

What many regard as the nation's first Thanksgiving took place in 1621 as the religious separatist Pilgrims held a three-day feast to celebrate a bountiful harvest. The day did not become a national holiday until 1863 when President Abraham Lincoln proclaimed the last Thursday of November as a national day of thanksgiving. Later, President Franklin Roosevelt clarified that Thanksgiving should always be celebrated on the fourth Thursday of the month to encourage earlier holiday shopping, never on the occasional fifth Thursday. It is nice to know that even in President Roosevelt's time that the wife still controlled the calendar to allow for more shopping time before Christmas. Makes me wonder when the very first black Friday sale was that required husbands to wake up at 4:00 a.m. to chauffeur their wife from store to store at a time of day that I should either be asleep or at least in a deer stand. But anyway, back to a bit of turkey talk.

Although juicy and tender butterball turkeys are the main cuisine of today's Thanksgiving celebrations, these birds were NOT the most popular centerpieces on the first Thanksgiving tables. In 1621 when the Plymouth colonists and Wampanoag Indians celebrated the first Thanksgiving, they were gobbling up many more foods than just turkey. Since lobster, goose, duck, seal, eel, and cod were plentiful during this time, these foods were most likely the main courses of this first feast. Deer meat and wild fowl are the only two items that historians know for sure were menu of this autumn celebration. There you go, deer meat, that's another reason why I should be on the deer stand early black Friday morning instead of playing bumper cars in the mall parking lot so that my wife can get a free ornament for being one of the first 100 customers.

One story tells of how Queen Elizabeth of 16th century England was chowing down on roast goose during a harvest festival. When news was delivered to her that the Spanish Armada had sunk on its way to attack her beloved England, the Queen was so pleased that she order a second goose to celebrate the great news. Thus, the goose became the favorite bird at harvest time in England. When the Pilgrims arrived in America from England, roasted turkey replaced roasted goose as the main cuisine because wild turkeys were more abundant and easier to find than geese.

Turkey production in the United States over the last few years has been anywhere from around 250 million birds to 325 million birds. Minnesota leads the nation in the number of turkeys raised with our neighbor to the north, Arkansas, coming in 3<sup>rd</sup> place, raising 28 million birds. According to 2009, statistics there are approximately 117 million households in the United States. So even if each of those homes cooked one bird, over half the turkey production in the U.S. is used at other times of the year.

Who knows the true story of why turkeys became the main course for Thanksgiving and really, do we care as long as we can continue to enjoy Thanksgiving with family, friends, neighbors, and a meal that will last for days?

