How Did Thanksgiving Start?

By Grace Wells, Website and Publicity

This Thanksgiving, you will probably sit around the dinner table with turkey, mashed potatoes, green beans, bread rolls, and some stuffing watching football on the television. But have you ever wondered what people did on the very first Thanksgiving? The special holiday event was held sometime during the fall of 1621 and included the Pilgrims, Puritans, and Wampanoag Indians. Thanksgiving lasted for three days in Plimoth, Massachusetts. This event was first held to celebrate a bountiful harvest after a year of sickness and scarcity. It was also put on as a sign of gratitude towards God. Services such as this were celebrated by Spanish explorers and other English colonists before Thanksgiving but were not known of until the 20th century. Before Thanksgiving was declared a holiday, many religious feasts were held for anything that the Pilgrims or Puritans thought needed thanking. Even though the very first Thanksgiving was in 1621, the Continental Congress declared the first national Thanksgiving in 1777. President George Washington called November 26, 1789 “a day of public thanksgiving and prayer,” to mainly give thanks for the establishment of a new constitution. By the 1850s, most all states celebrated Thanksgiving. The year 1863, President Lincoln announced a Thanksgiving on August 6 and another on the last Thursday of November. From 1939 to 1941, Franklin D. Roosevelt was seeking a longer Christmas shopping season so he proclaimed Thanksgiving to be on the third Thursday of November. However, backlash ensued so in 1941, Congress permanently established the fourth Thursday of November to be Thanksgiving.