

WBNP #24 - Thanksgiving Part 1

Good Evening. A Puritan's Mind brings you the old time radio program *The Wild Boar News Podcast* from Sunny South Florida. Welcome, I'm Dr. Matthew McMahon.

The celebration we now popularly regard as the "First Thanksgiving" was the Pilgrims' three-day feast celebrated in early November of 1621 (although a day of thanks in America was observed in Virginia at Cape Henry in 1607). The first Thanksgiving to God in the Calvinist tradition in Plymouth Colony was actually celebrated during the summer of 1623, when the colonists declared a Thanksgiving holiday after their crops were saved by much-needed rainfall.

The Pilgrims left Plymouth, England, on September 6, 1620, sailing for a new world that offered the promise of both civil and religious liberty. The Pilgrims had earlier left England in 1608, as the Church of England had curtailed their freedom to worship according to their individual consciences.

The Pilgrims had settled in Holland for twelve years, where they found spiritual liberty in the midst of a disjointed economy (which failed to provide adequate compensation for their labors) and a dissolute, degraded, corrupt culture (which tempted their children to stray from faith). For almost three months, 102 seafarers braved harsh elements to arrive off the coast of what is now Massachusetts, in late November of 1620. On December 11, prior to disembarking at Plymouth Rock, they signed the "Mayflower Compact," America's original document of civil government and the first to introduce self-government; a mistake, yet historical reality. While still anchored at Provincetown harbor, their Pastor John Robinson counseled, "You are become a body politic ... and are to have only them for your... governors which yourselves shall make choice of."

The Pilgrims were Separatists, sectarian Independents, which were America's Calvinist Protestants, who rejected the institutional Church of England.

Upon landing in America, the Pilgrims conducted a prayer service, and then quickly turned to building shelters. Starvation and sickness during the ensuing New England

winter killed almost half their population, but through prayer and hard work, with the assistance of their Indian friends, the Pilgrims reaped a rich harvest in the summer of 1621. Most of what we know about the Pilgrim Thanksgiving of 1621 comes from original accounts of the young colony's leaders, Governor William Bradford and Master Edward Winslow, in their own hand.

The feast included foods suitable for a head table of honored guests, such as the chief men of the colony and Native leaders Massasoit ("Great Leader" also known as Ousamequin "Yellow Feather"), the sachem (chief) of Pokanoket (Pokanoket is the area at the head of Narragansett Bay). Venison, wild fowl, turkeys and Indian corn were the staples of the meal, which likely also included other food items known to have been aboard the Mayflower or available in Plymouth, such as spices, Dutch cheese, wild grapes, lobster, cod, native melons, pumpkin (pompion) and rabbit.

By the mid-17th century, the custom of autumnal Thanksgivings was established throughout New England. Observance of Thanksgiving Festivals began to spread southward during the American Revolution, as the newly established Congress officially recognized the need to celebrate this day.

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, our first.

The first Thanksgiving Proclamation was issued by the revolutionary Continental Congress on November 1, 1777. Authored by Samuel Adams, it was one sentence of 360 words, which read in part: "Forasmuch as it is the indispensable duty of all men to adore the superintending providence of Almighty God; to acknowledge with gratitude their obligation to him for benefits received...together with penitent confession of their sins, whereby they had forfeited every favor; and their humble and earnest supplications that it may please God through the merits of Jesus Christ, mercifully to forgive and blot them out of

remembrance...it is therefore recommended...to set apart Thursday the eighteenth day of December next, for solemn thanksgiving and praise, that with one heart and one voice the good people may express the grateful feeling of their hearts and consecrate themselves to the service of their Divine Benefactor...acknowledging with gratitude their obligations to Him for benefits received....To prosper the means of religion, for the promotion and enlargement of that kingdom which consisteth 'in righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost'."

It was one-hundred and eighty years after the first day of thanksgiving in America that our Founding Fathers officially recognized the day by proclamation of the Constitutional government. Soon after adopting the Bill of Rights, a motion in Congress to initiate the proclamation of a national day of thanksgiving was approved.

More later...

This is Dr. Matthew McMahon signing off.