

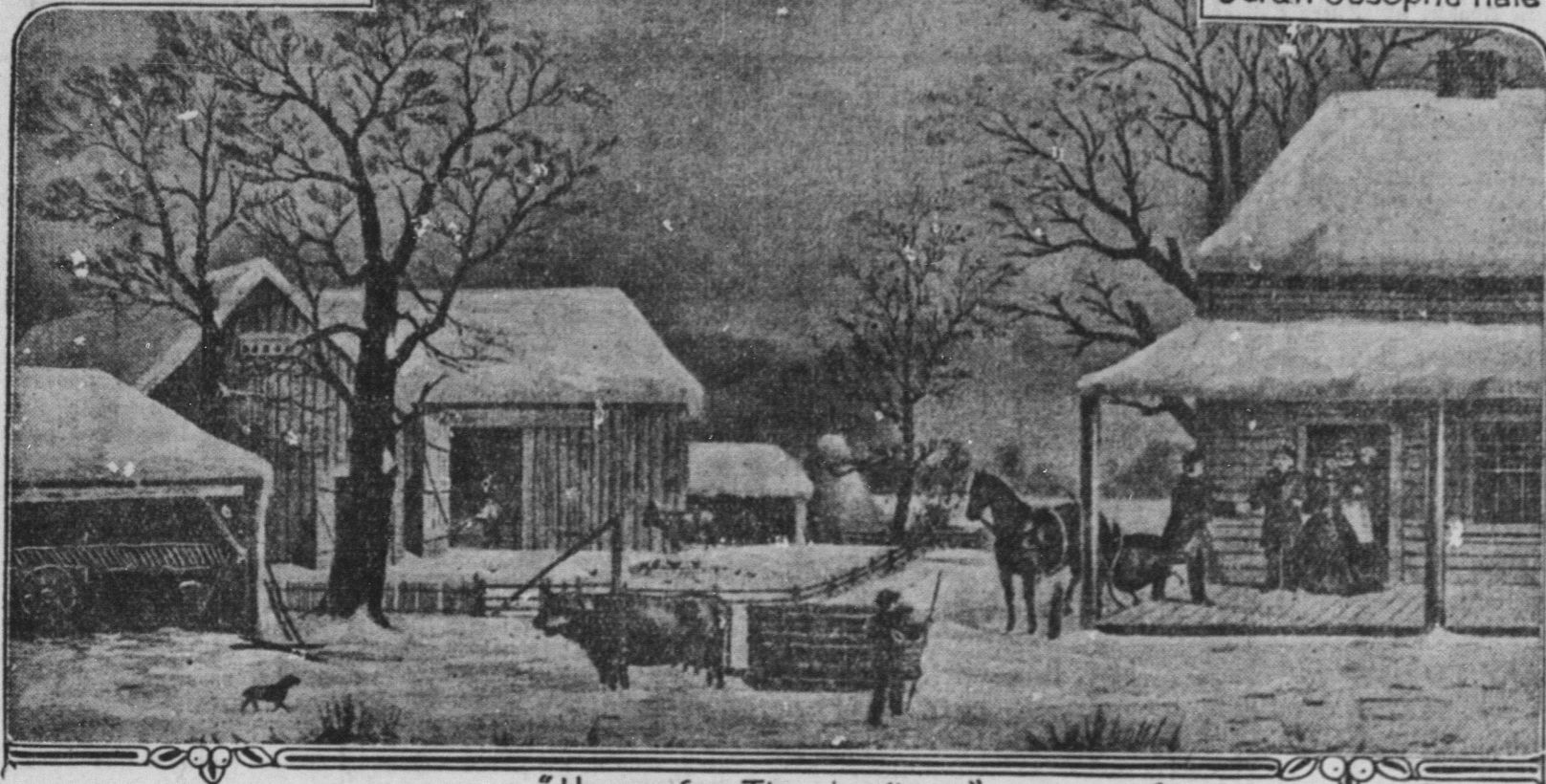


Abraham Lincoln

# They Gave Us Our Chanksgiving Holiday



Sarah Josepha Hale



"Home for Thanksgiving"

from a Currier & Ives Print

By ELMO SCOTT WATSON



SK ten Americans "Why do we celebrate Thanksgiving on the last Thursday in November?" and nine of them probably will answer "Why, that's because the Pilgrim Fathers who established it celebrated it then." And that, like so many of our "popular beliefs," is only a half-truth, at best. It's true that the Pilgrim Fathers were principally responsible for Thanksgiving day being a red-letter day on our calendars. But it's also true that we owe the establishment of Thanksgiving day as a national holiday on a certain date (certain to the extent that it always occurs on the last Thursday in November) mainly to two persons, a man and a woman, to Abraham Lincoln and Sarah Josepha Hale.

