

Oyster English's November News



Thanksgiving:
A Native American Perspective

Native Americans

arguably /'ɑːɡjuwəbli / (adv): it can be argued this statement is almost certainly true

modern /'mɑːdən/ (adj): related to the present time

festive /'fɛstɪv / (noun): cheerful and suited to a celebration or holiday

supposed /sə'pəʊzəd / (adj): claimed to be true or real

Pilgrim /'pɪlgrəm / (noun): a person who traveled with a group by boat from England to create the first permanent settlement in Plymouth, New England in 1620.

Native American Indians (noun): American Indian, Indian, Native, Native American, and Indigenous American are all acceptable names for the people who were living in North America above Mexico prior to the arrival of the European explorers. Whenever possible, Native people prefer to be called by their specific tribal name. Today there are 566 different recognized Native American tribes in the United States.

reenact /,riːjə'nækt / (verb): to repeat the actions of a previous event

surely /'ʃəli / (adv): in a certain way, without a doubt.

trace /'treɪs / (verb): to trace the outline of something.



The “First” Thanksgiving

As I sit here on Thanksgiving, **arguably** my favorite holiday, I think of all the things I’m thankful for. I’m grateful that I am able to spend the day with my family, eating good food and being together. **Modern** day Thanksgiving is about food and family.

But today’s **festive** Thanksgiving is nothing like the events that happened back in 1621, the year of the **supposed** “first” Thanksgiving. As I look back to what I learned in school about this holiday, I realize that the story is not how things actually happened. Most American children think of the first Thanksgiving as a peaceful gathering of two very different groups—the **Pilgrims** and the **Native American Indians**. We learned the Pilgrims generously invited all of the Indians over for a huge feast.

Most kids also used to participate in Thanksgiving pageants at school, dressing up as Indians and Pilgrims to **reenact** these events. The way Indians were portrayed was often very disrespectful to their culture. Every American child has **surely** done a variety of Thanksgiving art projects by **tracing** the shape around their hands on paper to make turkeys, which by the way, was not the main meal back in 1621.



Native Americans

The “Thanksgiving” that is considered the **precursor** to the modern holiday is much different and so I thought I’d share the **fuller** picture of the story.

By the time the Pilgrims arrived in the Massachusetts area (Plymouth), the Wampanoag Indians were already **settled** there. The Wampanoag practiced agriculture, including **cultivating** varieties of corn, beans and squash, as well as did hunting and fishing. The society had its own rich culture and socio-political structures, with 69 **autonomous** villages within the Wampanoag nation.



Indian “dream catcher”

In the few years just before the Pilgrims arrived, the Wampanoag had been **decimated** by diseases that were brought over from Europe by previous **explorers**. These diseases **wiped out** entire villages and it is estimated by historians that approximately 75 percent of Wampanoags were killed by these diseases.

This left the Wampanoags **vulnerable** to their enemies, the Narragansett Indians who lived close by. The Narragansett had not been affected by these **epidemics** and **outnumbered** the Wampanoags to the point that they started demanding **tributes** from some villages.

It is in this **climate** that the Pilgrims, a group of European adventures and religious refugees, anchored their ship (*the Mayflower*) in Cape Cod Bay. Most of those who came to America were adventurers who wanted to make a profit from the bountiful land and a smaller number of the group were escaping Europe because of religious **intolerance**.

precursor / prɪˈkʌsə / (noun): something that comes before another thing and that often influences its development

full / ˈfʊl / (adj): complete. fuller = more complete

settle / ˈsetl / (verb): to make a place your permanent home

cultivate / ˈkʌltɪveɪt / (verb): to grow crops

autonomous / ɔˈtɑːnəməs / (adj): existing or acting separately from other things or people

decimate / ˈdesəˌmeɪt / (verb): to destroy a large number of (plants, animals, people, etc.)

wipe out / ˈwaɪpˌaʊt / (phrasal verb): to destroy a large number of (plants, animals, people, etc.)

vulnerable / ˈvʌlnərəbəl / (adj): open to attack, harm, or damage

epidemic / ˌepəˈdɛmɪk / (noun): an occurrence in which a disease spreads very quickly and affects a large number of people

outnumber / ˌaʊtˈnʌmbə / (verb): to be more than (someone or something) in number

tribute / ˈtrɪˌbjʊːt / (noun): money or goods that a ruler or country gives to another ruler or country especially for protection

climate / ˈklaɪmət / (noun): the usual or most widespread mood or conditions in a place

intolerance / ɪnˈtɑːlərəns / (noun): not willing to allow some people to have equality, freedom, or other social rights



Native Americans

bounty / 'bəʊnti / (noun): good things that are given or provided freely and in large amounts

butcher / 'bʊtʃə / (noun, verb): someone who kills animals and prepares their meat to be eaten

harvest / 'hɑːvəst / (noun): the amount of crops that are gathered

shelter / /'ʃeltə / (noun): a structure that covers or protects people or things (a place to live)

befriend / bi'frɛnd / (verb): to become a friend to (someone)

settler / 'setlər / (noun): a person who goes to live in a new place where usually there are few or no people

cultivate / 'kʌltɪveɪt / (verb): to prepare the land and grow crops

kidnap / 'kɪdnæp / (verb): to take somebody away illegally and keep them as a prisoner

make it back (expression): to manage to return to a place again

survive / sə'vaɪv / (verb): to remain alive: to continue to live

negotiate / nɪ'ɡoʊʃi, eɪt / (verb): to agree on (something) by formally discussing it

peace agreement (noun): a formal written agreement for peace between two parties.

The Pilgrims had not planned well for their arrival and although the area was a **bounty** of forest and fields, they were not hunters and **butchers**. They lacked the skills to catch, process and store food and arrived too late to plant a **harvest**. Over the first few months, several Pilgrims died each day from lack of **shelter** and food.

