A couple of articles about the American tradition of Thanksgiving, chosen almost at random from the internet....

From [http://wilstar.com/holidays/thankstr.htm](http://wilstar.com/holidays/thankstr.htm)

The Thanksgiving Story

The Pilgrims who sailed to this country aboard the Mayflower were originally members of the English Separatist Church (a Puritan sect). They had earlier fled their home in England and sailed to Holland (The Netherlands) to escape religious persecution. There, they enjoyed more religious tolerance, but they eventually became disenchanted with the Dutch way of life, thinking it ungodly. Seeking a better life, the Separatists negotiated with a London stock company to finance a pilgrimage to America. Most of those making the trip aboard the Mayflower were non-Separatists, but were hired to protect the company's interests. Only about one-third of the original colonists were Separatists.

The Pilgrims set ground at Plymouth Rock on December 11, 1620. Their first winter was devastating. At the beginning of the following fall, they had lost 46 of the original 102 who sailed on the Mayflower. But the harvest of 1621 was a bountiful one. And the remaining colonists decided to celebrate with a feast -- including 91 Indians who had helped the Pilgrims survive their first year. It is believed that the Pilgrims would not have made it through the year without the help of the natives. The feast was more of a traditional English harvest festival than a true "thanksgiving" observance. It lasted three days.

Governor William Bradford sent "four men fowling" after wild ducks and geese. It is not certain that wild turkey was part of their feast. However, it is certain that they had venison. The term "turkey" was used by the Pilgrims to mean any sort of wild fowl.

Another modern staple at almost every Thanksgiving table is pumpkin pie. But it is unlikely that the first feast included that treat. The supply of flour had been long diminished, so there was no bread or pastries of any kind. However, they did eat boiled pumpkin, and they produced a type of fried bread from their corn crop. There was also no milk, cider, potatoes, or butter. There was no domestic cattle for dairy products, and the newly-discovered potato was still considered by many Europeans to be poisonous. But the feast did include fish, berries, watercress, lobster, dried fruit, clams, venison, and plums.

This "thanksgiving" feast was not repeated the following year. But in 1623, during a severe drought, the pilgrims gathered in a prayer service, praying for rain. When a long, steady rain followed the very next day, Governor Bradford proclaimed another day of Thanksgiving, again inviting their Indian friends. It wasn't until June of 1676 that another Day of Thanksgiving was proclaimed.

On June 20, 1676, the governing council of Charlestown, Massachusetts, held a meeting to determine how best to express thanks for the good fortune that had seen their community securely established. By unanimous vote they instructed Edward Rawson, the clerk, to proclaim June 29 as a day of thanksgiving. It is notable that this thanksgiving celebration probably did not include the Indians, as the celebration was meant partly to be in recognition of the colonists' recent victory over the "heathen natives," (see the proclamation).

October of 1777 marked the first time that all 13 colonies joined in a thanksgiving celebration. It also commemorated the patriotic victory over the British at Saratoga. But it was a one-time affair.

George Washington proclaimed a National Day of Thanksgiving in 1789, although some were opposed to it. There was discord among the colonies, many feeling the hardships of a few Pilgrims did not warrant a national holiday. And later, President Thomas Jefferson scoffed at the idea of having a day of thanksgiving.

It was Sarah Josepha Hale, a magazine editor, whose efforts eventually led to what we recognize as Thanksgiving. Hale wrote many editorials championing her cause in her Boston Ladies' Magazine, and later, in Godey's Lady's Book. Finally, after a 40-year campaign of writing editorials and letters to governors and presidents, Hale's obsession became a reality when, in 1863, President Lincoln proclaimed the last Thursday in November as a national day of Thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving was proclaimed by every president after Lincoln. The date was changed a couple of times, most recently by Franklin Roosevelt, who set it up one week to the next-to-last Thursday in order to create a longer Christmas shopping season. Public uproar against this decision caused the president to move Thanksgiving back to its original date two years later. And in 1941, Thanksgiving was finally sanctioned by Congress as a legal holiday, as the fourth Thursday in November.


