

# 14 Pilgrims, Indians, and Puritans



One way of cooking a turkey on an open fire was in a roasting pan with a tight lid: "For turkey braised, the Lord be praised."

Like the Jamestown colonists, the Pilgrims have picked a poor site. The New England coast is cold and wind-whipped; the land is rocky, the soil is thin. But these industrious people will use the sea and the forest to sustain themselves. Soon they will be shipping fish, furs, and lumber back to England.

Without the Indians they might not have survived. Picture this scene: Pilgrims are struggling to find ways to live in this difficult region, when out of the woods strides a tall man in deerskin clothes. They are astounded when he greets them. "Welcome, Englishmen," he says. His name is Samoset, and he has learned some English from fishermen and traders.

Samoset returns with 60 Indians, a chieftain named Massasoit, and an Indian whom the settlers name Squanto. Squanto speaks English well. He had been kidnapped by sailors, taken to London, befriended by a London merchant, and then returned to his native land.

Trumpet and drums are played as the Pilgrims' governor, John Carver, leads Massasoit to his house, kisses his hand (as is proper to a king), offers refreshments, and writes a treaty of peace between the Indians and the English. While Massasoit is alive, the peace will be kept.

Squanto stays with the settlers. To the Pilgrims he was "a special instrument sent of God for their good beyond their expectation....He directed them how to set [plant] their corn, where to take [catch] fish, and to procure other commodities, and was also their pilot to bring them to unknown places."

**Squanto's real name is Tisquantum.** These Native Americans are Algonquians of the Wampanoag tribe, who live in what is now Rhode Island. *Wampanoag* means "eastern people." They hunt, fish, dig for clams, and gather berries and nuts. They are good cooks; they make venison (deer) steak, fish chowders, succotash, cornbread, and maple sugar.



Edward Winslow was a printer and a clever man. He traveled a lot to London to trade and negotiate for the Pilgrims. On his first trip back to Plymouth he brought something very important: cattle.



Not all the early colonists dressed in somber styles and colors. Only the Saints insisted on plain, dark clothes.

**One of** America's first folk songs praised the humble but essential pumpkin. For pottage and puddings and custards and pies Our pumpkins and parsnips are common supplies. We have pumpkin at morning and pumpkin at noon, If it were not for pumpkin, We should be undone.

In 1621, after the first harvest, the Pilgrims invite their Indian friends to a three-day feast of Thanksgiving. In one year they have accomplished much.

The Pilgrims are frugal, but the celebration is unusually generous. They will need their food to get through the winter and to help feed the new colonists who are beginning to arrive.

William Bradford, who is elected governor when John Carver dies suddenly, keeps a record of the arrivals. When the ship *Fortune* docks he writes, "there was not so much as biscuit-cake, neither had they any bedding...nor pot, or pan."

Abraham Pearce, a black indentured servant, is one of those who comes in 1623. A few years later he will own land, vote, and be a respected member of the community.

The new arrivals bring reports from England that are not good. Now the Puritans are in trouble. The Puritans are also called Saints, but they are more moderate than the Pilgrims. Remember, Puritans don't want to separate themselves from the Church of England, they want to purify the church. What they really want is to control the Church of England; of course, King James and those in charge don't want that at all.

The Puritans can't stand King James and he doesn't like them either. Of the Puritans he says, "I will make them conform themselves, or else I will harry [harass] them out of the land." The Puritans can see that King James isn't good for England's economy. First, there is inflation and then a depression. James has brought his big-spending friends to England from Scotland, where he is also king. They are getting special favors. The Puritans are not.

And so a group of Puritans gathers at Cambridge University, where most of them have gone to college, and makes plans to sail to America. The Puritans are better educated than the Pilgrims—and richer, too. John Winthrop, their leader, is a lawyer, born on a manor, with servants and tenants.

When King James dies, in 1625, and Charles I becomes king, things get even worse for the Puritans.

**GOOD  
NEWES**  
FROM NEW ENGLAND,  
OR  
A true Relation of things very remarkable at the Plantation of *Plymouth* in NEW-ENGLAND.

Shewing the wondrous providence and goodness of God, in their preservation and continuance, being delivered from many apparent *ships and dangers*.

Together with a Relation of such religious and civil *Laws and Customs*, as are in practice amongst the *Indians*, adjoining to them at this day. As also what *Commodities* are there to be caught for the maintenance of this and other *Plantations* in the said Country.

Written by *E. W.* who hath borne a part in the fore-said troubles, and there lived since their first Arrival.

Wherunto is added by him a briefe Relation of a credible intelligence of the present state of *Virginia*.

