

It's Time to Talk TURKEY

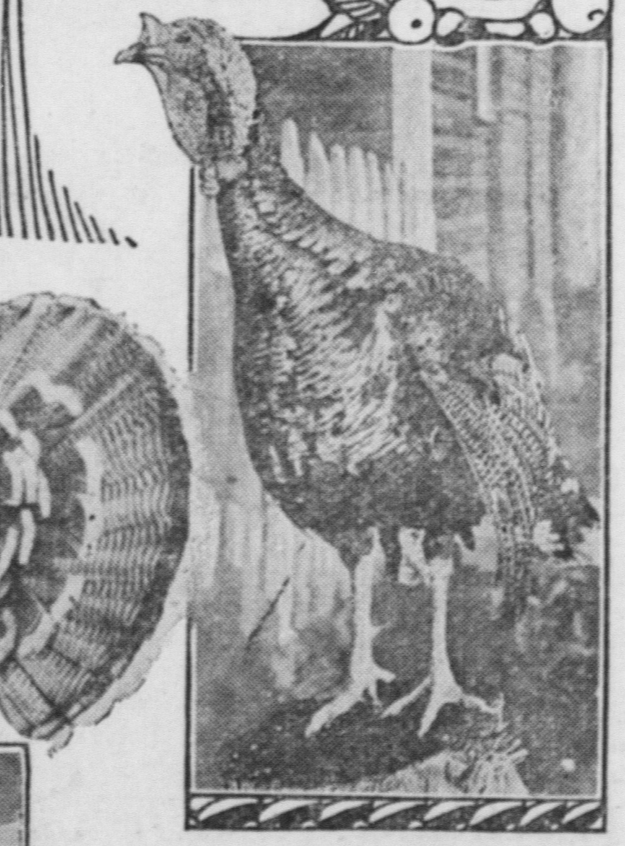
By the President of the United States of America
a Proclamation

Whereas it is the duty of all Nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey his will, to be grateful for his bounties, and to invoke his protection and favor; and whereas both Houses of Congress have by their joint committee requested me to recommend to the People of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer, to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many signal favors of Almighty God, especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness;

I do hereby recommend and signify that the 28th day of November next, to be devoted by the People of the United States to the service of that great and glorious Being, who is the beneficent author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be - that we may then all unite in rendering unto him our praise and humble thanks - for his kind care and protection of the People of this country, previous to their becoming a Nation - for the signal and manifold mercies, and the favorable interpositions of his providence, which are experienced in the course and conclusion of the late war - for the great degree of tranquility, union, and plenty, which we have just enjoyed - for the peaceable and rational manner in which we have been enabled to establish constitutions of government for our safety and happiness, and particularly the national One, now lately instituted - for the civil and religious liberty with which we are blessed - and the means we have of acquiring and diffusing useful knowledge, and in general for all the great and various favors which he hath been pleased to confer upon us;

and that we may then unite in most humbly offering our prayers and supplications to the great God and Ruler of the Universe, and beseech him to pardon our national and other transgressions - to enable us all, whether in public or private stations, to perform our several and relative duties properly and punctually - to render our national government a blessing to all the People, by constantly being a government of wisdom, justice, and moderation, temperately and fearlessly, and to protect and guide all our citizens in the paths of true religion; and to give us a degree of temporal prosperity as he alone knows to be best.

G. Washington



President Hoover recently issued the annual Presidential proclamation calling upon Americans to set aside Thursday, November 24, as Thanksgiving day. Above is shown a facsimile of the first Presidential Thanksgiving proclamation, issued by George Washington and setting the date as Thursday, November 26, 1789.

By ELMO SCOTT WATSON

AS NOVEMBER 24 approaches, Americans realize that it's about "time to talk turkey." For November 24 is Thanksgiving day and what would the American Thanksgiving day dinner table be without the presence of a roasted turkey?

But before proceeding with a discussion of the species of fowl who, once a year, is our national bird, it might not be amiss to consider the origin of that typically American expression "to talk turkey." If a certain tradition is to be believed, it had its origin in an incident which is as typically American as is the custom of observing a Thanksgiving day on the last Thursday in November and making it a feast day of typically American edibles, chief of which is the native American turkey.

Away back in the early days (just when no one seems to know) in one of the thirteen colonies (it cannot be stated positively which one, although from certain aspects of the incident the suspicion arises that a Yankee was one of the actors), an Indian and a white man agreed to hunt together for a day and then to divide the spoils. This they did and the division proceeded agreeably enough until only a crow and a turkey remained.

Thereupon the white man, volubly frank and seemingly generous in manner, said "Now you may have the crow and I'll take the turkey; or I'll take the turkey and you may have the crow." But the red man was not so easily taken in by this glib proposal and replied indignantly "Huh! Why you no talk turkey to me?" And ever since that time, so says the legend, when a person began to dissemble, to conceal his real meaning in a superfluity of words, to attempt to "put over" something on another, it became time for the other to advise him to "talk turkey," i. e. to be straightforward and get down to business.

Reference was made above to the fact that once a year the turkey is our national bird. It is just possible that he might have been our national bird the other 364 days—that is, if a suggestion made by Jolly old Ben Franklin had been followed. And thereby hangs the tale of the first coins and seals that came from the mint when the new republic of the United States of America was established. These were rather crude affairs and the eagle on them looked very much like a turkey—and a slightly tipsy turkey at that! Whereupon Franklin wrote this comment: "I am not displeased that the figure is not known as a bald eagle, but looks more like a turkey. For in truth, the turkey is in comparison a much more respectable bird, and withal a true native of America. He is besides (though a little vain and silly, it is true, but not the worse emblem for that) a bird of courage, and would not hesitate to attack a grenadier of the British guards, who should presume to enter his farmyard with a red coat on."

estic turkeys have been found attached to pueblos and cliff dwellings in excavated ruins of untold centuries ago.