But before discussing their part in the matter of establishing this popular national holiday, let's check up a bit on the history of the development of Thanksgiving. The story of the first New England Thanksgiving, from which our present-day celebration is a direct descendant, is familiar to all Americans—how that first winter of the Pilgrims in America had been a terrible one of cold and sickness which had left only 55 of the little company of 101 alive when the spring of 1621 came around, how all through the summer they watched with the greatest anxiety the progress of the crops they had sown, and how when autumn came there was a bountiful harvest.

Then, according to Mourt's "Relation, or Journal of the Plantation at Plymouth": "Our harvest being gotten in, our Governour sent four men on fowling, that so we might after a more special manner rejoice together, after we had gathered the fruit of our labours; they foure in one day killed as much fowle, as with a little helpe besides, 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 ninetie men, feasted for three dayes we entertained and woomed, for they went out and killed five Deere, which they brought to the Plantation and bestowed on our Governour, and upon the Captaine, and others."

The popular view is that this "first Thanksgiving" was the beginning of a series of such celebrations every year. But the fact is that the following year, 1622, no such observance occurred. In 1623 a day of thanksgiving was held but not in the autumn and not in connection with the harvest. It was observed on July 30 and had to do with the safe arrival of a shipload of provisions from England.

From then on for decades Thanksgiving was observed in most irregular fashion. Some years were skipped; some years had more than one celebration—sometimes for the arrival of ships, more often for victory over the Indians, as in the instance of quelling the Pequots in 1637 and the defeat of King Phillip in 1676. It was not until 1659 that the Massachusetts general court issued the first recorded formal Thanksgiving proclamation.

During the Revolutionary war the people and the army observed an annual Thanksgiving day by proclamation of the Continental congress, but after peace was declared it was discontinued until 1789.

In that year a new element came into the observance of Thanksgiving and one which has survived in the present celebration. That was the Presidential proclamation of a Thanksgiving day for the whole nation and it was George Washington, the first President, who issued such a proclamation setting aside Thursday, November 26, 1789, as the day.

It so happened that Thursday, November 26, 1789, was the last Thursday in November that year and that fact was to have an important bearing on the later history of Thanksgiving day, as we shall see farther on in this article.

But although Washington was the first to issue a Presidential proclamation for a national Thanksgiving day, he did not establish a precedent which was followed consistently. During his second administration, he again issued a Thanksgiving proclamation. On January 1, 1795,

in Philadelphia, which was then the national capital, he called upon his fellow Americans to "set apart and observe Thursday, the nineteenth day of February next, as a day of public thanksgiving and prayer, and on that day to meet together and render their sincere and hearty thanks to the Great Ruler of Nations for a long list of blessings which the country was then enjoying.

The example set by Washington was followed by his successor, John Adams, who proclaimed two Thanksgiving days during his administration—one on Wednesday, May 9, 1798, and the other on Thursday, April 25, 1799. This custom, however, was allowed to lapse during the two terms of Thomas Jefferson, but it was revived by James Madison who issued four such proclamations during his administration. The first one of these set aside the third Thursday in August of 1812, the second named the second Thursday in September, 1813, as the day; the third designated Thursday, January 12, 1814, and the fourth and last set aside the second Thursday in April, 1815.

Thus it will be seen that although Thanksgiving days by Presidential proclamation in the main picked upon Thursday as the day of the week for such an observance, the month varied greatly and there was no connection between these Thanksgiving days and the annual observance established by the Pilgrims. No other Presidents after Madison seemed to have had occasion for proclaiming a Thanksgiving day and it remained for Abraham Lincoln to resume the custom and to link up the proclaimed Thanksgiving day with the Pilgrim custom by establishing the last Thursday in November as a national feast day and a day for giving thanks.

