
Allerton, Isaac with children Bartholomew, Mary, Remember; the Allerton servant William Latham
Billington, John & Eleanor with sons Francis, John Jr.
Bradford, William
Brewster, William & Mary with sons Love, Wrestling; their ward Richard More
Browne / Brown, Peter
Carver, ward Desire Minter; the Carver servant John Howland; the Carver maidservant Dorothy.
Chilton, Mary
Cooke, Francis with son John
Crackston, John
Eaton, Francis with son Samuel
Ely, Unknown adult man
Fuller, Samuel with nephew Samuel 2d
Gardiner, Richard
Goodman, John
Hopkins, Stephen & Elizabeth with Giles, Constance, Damaris, Oceanus; servants Edward Doty and Edward Leister.
Mullins, Priscilla
Rogers, Joseph
Standish, Myles
Tilley, Elizabeth
Tilley, Tilley wards Humility Cooper and Henry Samson
Trevor / Trevore, William
Warren, Richard
Winslow, Edward & Susanna with her sons Resolved White & Peregrine White; servant George Soule
Winslow, Gilbert

Breakdown of the Pilgrim Attendees:

22 Men: John Alden, Isaac Allerton, John Billington, William Bradford, William Brewster, Peter Brown, Francis Cooke, Edward Doty, Francis Eaton, [first name unknown] Ely, Samuel Fuller, Richard Gardiner, John Goodman, Stephen Hopkins, John Howland, Edward Lester, George Soule, Myles Standish, William Trevor, Richard Warren, Edward Winslow, Gilbert Winslow.
4 Married Women: Eleanor Billington, Mary Brewster, Elizabeth Hopkins, Susanna White Winslow.
9 Adolescent Boys: Francis & John Billington, John Cooke, John Crackston, Samuel Fuller (2d), Giles Hopkins, William Latham, Joseph Rogers, Henry Samson.
5 Adolescent Girls: Mary Chilton, Constance Hopkins, Priscilla Mullins, Elizabeth Tilley and Dorothy, the Carver's unnamed maidservant.
13 Young Children: Bartholomew, Mary & Remember Allerton, Love & Wrestling Brewster, Humility Cooper, Samuel Eaton, Damaris & Oceanus Hopkins, Desire Minter, Richard More, Resolved & Peregrine White.

No other ships arrived in Plymouth until after the first Thanksgiving at Plymouth. The Pilgrims at the first Thanksgiving at Plymouth are all the Mayflower survivors.

Thanksgiving in Hawai'i

It's not clear when the first western Thanksgiving feast was held in Hawai'i, but from all apparent possibilities, the first recorded one took place in Honolulu and was held among the families of the American missionaries from New England.

According to the reported entry in Lowell Smith's journal on December 6, 1838:

"This day has been observed by us missionaries and people of Honolulu as a day of Thanksgiving and praise to Almighty God. Something new for this nation."

"The people turned out pretty well and they dined in small groups and in a few instances in large groups. We missionaries all dined at Dr. Judd's and supped at Brother Bingham's. ... An interesting day; seemed like old times - Thanksgiving in the United States."

Laura Judd, in Sketches of Life in Honolulu noted on January 1, 1841:

"There were twenty-five adults and thirty-two children of the station in Honolulu, and a proposition to unite in appropriate religious exercises and a Thanksgiving dinner, met with unanimous approval. ..."

"Each lady was to furnish such dishes as suited her taste and convenience, while the table arrangements were the portion of one individual. ... At three o'clock we had donned our best apparel, and sat down at the long table to enjoy a double feast."

The first Thanksgiving Proclamation in Hawai'i appears to have been issued on November 23, 1849, and set the 31st day of December as a date of Thanksgiving. This appeared in 'The Friend' on December 1, 1849.

The following, under the signature of King Kamehameha III, named the 31st of December as a day of public thanks. The Thanksgiving Proclamation of 1849 read, in part:

"In accordance with the laws of this Kingdom, and the excellent usage of Christian Nations, it has pleased his Majesty, in council, to appoint the Thirty-first day of December, next, as a day of public thanksgiving to God, for His unnumbered mercies and blessings to this nation; and ..."

"... people of every class are respectfully requested to assemble in their several houses of worship on that day, to render united praise to the Father of nations, and to implore His favor in time to come, upon all who dwell upon these shores, as individuals, as families, and as a nation." (Signed at the Palace. Honolulu, November, 23, 1849.)

"It will be seen by Royal Proclamation that Monday, the 31st of December has been appointed by His Majesty in Council as a day of Thanksgiving. We are glad to see this time-honored custom introduced into this Kingdom."

US National Holiday

The celebratory day of Thanksgiving changed over time.

The Continental Congress proclaimed the first national Thanksgiving in 1777. A somber event, it specifically recommended "that servile labor and such recreations (although at other times innocent) may be unbecoming the purpose of this appointment [and should] be omitted on so solemn an occasion."

Presidents Washington, Adams and Monroe proclaimed national Thanksgivings, but the custom fell out of use by 1815, after which the celebration of the holiday was limited to individual state observances. By the 1850s, almost every state and territory celebrated Thanksgiving. (plimoth-org)

In the 19th century, the modern Thanksgiving holiday started to take shape. In 1846, Sarah Josepha Hale, editor of a magazine called Godey's Lady's Book, campaigned for an annual national thanksgiving holiday.

But it wasn't until 1863, when President Abraham Lincoln declared two national Thanksgivings; one in August to commemorate the Battle of Gettysburg during the Civil War, and the other in November to give thanks for "general blessings." It's the second one that we celebrate today. (National Geographic)

Neither Lincoln nor his successors, however, made the holiday a fixed annual event.

Finally, on December 26, 1941 President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed into law a bill making the date of Thanksgiving a matter of federal law, fixing the day as the fourth Thursday of November.



Happy Thanksgiving!!!

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