The Spaniards who conquered Mexico found turkeys, both wild and domesticated, in that country as early as 1519 and it was no less a person than Cortez's own confessor, Fra Agapita, who wrote back to Spain from Mexico the following "There is a bird, much greater in bigness than a peacock, that is found within the forests and vegas all over this country. It surpasses as food any wild bird we have found up to this time. The natives do shoot these birds with arrows and catch them in various kinds of springs and snares.

Specimens of this splendid fowl were almost immediately sent back to Spain and the Jewish merchants, who were the leading dealers in such commodities at the time, thought they looked more like peacocks than anything else. The Hebrew word for peacock was "tukki," from a Hindu word "tuka," meaning "trailing skirt," and these merchants began calling them "tukkis" or "American tukkis." Soon the word "tukki" became corrupted to "turkey" and led to a confusion as to their origin, even though they were of American rather than Turkish nativity.

From Spain the new delicacy from the New world spread to other parts of Europe and won instant favor. Turkeys were taken to Persia by Armenians, and to Batavia by the Dutch. In France—where the turkey was, and is, called "dinde" because they believed it hailed from India—the bird was first served for the wedding feast of the lively young Charles IX and Elizabeth of Austria. Twelve turkeys were considered fine enough for a royal gift from the merchants of Amiens to Charles. By the middle of the century, England met the bird, and in another 20 years it was being plentifully raised in various sections of Great Britain.

And now comes one of the curious paradoxes of history, in that this "native American" became an immigrant to the shores of his own land. In 1629 a letter written to Governor Endicott in Salem, Mass., by his agents in London assured him that "tame turkeys shall be sent you by the next shippe." So in a short time the New England variety of the North American wild turkey was being mixed with his partly domesticated descendant from Mexico via England—thus completing a curious 100-year, round-the-world tour.

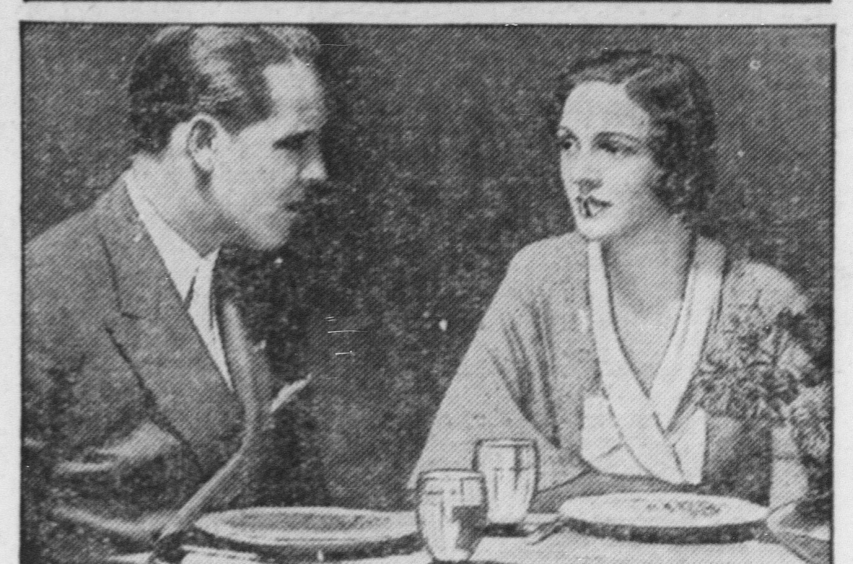
It is probable that not one turkey in a thousand which will grace the Thanksgiving table this year will be a native wild turkey. For the original New England wild turkey (Meleagris Americana) is all but extinct in the part of the country where he first made his appearance on that festive board. The wild turkey of today (Meleagris gallapavo silvestris,) according to ornithologists, is found in greatly reduced numbers only from Pennsylvania and Ohio south to the gulf states and west to Arkansas. There is a smaller variety, the Florida wild turkey. In that state; in southern Texas is another, the Rio Grande turkey and in the Rocky mountain region, another, Merriam's turkey. All modern domesticated turkeys are derived from the Mexican wild turkey (Meleagris Mexicana) of the earliest days. From him comes the exquisite penciling of modern domesticated turkeys.

But to get back to why the turkey occupies such a prominent place on our Thanksgiving day dinner table—of that first celebration, held in Plymouth in 1621, Edward Winslow wrote back to England as follows:

"Our harvest being gotten in, our Governor sent four men on fowling, that so we might after a more speciall manner rejoice together, after we had gathered in the fruit of our labours; they foure in one day killed as much fowle, as with a little help beside, served the company almost a week, at which time amongst other recreations, we exercised our Armes, many of the Indians coming amongst us, and amongst 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 Deere, which they brought to the Plantation and bestowed on our Governor, and upon the Captaine (Standish) and others."

There is no doubt that chief among the "fowle" at this feast was the native wild turkey. However, according to Mary Austin, "Our elevation of the turkey to the place of honor on the Thanksgiving dinner table is not entirely owing to its traditional importance to the first American Thanksgiving day; it is a tribute to the homemaking instinct of the Puritan women who made the turkey brood a part of that association of men and their wild brethren which is inseparable from the human idea of home. The Indians domesticated the turkey chiefly for his feathers, which they prized. But I have no doubt that the English housewife, arriving chickenless, got her first feeling of being at home from the brooding duck of the turkey hen about her door."

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