But before adding another star to the crown of the Great Emancipator, heed now the ancient French admonition, "Cherchez la Femme!" It is here that Sarah Josepha Hale comes into the Thanksgiving picture. For it was Mrs. Hale, a native of Newport N. H., known wherever English is spoken as the author of "Mary Had a Little Lamb," editor of the famous magazine, Godey's Lady's Book, and a pioneer in educational and civic problems of her day—who, by canvassing the governors of states and territories and reconciling sectional differences, and by appealing constantly to successive Presidents, brought about the establishment of Thanksgiving day as a national holiday on the last Thursday in November.

Sarah Josepha Hale was a far-sighted woman in many respects. She was the first to advocate women teachers in public schools. She demanded for housekeeping the dignity of a profession, and put the term "domestic science" into the language. She started the first day nursery, and was the first to stress the necessity of physical training for her sex, as well as the first to advocate public playgrounds. She founded the first society for the advancement of women's wages, better working conditions for women and the reduction of child labor.

As early as 1827 she began advocating a nation-wide observance of Thanksgiving day. "We have too few holidays," she wrote at that time. "Thanksgiving, like the Fourth of July, should be considered a national festival and observed by all our people . . . as an exponent of our republican institutions."

But it was not until 1846 that she began her campaign through the editorial columns of Godey's Lady's Book to hold such a nation-wide celebration on a certain date and every year from that time on she waged her campaign. Early in the spring she would write letters to the governors of all the states and territories, and to influential persons everywhere, asking their assistance in making the last Thursday in November, which had been Washington's choice, a universal holiday. In the hope of bringing pressure to bear upon the governors, she next opened correspondence with literally thousands of private persons of influence, with senators and congressmen and the clergy.

In her effort for the establishment of state Thanksgivings she was almost immediately successful. By 1849, the third year of her campaign, most states and territories were keeping individual festivals, but no attempt was made to coincide the dates—Maine might celebrate—

and frequently did—in September, Virginia in October and Pennsylvania in November.

A conglomeration of state holidays, however, was not by any manner of means Sarah Hale's goal. She dreamed of the states joined in a great national observance, and to this end she soon began appealing to whoever happened to be the President in office. Using Washington's single act as a precedent and example, she privately wrote again and again to Fillmore, Pierce and Buchanan, all to no avail. It was an age when women outside the home were seen and not heard. She herself at the time was the only successful business woman in the country. Feminine meddling in public affairs was not only frowned on but resented.

Mrs. Hale was quite aware of this antagonistic attitude. In one of her letters to President Fillmore, now preserved in a public collection at Buffalo, she begged his excellency not to be prejudiced against the idea because he was being addressed by a woman! He may not have been so prejudiced, but at least he did nothing about it. Neither did Pierce, his successor, nor Buchanan, who preceded Lincoln.

Falling with the Presidents, she fell back on her editorials, thus carrying her appeal again directly to the people. As early as 1832 she had succeeded in whipping 29 states and territories into line for the last Thursday of November. Each year all through the seething '50s she proclaimed in Godey's Lady's Book that that day would be Thanksgiving day, and in the main the country kept it with her. The most gigantic civil strife in the history of the world was pending, and political and sectional bitterness was rife.

In 1859, while the storm was brewing, she was more vigorous than ever with her thanksgiving plan, in hope that it might help to avert disunion. "If every state," she wrote in an editorial in Godey's, "would join in union Thanksgiving on the twenty-fourth of this month, would it not be a renewed pledge of love and loyalty to the Constitution of the United States which guarantees peace, prosperity, progress and perpetuity to our great Republic?" So in 1859 an almost universal Thanksgiving day was kept, not in response to a Presidential proclamation but because a woman asked it.

In 1861, with the smoke of battle darkening the land, Mrs. Hale begged for a "Thanksgiving Day of Peace," but there was no peace. In 1862 she again failed, but in 1863 she won—after 17 years.

It came about in this way. In the September number of Godey's she wrote: "Would it not be better that the proclamation that appoints Thursday the twenty-sixth of November (1863) as the day of Thanksgiving for the people of the United States of America should, in the first instance, emanate from the President of the Republic—to be applied by the governors of each and every state, in acquiescence with the Chief Executive advisor?"

