

# The Carlisle Mercury

Our 111th year, No. 47

Carlisle, Ky. 40311, Thursday, November 23, 1978

20 Cents per copy

## Thanksgiving 1621-1978



### Squanto's advice was Pilgrims' salvation in 1621

About the only thing the Pilgrims had to be thankful for on that first Thanksgiving in 1621 was that they were still alive — and not many could claim that.

In fact, if it hadn't been for a friendly Indian who once lived in England, the hardy band of colonists might not have had the strength to lift the turkey on Thanksgiving Day.

But once the Pilgrims reached America and established the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1620 they began to travel a road that would eventually lead to the United States Constitution, written almost 170 years after that first Thanksgiving Day.

Every school child is familiar with the story of the Pilgrims. How they left England to avoid religious persecution

for their individual ways of worship. How they landed the Mayflower near Plymouth Rock and began establishing the colony. How many of them did not survive that first terrible winter.

Those images are known by almost every American. What is often forgotten is the story of the Mayflower Compact, with its statement of the theory of limited consent of the governed people as a basis or the authority through which the officials derived their power to govern and the idea of an elective system of choosing those officials.

Almost 170 years later the Continental Congress would use the Mayflower Compact and its ideas as the theme for the United States Constitution, the full flowering of the Pilgrims' dream.

The Mayflower Compact was signed while that ship was still at sea, when the Pilgrims had the time and energy to devote to such matters. It was a different story when they landed on the shores of the unknown continent of America.

For one thing, they picked about as unsuitable a spot to establish a foothold in the New World in the advent of winter. Most would agree that Florida would have been an easier place to start from, perhaps then work the way north.

That first winter the colonists lived on ship or in rude huts hastily built on land. The next spring would see their number of fewer, a loss blamed by many historians on an epidemic that swept America between 1618 and 1619 that left 95,000 Indians dead and only

5,000 surviving on the east coast of the continent.

One of those surviving Indians walked into the compound at the beginning of March in 1621 and addressed the colonists in English. He was Samoset, and before he spoke, the colonists, who had seen the Mayflower sail back for England only days before, were terrified.

But Samoset came in friendly, the aftermath of the epidemic had left the Indians weak and drained and somehow they decided that it was better to deal as friends with these white men than to declare a war they were not sure they had the strength to fight.

He led them to Massasoit, chief of the Wampanoag, the chief tribe in the area. With Massasoit was Squanto,

whose instructions in hunting and tending crops in the New World was the salvation of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

Squanto had been sold into slavery to Spain and later lived for a while in England. One of his contributions was to act as an interpreter between Massasoit and the Pilgrims. But his real value was as an adviser. (Squanto's advice in crop may have qualified him as the first county agent.)

With the help of the English-speaking Indians the Pilgrims learned how and where to plant corn. They learned how and where to stalk wild game, where to find fish and how to use dead fish as fertilizer on their corn crop.

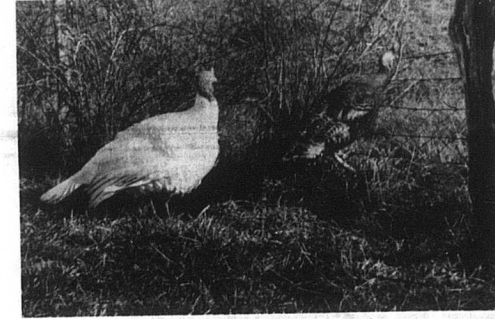
As the colonists began to plant their first corn crop, they were worried

because the streams were lacking fish. But Squanto told them the fish would spawn in the shallow soon and they could be taken by the hundreds. They did, and they were.

Later he advised them to plant the fish deep below the seed corn and to guard the fields until the fish rotted or the wolves would dig them up.

As the harvest approached and the Pilgrims saw their meager stands of English barley and peas and then compared them with the healthy 20 acres of corn planted under Squanto's supervision they had much to be thankful for. Squanto never let his experience with slavery color his actions toward the settlers and together the two different races lived in peace for more than 50 Thanksgivings.

### Unexpected guests liven Thanksgiving Day, 1621



Bustin' out

These turkeys aren't hanging around to see what's on the menu this Thanksgiving. Maybe they've been tipped off but they're not taking any chances and are hopping the fence to freedom. They were raised by Julian McKee, who

quickly sold out of the birds this year, sending 20 at one time to Floyd County. The wild bird is a six-year-old tom that's safe, according to McKee. His old enough to be a little too tough for the table. — Photo by Jeff Kerr.

Mothers, wives and assorted cooks as you prepare for the annual Thanksgiving onslaught of relatives, children, parents, friends and sometimes strangers, take heart in the tradition by the four women who did the cooking the first Thanksgiving Day in 1621.

Those four brave Pilgrims were busy preparing the menu when Chief Massasoit of the Wampanoag arrived at the colony with some guests — 90 to be exact.

Earlier that week Governor William Bradford, who was chosen head of the Massachusetts Bay Colony when former governor John Carver died after being stricken while hoisting corn, sent four men into the woods where they bagged enough wild turkeys to feed the entire colony for almost a week.

In commemoration of the first successful harvest by the colony Bradford called for a Thanksgiving Day and issued invitations to the friendly Indians who had helped the colonists so much during that first crop.

But Chief Massasoit thought the Pilgrims were observing the Great Corn Dance, an Indian celebration closely akin to our Thanksgiving. And, like any other big chief, even down to today, Massasoit would not dream of attending the harvest festival without a retinue of his subjects. So when Bradford's invitation arrived the chief

assembled 90 of his braves and set out for the colony.

The Pilgrims were dismayed to see so many Indians. They could also see their wider supplies dwindle under the onslaught of 90 hungry braves.

But Chief Massasoit stuck true to another Indian custom of the Great Corn Dance and sent some of his braves into the nearby forest. They quickly returned with five deer and the feast began.

For three days the Pilgrims and the Indians ate, drank and played games. The Indians were delighted to see that some of the colonists were almost as expert with the bow and arrow as they were and also enjoyed the rough-and-tumble wrestling and running games.

The Pilgrims gave the Indians an exhibition of their magic after a display of military maneuvers when the soldiers fired their muskets into the air. As a topping for the events Bradford had the colony's only cannon loaded with powder (but no shot) and fired it also, greatly impressing the Wampanoag.

Present at that first Thanksgiving were names that have become familiar to millions of Americans through the years: William Bradford, Miles Standish, John Alden and the Indian, Squanto, who acted as interpreter between the two races.

The spirit of friendship that existed

between the colonists and the Wampanoag lasted for 50 years, until 1870 when the son of Massasoit, King Phillip, engaged the settlers in a conflict that became known as King Phillip's War.

That signaled the beginning of a hostility between the white and red man that would never really cease but for that first half century of a colonized America both races lived together in a peace that was created that first Thanksgiving Day when men from both "tribes" sat at a common table and gave thanks to their respective gods that the harvest had been successful.

### Thanksgiving declared holiday by Lincoln

Legend tells us that the Pilgrims celebrated Thanksgiving before they came to America, when some of that group were living in Holland where they had fled to escape religious persecution in their native England. But it wasn't until the feast was first observed in America that the idea of Thanksgiving as an annual holiday began to take shape.

That first Thanksgiving was celebrated in the autumn of 1621 with a three-day feast including every kind of game and vegetable the colonists could raise or hunt, and also games and fellowship. So sure were each group of the other's friendly intentions that the Indians slept at night in the fields next to the colony and the Pilgrims gave their regular guards the time off, in what was surely America's first three-day weekend.

It wasn't until 1863 that President Abraham Lincoln took time out from his guidance of the Union during the Civil War to declare Thanksgiving a national holiday.

From 1863 until 1941 American tradition observed Thanksgiving on the last Thursday in November. But on the eve of another war in 1941 an Act of Congress established the fourth Thursday in November as Thanksgiving.

America's northern neighbor, Canada, declared Thanksgiving a national holiday in November of 1879. But the Canadians observe their Thanksgiving earlier than the Americans.

In Canada, the holiday is celebrated on the second Monday in October, probably due to the earlier harvests in that northern clime.

This year Thanksgiving will be celebrated, as usual, with parades, football games, family reunions and feasts. From a holiday commemorating the successful harvest in 1621 to the modern Thanksgiving which emphasizes giving thanks for blessings, the day has come to be revered by Americans.

It was the first true American holiday and so children and loved ones gather from afar at the family homes the meaning of Thanksgiving takes on another shade in 1978, 357 years after the first Thanksgiving Day.

### First Thanksgiving menu would strain modern diet

Throughout the years the image of the Pilgrims as a stern, forbidding people who lived austere, serious lives has taken hold in American lore. But there is some evidence that they were not as drab and serious as has been

popularly portrayed. In fact, one author of a book about the Pilgrims' first year in America has this to say about them: "They took their religion seriously, to be sure. But they also relished good

food, good liquor and good conversation." That they liked good food when they could get it is an understatement. The menu for that first Thanksgiving would have floundered even an accomplished trencherman.

For meat they had wild turkey, wild geese, venison, eels, lobster and shellfish. The vegetable dishes included parsnips, carrots, turnips, onions, cucumbers, radishes, beets and cabbage, no doubt available either singly or in the form of casseroles and dishes.

The wheat crop was thin that year and not much bread was present but the bumper corn crop filled that void with ashakes and hockeas.

Also running short was the Pilgrims' supply of beer but they supplemented it with white and red wines, made from the juice of wild grapes.

Topping off the menu were pies made of gooseberry, strawberry, plum and cherry with berries gathered in the wild and baked in dough cases, or pie crusts.

It is not known if pumpkin pie was included on the first Thanksgiving menu (see story this page) but it is known that the Indians were cultivating pumpkins at that time. Perhaps they saved the best for themselves and when Massasoit and his 90 braves returned home after the three-day feast they may have sat down to dine on pumpkin pie, grinning at their cunning in reserving this tasty treat for themselves.

### How? Popped, with maple syrup



Some historians say the Wampanoag Indians that were guests at the first Thanksgiving may have introduced a delicacy that millions of Americans enjoy today.

Since corn was a staple of the Indian diet, it is not too implausible to assume they experimented with it many times to find how many uses they could make of the grain.

One of the uses known to have been made by them at the time was to bury dried ears low in the coals of a fire, wrapped securely. After a time the packages were retrieved and opened to reveal popcorn.

But the Indian didn't stop there. At certain times of the year, when it was available, they used maple syrup poured over popped corn to make the first popcorn balls.

Another dish popular at the first Thanksgiving that was Indian in origin was Indian pudding, a mixture of cornmeal and molasses. The Pilgrims' friend Squanto was said to be the first to introduce the colony to this delicacy.