LONDON  
Printed by *J. D.* for *William Bladen and John Rolfe*, and are to be sold at their Shop, in the *Widdow Church-yard*, next to the *West-End* of *St. Dunstons Church*, in the *City*.

Edward Winslow wrote this pamphlet to encourage more colonists to come to New England.

## Giving Thanks

The story that the first American Thanksgiving was held at Plymouth Colony is a real turkey. In 1540, long before the Pilgrims sat down to their big dinner, Francisco Vasquez de Coronado and his men conducted a thanksgiving service in their camp at Palo Duro Canyon in what is now known as the Texas Panhandle.

Half a century before the Pilgrims landed, French Huguenots settled near today's Jacksonville, Florida. They "sang a psalm of Thanksgiving unto God, beseeching Him...to continue his accustomed goodness toward us." Unfortunately for the French, the goodness did not continue. Their colony was wiped out by Spanish raiders. Still, some Floridians claim that as the first American Thanksgiving.

A group of English Catholics arrived in Maine in 1605, said prayers of thanks, faced a year of Maine weather, changed their minds about living in America, and sailed back to England. But some Mainiacs (yes, that's what they are called) say their state had the first Thanksgiving.

Two years before the feast in Massachusetts, the settlers at Berkeley Hundred, on the James River in Virginia, decreed that the day of their landing, December 4, 1619, "shall be yearly and perpetually kept holy as a day of Thanksgiving." Did

they have a feast? It depends on whom you ask at Berkeley Plantation. (There is no documented record of one.)

Now, to give the Pilgrims their due: they did eat a big meal, and one of them—Edward Winslow—wrote six sentences about it. None of the other claimants can say that.

Those Pilgrims needed a good meal. Fewer than half of the 102 passengers who came on the *Mayflower* in 1620 survived their first American winter. The local Indians weren't in good shape either. They had been hit—hard hit—by diseases brought by French fishermen, who had made contact four years earlier.

The English colonists wouldn't have survived at all—and they knew it—if it hadn't been for corn and other help from the Indians. And Massasoit was forever grateful to Winslow, who made a nourishing broth that helped him recover from a serious illness. Good will, necessity, and plain good sense seem to have made them all good neighbors.

So when harvest time arrived in 1621, the Pilgrims had much to be thankful for. They had made a start at the beaver trade, they lived in peace with the Native Americans, 11 houses had been built, and, thanks to Squanto, the corn harvest was

good. They had celebrated harvest time in Holland; they wished to continue that tradition.

They invited Massasoit to join them. He came with 90 hungry Indians. They might have wiped out the larder, but the Indians "went and killed five deer, which they brought to the plantation and bestowed on our governor," Winslow writes.

We don't know exactly what the Pilgrims cooked, but ducks, geese, turkey, clams, eels, lobster, squash, wild grapes, dried fruit, and cornbread are all good guesses, along with watercress and other "sallet herbes." Winslow says, "Our governor sent four men on fowling, that so we might after a special manner rejoice together after we had gathered the fruit of our labors. They four in one day killed as much fowl as, with a little help beside, served the company almost a week." That's as detailed as he gets, with this addition: "for three days we entertained and feasted."

That's all we know? That's it. Except for a brief word from Governor William Bradford, who doesn't write specifically about a feast with the Indians, but does say that "they began now to gather in the small harvest they had....All summer there was no want; and now began to come in store of fowl, as winter approached, of which this place did abound....And besides wa-

(continued on p.58)

terfowl there was great store of wild turkeys, of which they took many, besides venison, etc. Besides, they had about a peck of meal a week to a person, or now since harvest, Indian corn in that proportion."

Did they eat cranberries, which were thick in the nearby bogs? Or pumpkin pie? Not likely. You need sugar for those

dishes, and they didn't have any.

**A**s devout Christians, the Pilgrims gave thanks before each meal. But this was a harvest festival, not, primarily, a celebration of thanks to God. And it probably came at the end of September. Still, all in all, the spirit was the same as at today's November festival where we give thanks, we re-

member, we enjoy—and we eat!

The first national Thanksgiving was actually proclaimed by George Washington in 1789. But Thanksgiving was not celebrated officially again until Abraham Lincoln (urged on by a magazine editor, Sarah J. Hale) decreed a national holiday in 1863. Since then it's been turkey all the way.



This is the first Thanksgiving dinner celebrated by the Pilgrims and Native Americans, as pictured by the artist J.L.G. Ferris (1863-1930). No one really knows if they ate outdoors or not.

John V  
a lawyer  
job be  
religio  
came

munity  
country  
have s  
You

Puritan  
go to t  
But, be  
Think  
and set  
people

Why  
their re  
a holy c  
Puritan  
follow it