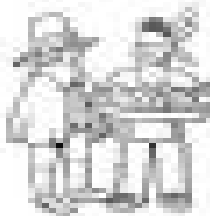


THE "FIRST" THANKSGIVING



In December 1620, a small ship called the *Mayflower* left Plymouth, England, carrying 102 passengers—an assortment of religious separatists seeking a new home where they could freely practice their faith. One month later, the *Mayflower* crossed Massachusetts Bay, where the Pilgrims, as they are now commonly known, began the work of establishing a village at Plymouth.

A legendary Thanksgiving celebration was held in 1621. The harvest season of the previous year had been difficult for the Pilgrims. Many of the Pilgrims had died because of illness and lack of shelter. The Thanksgiving celebration was held after the Pilgrims had their first harvest—after they had gathered their first crops.

The writings of the Pilgrims tell us that about 140 people attended the three-day celebration. Ninety of the people were Wampanoag Indians. About 50 people were Pilgrims. Only four of the Pilgrims at the party were women. The feast was held outside because the Pilgrims did not have a building large enough to hold so many people.



The Pilgrims were thankful for the harvest and for the help of the Wampanoag Indians in teaching them to grow crops in America. Without their help, the Pilgrims would have had little to eat. The menu for the first Thanksgiving included wildfowl, or deer meat, and food which included ducks, geese, and turkeys. Sea bass, cod fish, cornmeal, fruits and vegetables were also served.

Dances were played, and singing and dancing were also part of the celebration. Prayers were given to God for the harvest and for the Pilgrims that survived the harsh winter.

Thanksgiving in America is now celebrated on the fourth Thursday in November. Families prepare a meal similar to the meal prepared by the Pilgrims and Wampanoag 400 years ago. It is a time for counting the blessings we have received during the year and for spending time with family and friends.