

Gentlemen, start your cash registers

This week the Holiday Season officially begins. Thanksgiving, a much exaggerated version of the first celebration that took place in 1621 will be enjoyed by families from coast to coast. The local Native Americans who were kind enough to help the Pilgrims survive their first winter after landing at Plymouth Rock were probably responsible for initiating that first event.

Although the 1621 feast is considered by many to be the very first Thanksgiving celebration, it was actually in keeping with a long tradition of celebrating the harvest and giving thanks for a successful bounty of crops by the local Native American tribes.

The tribes included the Pueblo, Cherokee, Creek and many others. They organized harvest festivals, ceremonial dances, and other celebrations of thanks for centuries before the arrival of Europeans in North America.

Nonetheless, the first European settlers had a lot to be thankful for, and they owed most of their thanks to the hospitable and forgiving Native Americans.

The initial landing party at Plymouth, Mass., according to William Bradford who wrote an early accounting of the events, said that some time after their arrival, probably around 1620, the Pilgrim men led by Captain Miles Standish, fired shots into the darkness at "a hideous and great cry."

Apparently, they mistook the cries of the Indians for a "company of wolves, or such like wild beasts." The next morning when arrows came flying at them by the hundreds, their assumptions changed.

But instead of introducing themselves and offering good will by treating the natives with even the smallest modicum of respect, they shot at them. As would be expected, this was not well received.

The first few months in America proved hard on the Pilgrims. Half of their 102 members perished. Of the 17 male heads of families, 10 died of infectious diseases. Of the



You can't beat a system you can't understand

By Sam Bari

17 wives, only three remained after three months. The devastation was dramatic.

However, the following summer conditions improved due to the help and instruction of a native host named Squanto. This knowledgeable and benevolent native was a member of the Patuxet tribe that lived at present-day Plymouth, and fortunately for the Pilgrims, he spoke English. He felt sorry for the ragtag group of Pilgrims who would have surely died if he had not offered his assistance.

Squanto apparently taught the remaining Pilgrims how to survive the brutal winter, plant corn and other vegetables, and gave them a few tips on hunting.

Anyway, the Pilgrims decided to ask Squanto and a few of his friends who helped them to enjoy a little feast as a token of their appreciation. The word got out that the Pilgrims were having a party and everybody decided to get in on the action. Chief Massasoit, the head of one of the local tribes, brought 90 of his closest friends to join the celebration. Now the natives greatly outnumbered the hosts, which made them a bit nervous.

Massasoit was good guy however, and when he saw the meager table set by the Pilgrims, the chief, along with Squanto and a few braves, went hunting. As the story goes, they brought back five deer, fish, pheasants, wild turkeys, and other local fare, built a huge fire, and had a cookout that lasted three days. Since there was no refrigeration, the natives showed the Pilgrims how to dry the leftovers so they could be preserved and enjoyed at a later date. So, the first party was a roaring success.

Then, nothing happened for over 200 years. The 1621 three-day bash was the only "Thanksgiving" celebration. So, we fast-forward to the Lincoln administration in the mid-19th Century when the Thanksgiving issue was raised again. The idea of a holiday was heavily lobbied by Sarah Josepha Hale, an influential magazine editor, who insisted on making Thanksgiving a national holiday.

Lincoln caved in and declared the fourth Thursday of November as a day of thanks. He did not make it a national holiday. Now jump forward nearly another century to Franklin Delano Roosevelt's second term in office. He thought it would be a good idea to boost the economy that was still recovering from the great depression by declaring the third Thursday in November as the day of thanks.

He thought it would give the retailers an extra week to promote business for the Christmas Season. In 1941, during Roosevelt's third term, Congress decided to make Thanksgiving an official national holiday, but they changed the date back to the fourth Thursday in November, where it has remained to this day.

So the truth is out. Thanksgiving is a holiday made for the retailers to promote business for the Christmas season. In other words, Thanksgiving kicks off the time of year that should be called "the selling season."

It's a perfectly good business idea. Disguised as the Holiday Season, the retailers are given an opportunity to move the stuff they couldn't sell all year long and make a little profit, and the consumers get their Christmas shopping done at discount prices. Although I hate to say this, it's a "win-win situation."

Then, when the holidays are over, retailers have the January white sales and inventory blow-outs. Why they call it such, I have

no idea. Anyway, that's when the retailers sell stuff that they couldn't get rid of at rock bottom prices before Christmas. In January, they charge slightly less than the fees they would pay if they had the trash man haul the merchandise away.

We, as a nation, have managed to rationalize the commercializa-

tion of the Holy Days, by calling the kickoff to the Selling Season, "Thanksgiving." It's just not as crass and keeps us from feeling guilty. Doesn't it just make you feel warm and fuzzy all over? It's little wonder that we live in a system we can't understand.

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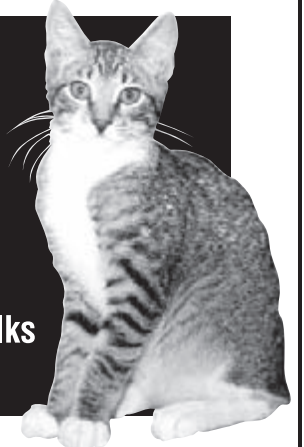
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