



Thanksgiving Offers Us Perspective on the Things that Mean the Most

JEFFERSON CITY — We have come upon the time of year that allows us to briefly put on hold our daily worries and gain perspective on what means the most to each of us. As we gather with our loved ones for the Thanksgiving holiday, our stress levels subside and we can focus on our friends, family and faith. With the tradition of Thanksgiving a founding institution in our national heritage, the holiday is also a part of who we are as Americans.

What we celebrate as Thanksgiving is traditionally tied to a three-day feast hosted by the Pilgrims after their first harvest in 1621. After a long winter that claimed many lives in the Pilgrims' first year at Plymouth Colony, they nevertheless held a celebration to give thanks for their blessings. The colonists joined Native Americans from the surrounding areas and enjoyed a menu of wild fowl, venison, seafood, squash and corn, among other dishes.

The Pilgrims held a day of thanksgiving again in 1623. After that, a tradition began in Plymouth, other New England colonies and New Netherland of setting aside a day to give thanks for the autumn harvest. Although this tradition was not held every year, it persisted throughout the rest of the 17th century and became a foundation of a maturing colonial landscape.

During the Revolutionary War, the Continental Congress appointed one or more Thanksgiving days each year except for 1777. In that year, revolutionary commander George Washington declared the holiday as a victory celebration for the defeat of the British at Saratoga. Washington again issued proclamations of the Thanksgiving holiday in 1789 and 1795, this time as the president of a young nation.

However, it was not until another war, one with an equally important effect on the development of our nation, that Thanksgiving Day was proclaimed a national holiday. Influenced by a series of appeals by Sarah Josepha Hale, Abraham Lincoln issued the proclamation on Oct. 3, 1863, citing "the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies" amid a "civil war of unequalled magnitude and severity."

Although the food is something to look forward to, Thanksgiving is not just turkey and mashed potatoes. With our loved ones, we can relay the instances of kindness that have made us smile over the year and the faith that got us through the more difficult times. And we can thank the good Lord for giving us one another, our health and our good fortune. For it is clear that those who came before us, facing much tougher circumstances, had the perspective to give thanks for what they did have.

If you have comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by phone at (866) 271-2844.

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