Thanksgiving, or Thanksgiving Day, is a traditional North American holiday to give thanks at the conclusion of the harvest season. Thanksgiving is celebrated on the fourth Thursday of November in the United States and on the second Monday of October in Canada.
Traditional celebration
In the United States, Thanksgiving is a four day weekend which usually marks a pause in school and college calendars. Families and friends gather for a reunion, a day of thanks, and a festive meal.

Thanksgiving meals are traditionally family events where certain kinds of food are served. First and foremost, turkey is the featured item in most Thanksgiving feasts (so much so that Thanksgiving is sometimes facetiously referred to as "Turkey Day"). Stuffing, mashed potatoes with gravy, sweet potatoes, cranberry sauce, corn, turnips, yams and pumpkin pie are commonly associated with Thanksgiving dinner. Often guests bring food items or help with cooking in the kitchen as part of a happy, communal meal.

In keeping with the holiday theme of giving thanks, during the socializing or meal, people talk about what they are thankful for or tell about experiences during the past year which have caused them to feel grateful.

The Pilgrims
The early settlers of Plymouth Colony in Massachusetts were particularly grateful to Squanto, the Native American and former British slave who taught them how to both catch eel and grow corn and also served as their native interpreter. Without Squanto's assistance, the settlers might not have survived in the New World.

The Plymouth settlers (who came to be called "Pilgrims") set apart a holiday immediately after their first harvest in 1621. They held an autumn celebration of food, feasting, and praising God. The Governor of Plymouth invited Grand Sachem Massasoit and the Wampanoag people to join them in the feast. Evidence to support that claim came from diaries of Plymouth. The settlers fed and entertained the Native Americans for three days, at which point some of the Native Americans went into the forest, killed 5 deer, and gave them to the Governor as a gift.

The National Thanksgiving Proclamations
National Thanksgiving Proclamations proclaim thanks for God's providence in the events of the nation and, as President Washington explained in his Thanksgiving Proclamation, “for the many signal favors of Almighty God” in the lives of the people.

As congress recognized the importance of Thanksgiving observance, President George Washington issued a national Thanksgiving Proclamation in 1789. He wrote, "Now therefore I do recommend and assign Thursday the 26th day of November next to be devoted by the People of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being, who is the beneficient Author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be—That we may then all unite in rendering unto him our sincere and humble thanks—for his kind care and protection of the People of this Country...for the signal and manifold mercies, and the favorable interpositions of his Providence which we experienced in the tranquility, union, and plenty, which we have since enjoyed...and also that we may then unite in most humbly offering our prayers and supplications to the great Lord and Ruler of Nations and beseech him to pardon our national and other transgressions—to enable us all, whether in public or private stations, to perform our several and relative duties properly and punctually...To promote the knowledge and practice of true religion and virtue, and the increase of science among them and us—and generally to grant unto all Mankind such a degree of temporal prosperity as he alone knows to be best."

In 1789 Washington designated a national thanksgiving holiday for the newly ratified Constitution, specifically so that the people may thank God for "affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness" and for having "been enabled to establish constitutions of government for our safety and happiness, and particularly the national One now lately instituted, for the civil and religious liberty with which we are blessed...".

The first official Thanksgiving Proclamation made in America was issued by the Continental Congress in 1777. Six national Proclamations of Thanksgiving were issued in the first thirty years after the founding of the United States of America as an independent federation of States. President George Washington issued two, President John Adams issued two, President Thomas Jefferson made none and President James Madison issued two. After 1815 there were no more Thanksgiving Proclamations until the Presidency of Lincoln, who made two during the Civil War.

President Lincoln declared Thanksgiving a Federal holiday as a "prayerful day of Thanksgiving" on the last Thursday in November. Since then every U.S. President has always made an official Thanksgiving Proclamation on behalf of the nation. President Franklin D. Roosevelt set the date for Thanksgiving to the fourth Thursday of November in 1939 (approved by Congress in 1941).