Ten Thanksgiving Tidbits - Happy Thanksgiving!

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Thanksgiving has become a popular national holiday on the American calendar. Families celebrate it by coming together and feasting on a meal of turkey with all the trappings. But did you know that the modern-day festival bears little resemblance to what the Pilgrims did in the 17th century? Read on to learn more little-known facts about Thanksgiving.



Pilgrims did not wear buckled hats: Thanksgiving is meant to commemorate the Pilgrims' harvest festival at the Plymouth colony in Massachusetts in 1621. The stereotypical image of a Pilgrim is of a man dressed in black and white and wearing a black buckled hat. However, the buckle did not become fashionable until the 18th century. So, chances are the Pilgrims did not wear them.

Thanksgiving didn't originate in America: Thanksgiving, as we know it, is actually a mixture of various festivals, including ancient European harvest rituals and the New England Puritan thanksgiving celebrations, amongst other influences.

Traditional Thanksgiving foods aren't historically accurate: Here's a list of aspects of the modern Thanksgiving meal that would not have been on the original Pilgrim dinner table: turkey, sweet potatoes, mashed potatoes, pumpkin pie, and cranberry sauce. They most likely would have eaten goose or duck instead of turkey. The meal might even have included swans, passenger pigeons as well as seafood.

Lincoln made Thanksgiving an official national holiday in 1863: Lincoln was heeding the request of Sarah Hale, a magazine editor who had petitioned five presidents to turn the festival into a national holiday. She's also the person who gave the world "Mary Had a Little Lamb" as she is the original composer of the nursery rhyme.

President Jefferson wasn't very thankful for Thanksgiving: He called the idea of a federal Thanksgiving proclamation "the most ridiculous idea ever conceived."

Turkey trivia: Over 45 million turkeys are eaten every year at Thanksgiving, according to the US Department of Agriculture. That's approximately one sixth of all the turkeys sold in the US every year.

The truth about cranberries: Although cranberries have become a Thanksgiving dinner staple, they were first used by American Indian tribes to heal wounds and dye cloth.

Presidential turkey pardon: The tradition of the US President pardoning a turkey every year officially began in 1947. However, there are unconfirmed stories that Abraham Lincoln was the first president to issue this pardon, sparing his son's pet turkey from the Thanksgiving table.

Thanksgiving Football: Football has been played on Thanksgiving every year since 1876 when Yale played Princeton.

Black Friday: Ever wondered why we call the Friday after Thanksgiving Black Friday? The term Black Friday was first used to describe the 1929 stock market crash which heralded in the Great Depression. Black Friday was first used to refer to the day after Thanksgiving by Philadelphia policemen. They called it that because of the horrendous traffic that would occur as hordes of people tried to get their Christmas shopping started early. Retailers began to embrace the term by using it in their ads and sanitising its negative connotation. They claimed that the day was called Black Friday because the intense shopping activity would lift their profits out of the red. In accounting, profits are recorded in black ink while red ink is used to denote losses. The term caught on and by the late 1990s Black Friday was nationally considered an unofficial holiday devoted to retail shopping.

Modern Thanksgiving celebrations may bear little to no resemblance to the original Pilgrim celebration, but the importance of giving thanks remains. That's the most important part of the holiday, anyway. Happy Thanksgiving!

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