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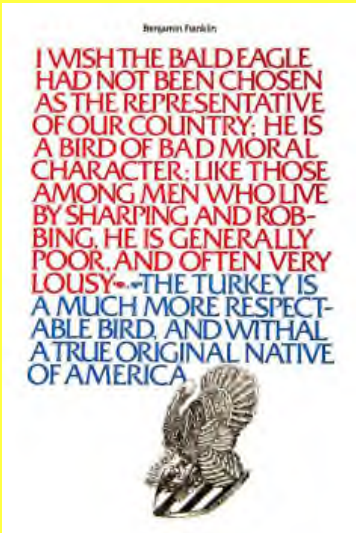
History Remembered, Inc.

*A Michigan Civil War Sesquicentennial
History Partner*

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Michigan Civil War Sesquicentennial Circular



Michigan Remembers the Civil War -

Thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving day used to be a time honored tradition for mom to serve a turkey dinner and pumpkin pie. It was a time when people paused to reflect on the many blessings they enjoyed. In recent times, Thanksgiving has become a bump in the road as people start looking forward to Christmas.

Thanksgiving in the Civil War meant something much different to those experiencing the effects of worry, families torn apart, the loss of loved ones, hunger, and more.

How citizens viewed the day was reflected in the presidential proclamations and messages from the pulpit. In this issue, I'll

share some of those words.

Happy Thanksgiving and thank you for commemorating the Civil War Sesquicentennial.

Bruce B. Butgereit,
Executive Director
History Remembered, Inc.
Grand Rapids, MI



Proclamation 118 -

Proclamation 118 - Thanksgiving Day, 1864
October 20, 1864

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

It has pleased Almighty God to prolong our national life another year, defending us with His guardian care against unfriendly designs from abroad and vouchsafing to us in His mercy many and signal victories over the enemy, who is of our own household. It has also pleased our Heavenly Father to favor as well our citizens in their homes as our soldiers in their camps and our sailors on the rivers and seas with unusual health. He has largely augmented our free population by emancipation and by immigration, while He has opened to us new sources of wealth and has crowned the labor of our workingmen in every department of industry with abundant rewards. Moreover, He has been pleased to animate and inspire

our minds and hearts with fortitude, courage, and resolution sufficient for the great trial of civil war into which we have been brought by our adherence as a nation to the cause of freedom and humanity, and to afford to us reasonable hopes of an ultimate and happy deliverance from all our dangers and afflictions:

Now, therefore, I, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, do hereby appoint and set apart the last Thursday in November next as a day which I desire to be observed by all my fellow-citizens, wherever they may then be, as a day of thanksgiving and praise to Almighty God, the beneficent Creator and Ruler of the Universe. And I do further recommend to my fellow-citizens aforesaid that on that occasion they do reverently humble themselves in the dust and from thence offer up penitent and fervent prayers and supplications to the Great Disposer of Events for a return of the inestimable blessings of peace, union, and harmony throughout the land which it has pleased Him to assign as a dwelling place for ourselves and for our posterity throughout all generations.

In testimony whereof I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed.

Done at the city of Washington, this 20th day of October, A.D. 1864, and of the Independence of the United States the eighty-ninth.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

By the President:

WILLIAM H. SEWARD,

Secretary of State.

An Annual Day of Thanksgiving; Who Gets the Credit? -

On October 3, 1863, with the nation embroiled in a bloody Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln issued a proclamation setting aside the last Thursday in November as a national day of thanks, setting the precedent for the modern holiday we celebrate today.

Secretary of State William Seward wrote it and Abraham Lincoln issued it, but much of the credit for the proclamation should probably go to a woman named Sarah Josepha Hale. A prominent writer and editor, Hale had written the children's poem "Mary Had a Little Lamb," originally known as "Mary's Lamb," in 1830 and helped found the American Ladies Magazine, which she used a platform to promote women's issues. In 1837, she was offered the editorship of "Godey's Lady Book," where she would remain for more than 40 years, shepherding the magazine to a circulation of more than 150,000 by the eve of the Civil War and turning it into one of the most influential periodicals in the country. In addition to her publishing work, Hale was a committed advocate for women's education (including the creation of Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York), and raised funds to construct Massachusetts's Bunker Hill Monument and save George Washington's Mount Vernon estate.