It is within this atmosphere that the Pilgrims and the Wampanoags **befriended** each other. The Pilgrims, who possessed weapons, could offer the Wampanoag protection. The Native Americans taught the **settlers** how to plant and **cultivate** new crops, hunt, fish and store their food.

So how did these two groups communicate?

Two of the Indians knew English because they had been unfortunately **kidnapped** years earlier and sold into slavery in Europe, where they learned the language. One of these Indians, Tisquantum ("Squanto"), a Wampanoag from Patuxet, may have been "lucky" to be a slave because as mentioned earlier, almost three-fourths of the Wampanoags had been killed by diseases brought to America by Europeans. By the time Tisquantum was able to **make it back to** America, he was the only **surviving** member of his own village.

Tisquantum helped the settlers learn how to survive and set-up a meeting between the great Wampanoag leader Massasoit, who **negotiated a peace treaty** between the two groups. With the help of the Wampanoag, the Pilgrims achieved a successful harvest in the autumn after their arrival, in 1621.

Even though the settlers planted some European seeds, it was the corn given to them by Massasoit that grew into a successful crop and saved them.

After this successful harvest, they decided to have a three-day harvest festival, known as a Harvest Home in Europe. This event included feasting, drinking and sporting events. It is this celebration that several Wampanoag were invited and that was recorded in a letter by Edward Winslow in December 1621.



Wampanoag leader Massasoit

Native Americans

It's interesting that America's modern holiday is based on this particular event as it was not considered a "Thanksgiving" celebration by those who held the event. Sadly, the peaceful **relations** that were started by Massasoit were frequently **strained** by aggressive and **dishonest** actions on the part of the Europeans.

Modern Day Thanksgiving

Today's Thanksgiving holiday in America is a combination of two different things. First, it comes from the European Harvest Home festival, which focuses on an **elaborate** feast as well as sport. Secondly, the holiday comes from the Puritan's religious practices in which the day is meant to be spent in prayer and **pious humility** thanking God for His special **providence**.

A first Thanksgiving was **proclaimed** in 1623 and the very first national Thanksgiving was proclaimed in 1776. It was not a national holiday, however, and each president had to issue a **proclamation** each year. There were many years when this did not happen and it was only celebrated by certain states. Finally, Thanksgiving was declared a national holiday in the 20th century by President Franklin Roosevelt in 1939. The holiday is celebrated each year on the Fourth Thursday in November.

Most Americans watch football games—that's American football—on the television throughout the day, which is the modern **equivalent** of the English harvest-time sporting events tradition.

Nearly every American celebrates Thanksgiving as a **secular** holiday of giving thanks for one's blessings and use the occasion to spend time with their families. More Americans travel on the Sunday following Thanksgiving than any other day of the year.



relations / ˈrɪˈleɪʃən / (noun): the way in which two or more people, groups, countries, etc., talk to, behave toward, and deal with each other

strained / ˈstreɪnd / (adj): not friendly and relaxed

dishonest / dɪsˈɑːnəst / (adj): not honest or true.

elaborate / ɪˈlæbəreɪt / (adj): made or done with great care or with much detail: having many parts that are carefully arranged or planned

pious / ˈpiəs / (adj): deeply religious: devoted to a particular religion

humility / hjuːˈmɪləti / (noun): the quality or state of being humble (not proud : not thinking of yourself as better than other people)

providence / ˈprɑːvədəns / (noun): God or fate thought of as the guide and protector of all human beings

proclaim / prəʊˈkleɪm / (verb): to say or state (something) in a public, official, or definite way : to declare or announce (something)

proclamation / ˌprɑːˈkleɪməʃən / (noun): an official statement or announcement made by a person in power or by a government

equivalent / ɪˈkwɪvələnt / (adj): having the same value, use, meaning, etc.

secular / ˈsekjələ / (adj): not religious

Native Americans

it's a shame (expression): it's unfortunate, it's sad that something has happened

aware / ə'weə / (adj): knowing that something (such as a situation, condition, or problem) exists

misconception / ,mɪskən'sepʃən / (noun): a wrong or mistaken idea

give recognition (expression): to accept or be aware that (something) is true or exists

significant / sɪg'nɪfɪkənt / (adj): very important

contribution / ,kɒ:ntrə'bju:ʃən / (noun): something that is given to help a person, a cause, etc.

establishment / ɪ'stæblɪʃmənt / (noun): the act of starting something that will last for a long time

retailer / 'ri:teɪlə / (noun): a person or business that sells things directly to customers for their own use

kick off (phrasal verb): to start something

stampede / stæm'pi:d / (noun): an occurrence in which a large group of frightened or excited animals or people run together in a wild and uncontrolled way to escape from something, get out of a place, etc.

The typical Thanksgiving menu includes a roasted turkey with all the “trimmings” — side dishes such as corn bread stuffing, cranberries, mashed potatoes, corn, corn pudding, vegetables and sweets such as pumpkin or apple pie.



It is a shame that more Americans are not **aware of** the **misconceptions** about the holiday itself. The month of November is National Native American month and it is a time to **give recognition** for the **significant contributions** the first Americans made to the **establishment** and growth of the United States.

One of the things that I dislike about this holiday weekend is that immediately after Thanksgiving is “Black Friday.” On Black Friday, most **retailers** open their stores very early and offer huge sales to **kick off** the Christmas shopping season. The term “Black Friday” reflects that most retailers operate at a financial loss (in the red) from January through November and start to turn a profit (go in the black) on this day. People have even been killed from **stampedes** during Black Friday shopping! I’m recovering from a cold so I will be staying at home. Besides, there’s always the chance to shop online ;)

Wishing you all a wonderful weekend! Nicole

