

Thursday, Nov. 22nd: Thanksgiving is celebrated on the *fourth Thursday in November* in the United States of America. Traditionally, this holiday celebrates the giving of thanks for the autumn harvest. Thanks to officeholidays.com for the background info (this text is copied from their website).

The tradition of Thanksgiving

The custom of giving thanks for the annual harvest is one of the world's oldest celebrations and can be traced back to the dawn of civilization.

However, it is not commonly a major modern event and arguably the success of the American holiday has been due to it being seen as a time to give 'thanks' for the foundation of the nation and not just as a celebration of the harvest.

The American tradition of Thanksgiving dates back to 1621, when the pilgrims gave thanks for their first bountiful harvest in Plymouth Rock. They celebrated for three days, feasting with the natives on dried fruits, boiled pumpkin, turkey, venison and much more. This has come to be known as the first Thanksgiving.

The celebration, however, was not repeated until many years later, when in 1789 George Washington proclaimed Thanksgiving to be a national holiday on Thursday 26 November that year - setting the precedent of the last Thursday in November. Despite this, the holiday was celebrated on different days from state to state and Thomas Jefferson later did away with the holiday.

Thanksgiving didn't become a nationwide holiday until President Lincoln proclaimed the last Thursday in November a national day of Thanksgiving in 1863. Every year following, the President proclaimed a day of Thanksgiving until finally Congress sanctioned the day a legal holiday in 1941.

Did you know?

Sarah Josepha Hale, writer of 'Mary Had a Little Lamb', led a 17-year campaign to get Thanksgiving declared a national holiday. Many letters she sent in that time were ignored, but a letter to Abraham Lincoln finally convinced him to declare Thanksgiving as a holiday in 1863.

More Thanksgiving facts

The holiday has evolved into what Americans now know as Thanksgiving. It is a day to gather with loved ones, celebrate, give thanks for many blessings and, of course, eat. The traditional American Thanksgiving meal includes: turkey, mashed potatoes, stuffing, cranberry sauce, yams, and pumpkin pie. The meal stems from that eaten by the pilgrims at the first Thanksgiving.

Did you know?

The Plymouth settlers did not refer to themselves as 'Pilgrims'. The majority of the settlers were dissidents who had broken away from the Church of England. They would have called themselves 'separatists' or 'puritans'. It wasn't until about 100 years later that the term 'Pilgrims' started to be commonly used to refer to the settlers.

More Thanksgiving facts

Another American Thanksgiving tradition is the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. The Parade began, even before Thanksgiving was a legal holiday, in 1924. That year Macy's employees marched through New York City from 145th St. down to 35th St. The employees dressed as clowns, cowboys, and knights marching next to professional floats, live bands, and 25 live animals that were borrowed from the Central Park Zoo. A quarter of a million people were in the audience; the parade was a success! It became an annual event - people traveled to New York City to be a part of the tradition.

After a three-year hiatus during World War II, the parade picked back up in 1945 nationally televised, so that all of America could participate, making the parade an integral part of the American Thanksgiving holiday tradition.

In Canada, Thanksgiving is celebrated on the second Monday in October.

From Oakwood United Methodist Church, Lubbock Texas