On the twenty-ninth of September she received from Seward, Lincoln's secretary of state, an answer to her letter to the President, stating that it was receiving official attention. Four days later, Abraham Lincoln issued the first national Thanksgiving day proclamation since Washington's day. In it he said "And so . . . the last Thursday in November is hereby set apart as a day of thanksgiving and praise." That set the precedent and Lincoln followed it up the next year, 1864, by naming the same date (the last Thursday) in his second and last regular Thanksgiving day proclamation. Since that time other Presidents have never deviated from the custom, nor have governors of the states.

As for Sarah Josepha Hale, "the Mother of Thanksgiving," so long as she remained editor of Godey's Lady's Book (she resigned in December, 1877), she stood guard over her cherished holiday. Had it not been for her, in the years of civil strife and reconstruction the precedent set by Lincoln might very well have been put aside, but by the time she laid down her editorial pen, in her ninetieth year, the custom had been firmly established. Thanksgiving day had taken its place in the hearts of all the people and on the calendar of the nation for all time to come.

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## Scraps of Humor

**NAMING THE BABY**  
Jane, secretary to an attorney, went to call on a dear friend, Mrs. S., and her new-born daughter. She was met at the door by little William, full of news about the new sister.  
"Well, what have you named her?" asked Jane.  
Suddenly an aggrieved expression overspread his happy face, and almost in tears he replied:  
"Oh I wanted to name her Spot, but muvver wouldn't."—Indianapolis News.

**Ingenuous Norah**  
There was a crash in the kitchen. The mistress found the maid and little Margaret gazing at something on the floor.  
"Oh, mother!" exclaimed the child, "just see the lovely jig-saw puzzle Norah has made out of one of the new plates."

**Effective Treatment**  
"He's an old flame of mine."  
"Yeah, he ought to be extinguished."—Kansas City Star.

## WHY DAD'S NOSE IS RED

Two foreign-looking girls, evidently domestics, were discussing their employers. "The misus is fine," said one, "but her husband is very cross."  
"He is?"  
"Yeah. But I get even with him. Every time he scolds me, I put starch in his handkerchiefs."—Boston Transcript.

**Cheaper Cheating**  
Fisherman—Boy, will you sell me that big string of fish?  
Evans—Nope, but I'll take your picture holding it for 50 cents.

## LEADING QUESTION



"I tell you, no one can fool my wife."  
"Then how did you get her?"

**Something Like That**  
Teacher—What is a volcano?  
Bright Boy—A high mountain that keeps on interrupting.

**You're Next!**  
Examiner—What is the feminine of bachelor?  
Student—Er—er—lady-in-waiting.

**MORE SATISFACTION CAN'T BE BOUGHT FOR 5¢**

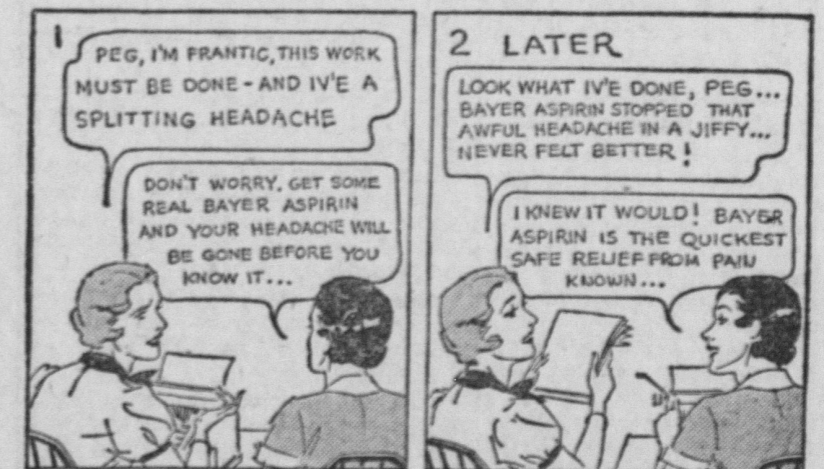


THE FLAVOR LASTS

**Seldom Astray**  
Teacher—Where are elephants usually found?  
Boy—Please, sir, they're so big they aren't usually lost.

**Hard Cash**  
Goggles—Old Plunkhunter's voice has a queer metallic ring. Notice it?  
Woggles—Yes; all he talks of is dollars.—Brooklyn Eagle.

## Ease Pain, Headache in Few Minutes



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