The New Hampshire-born Hale had grown up regularly celebrating an annual Thanksgiving holiday, and in 1827 published a novel, "Northwood: A Tale of New England," that included an entire

chapter about the fall tradition, already popular in parts of the nation. While at “Godey’s,” Hale often wrote editorials and articles about the holiday and she lobbied state and federal officials to pass legislation creating a fixed, national day of thanks on the last Thursday of November—a unifying measure, she believed that could help ease growing tensions and divisions between the northern and southern parts of the country. Her efforts paid off: By 1854, more than 30 states and U.S. territories had a Thanksgiving celebration on the books, but Hale’s vision of a national holiday remained unfulfilled.

The concept of a national Thanksgiving did not originate with Hale, and in fact the idea had been around since the earliest days of the republic. During the American Revolution, the Continental Congress issued proclamations declaring several days of thanks, in honor of military victories. In 1789, a newly inaugurated George Washington called for a national day of thanks to celebrate both the end of the war and the recent ratification of the U.S. Constitution—one of the original copies of Washington’s proclamation is set to be auctioned this November, with an estimated sale price of \$8-12 million. Both John Adams and James Madison issued similar proclamations of their own, though fellow Founding Father Thomas Jefferson felt the religious connotations surrounding the event were out of place in a nation founded on the separation of church and state, and no formal declarations were issued after 1815.

The outbreak of war in April 1861 did little to stop Sarah Josepha Hale’s efforts to create such a holiday, however. She continued to write editorials on the subject, urging Americans to “put aside sectional feelings and local incidents” and rally around the unifying

cause of Thanksgiving. And the holiday had continued, despite hostilities, in both the Union and the Confederacy. In 1861 and 1862, Confederate President Jefferson Davis had issued Thanksgiving Day proclamations following Southern victories. Abraham Lincoln himself called for a day of thanks in April 1862, following Union victories at Fort Donelson, Fort Henry and at Shiloh, and again in the summer of 1863 after the Battle of Gettysburg.

Shortly after Lincoln's summer proclamation, Hale wrote to both the president and Secretary of State William Seward, once again urging them to declare a national Thanksgiving, stating that only the chief executive had the power to make the holiday, "permanently, an American custom and institution." Whether Lincoln was already predisposed to issue such a proclamation before receiving Hale's letter of September 28 remains unclear. What is certain is that within a week, Seward had drafted Lincoln's official proclamation fixing the national observation of Thanksgiving on the final Thursday in November, a move the two men hoped would help "heal the wounds of the nation."

After more than three decades of lobbying, Sarah Josepha Hale (and the United States) had a national holiday, though some changes remained in store. In 1939, President Franklin Roosevelt briefly moved Thanksgiving up a week, in an effort to extend the already important shopping period before Christmas and spur economic activity during the Great Depression. While several states followed FDR's lead, others balked, with 16 states refusing to honor the calendar shift, leaving the country with dueling Thanksgivings. Faced with increasing opposition, Roosevelt

reversed course just two years later, and in the fall of 1941, the U.S. Congress passed a resolution returning the holiday to the fourth Thursday of November.

Other Proclamations from 1864 -

To the Friends of Union and Liberty

Executive Mansion, Washington, To the friends of Union & Liberty.
May 9, 1864.

Enough is known of Army operations within the last five days to claim our especial gratitude to God; while what remains undone demands our most sincere prayers to, and reliance upon, Him, without whom, all human effort is vain. I recommend that all patriots, at their homes, in their places of public worship, and wherever they may be, unite in common thanksgiving and prayer to Almighty God. ABRAHAM LINCOLN

(The year 1864 would have two official days of thanksgiving. The above proclamation and then the Thanksgiving day in November.)

Proclamation of a Day of Prayer -

July 7, 1864

By the President of the United States of America:

A Proclamation.

Whereas, the Senate and House of Representatives at their last

Session adopted a Concurrent Resolution, which was approved on the second day of July instant, and which was in the words following, namely:

"That, the President of the United States be requested to appoint a day for humiliation and prayer by the people of the United States; that he request his constitutional advisers at the head of the executive departments to unite with him as Chief Magistrate of the Nation, at the City of Washington, and the members of Congress, and all magistrates, all civil, military and naval officers,---all soldiers, sailors, and marines, with all loyal and law-abiding people, to convene at their usual places of worship, or wherever they may be, to confess and to repent of their manifold sins; to implore the compassion and forgiveness of the Almighty, that, if consistent with His will, the existing rebellion may be speedily suppressed, and the supremacy of the Constitution and laws of the United States may be established throughout all the States; to implore Him as the Supreme Ruler of the World, not to destroy us as a people, nor suffer us to be destroyed by the hostility or connivance of other Nations, or by obstinate adherence to our own counsels, which may be in conflict with His eternal purposes, and to implore Him to enlighten the mind of the Nation to know and do His will; humbly believing that it is in accordance with His will that our place should be maintained as a united people among the family of nations; to implore Him to grant to our armed defenders and the masses of the people that courage, power of resistance and endurance necessary to secure that result; to implore Him in His infinite goodness to soften the hearts, enlighten the minds, and quicken the consciences of those in rebellion, that they may lay down their arms and speedily return to their allegiance to the United States, that they may not be utterly destroyed, that the

effusion of blood may be stayed, and that unity and fraternity may be restored, and peace established throughout all our borders."

Now, therefore, I, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, cordially concurring with the Congress of the United States in the penitential and pious sentiments expressed in the aforesaid Resolution, and heartily approving of the devotional design and purpose thereof, do, hereby, appoint the first Thursday of August next, to be observed by the People of the United States as a day of national humiliation and prayer.

I do, hereby, further invite and request the Heads of the Executive Departments of this Government, together with all Legislators,---all Judges and Magistrates, and all other persons exercising authority in the land, whether civil, military or naval,---and all soldiers, seamen and marines in the national service,---and all the other loyal and law-abiding People of the United States, to assemble in their preferred places of public worship on that day, and there and then to render to the Almighty and Merciful Ruler of the Universe, such homages and such confessions, and to offer to Him such supplications, as the Congress of the United States have, in their aforesaid Resolution, so solemnly, so earnestly, and so earnestly, and so reverently recommended.

In testimony whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed.

Done at the City of Washington, this seventh day of July, in the year of our Lord, one thousand eight hundred and sixty-four, and of the Independence of the United States the eighty-ninth. ABRAHAM LINCOLN

By the President:

WILLIAM H. SEWARD, Secretary of State.

The Soldiers' and Sailors' Thanksgiving of 1864 -

In 1864 the Union League of New York decided to raise a fund to supply Thanksgiving dinner on November 24, 1864 for the Union soldiers and sailors fighting in the East. The reaction of the Northern public to this plan was overwhelming. Over \$56,000 in cash was raised, an enormous sum at the time, 250,000 pounds of fowl, and enormous contributions of foodstuffs of every type. The Union soldiers and sailors loved their feast and the reminder that they had not been forgotten by the folks back home. For Confederate soldiers, on starvation rations, there was of course no feast, a fact underlining the overwhelming tragedy of the Civil War. Here is the Union League appeal which was printed in the New York Times on November 8, 1864. [Note that Theodore Roosevelt, the father of the future president of the same name, is the Treasurer:]

"The undersigned, a Committee appointed at a meeting held at the Union League Club House, appeal to the people of the North to join them in an effort to furnish to our gallant soldiers and sailors, a good Thanksgiving dinner.

"We desire that on the twenty-fourth day of November there shall be no soldiers in the Army of the Potomac, the James or the Shenandoah, and no sailor in the North Atlantic Squadron who

does not receive tangible evidence that those for whom he is periling his life, remember him. It is hoped that the armies at the West will be in like manner cared for by those nearer to them than we. It is deemed impracticable to send to our more Southern post.

To enable us to carry out our own undertaking, we need the active cooperation of all loyal people in the North and East, and to them we confidently appeal. We ask primarily for donations of cooked poultry and other proper meats, as well as for mince pies and for fruit. If any person is so situated as to be unable to cook the poultry or meat, we will receive it uncooked. To those who are unable to send donations in kind, we appeal for generous contributions in money. Will not every wife who has a husband, every mother who has a son, every sister who has a brother, serving in the armies or navies of the Union, feel that this appeal is to her personally, and do her part to enable us to accomplish our undertaking? Will not all who feel that we have a country worth defending and preserving, do something to show those who are fighting our battles that they are remembered and honored?

"We will undertake to send to the front all donations in kind that may reach us on or before Nov. 20, and to see that they are properly and equally distributed. They should be wrapped in white paper boxes, and addressed to GEO. W. BLUNT, Getty's Building, Trinity-place, New-York. If uncooked, it should be so marked on the outside of the box, and a list of the contents should accompany the- box. Poultry, properly cooked, will keep ten days. None should be sent which has been cooked prior to Nov. 14. