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No FOREIGN FOOD

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Thanksgiving: Expressing Group Identity

Thanksgiving became an official national holiday only after Sarah Josepha Hale, then editor of *Godey's Lady's Book*, essentially browbeat President Lincoln into proclaiming it as a national holiday during the dark days of the Civil War in 1863. The South, which did not celebrate the holiday, was not in a position to complain, and through time this celebration of the nation's supposed New England roots became increasingly important. Maintained by annual proclamation for almost eighty years, Thanksgiving received the status of a legal national holiday at the beginning of another cataclysmic conflict in 1941.

The standard holiday menu seems to have been largely invented by cookbook writers and home magazines with a little help from Norman Rockwell's now iconic painting. The menu certainly is an idealized vision of that first seventeenth-century meal. All that is actually known about the feast is included in a firsthand account by Edward Winslow: "Our harvest being gotten in, our governor sent four men fowling, so that we might after a special manner rejoice together after we had gathered the fruit of our labors. They four in one day killed as much fowl as, with a little help beside, served the company for a week. . . . Many of the Indians coming amongst us, and among the rest their greatest King Massasoit, with some ninety men, whom for three days we entertained and feasted, and they went out and killed five deer, which they brought to the plantation and bestowed on our governor, and upon the captain and others. And although it be not always so plentiful as it was this time with us, yet by the goodness of God, we are so far from want that we often wish you partakers of plenty" (Bradford and Winslow, 1969).

Precious little is known about what was actually served at that feast. If turkey was one of the fowl served, it was a far different bird than now graces modern tables. The domesticated turkey was actually developed in nineteenth-century Europe from imported American birds. The new reengineered domestic bird was not reintroduced to America until the mid-nineteenth century. Reintroduction, however, did not bring commercial success. Commercial turkey production was so unimportant in the nineteenth century that flock counts were not included in the general poultry category in the census of agriculture. Large-scale commercial production did not come into existence until the late 1920s. Though the turkey was painted as an idealized full-breasted bird in Rockwell's interpretation of the gathering, today's full-breasted bird was largely created by modern genetic engineering after his painting was completed. The modern bird is so grossly top-heavy that some of the creatures can barely walk when they are sent to slaughter.

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Cranberries were indigenous to New England but probably were not a part of the first Thanksgiving meal. Commercial cranberry production and canning did not begin until the late nineteenth century, and widespread distribution is largely a mid-twentieth-century phenomenon. Cranberry production initially was concentrated in southern New England, and the Ocean Spray Company of Cape Cod continues to dominate the industry, although secondary production centers in Wisconsin and New Jersey are responsible for ever-increasing percentages of the total harvest.

The Pilgrims probably had never seen an "Irish" or white potato—they were not successfully cultivated in this country on even a moderate scale until more than a century later. The white potato did not enter the general American diet until almost a century after that. Gravy, or more specifically meat drippings, as a flavoring was known but was usually served with bread.

The various species of yams and sweet potatoes are indigenous to Southeast Asia, tropical America, and possibly West Africa. Yams were widely grown in West Africa by the sixteenth century, and it is believed that their use was introduced to America from there. The crop was unknown to the typical Englishman at this time and could not possibly have been grown in New England because of environmental constraints. Spanish potatoes (yams) were imported to New England during the eighteenth century.

Both Thanksgiving Day and the feast are largely nationalistic myths created to provide a past that never was. The very nature of the dynamic American evolution has meant that few of us have any genetic ties with that event. Yet millions of Americans dutifully trot out their turkeys and cranberry sauce on the third Thursday of each November to celebrate an event that has come to symbolize group membership—disregarding the reality that many of our ancestors probably would not have been welcome even if they had been in the vicinity at the time.

never existed is immaterial. Thanksgiving has become a Christmas-like holiday in that it involves cards and family visits, but it is open to all regardless of religion or ethnic heritage. And as with Christmas, it is becoming increasingly difficult for most Americans to achieve the idealized Thanksgiving feast depicted by Norman Rockwell on his *Saturday Evening Post* cover many decades ago. Families are widely scattered across the country, grandparents no longer live just down the street, and this kind of repast is difficult to prepare for the average 3.22-member American household.

It is not my goal to suggest that the conceived qualities has no phenomenon restricted to group every time we participating in a church service. What we serve speaks. No member of a mid with a plate of mussels. Those things would temporality of its co sending a message that acceptance of the rules.

I have attended the church in central Georgia old friend. The program time well reflected that an isolated, declining to a community with annual event has challenges were dominated. Modernity began to try to demonstrate trailers on the backstock of Victorian families. More and more *Southern* dishes became more dishes are most likely reveling in their return the housewives who shackles of tradition their lives.

"Everything has its self-conception and the why, and the whening whether a food is specified times. A pi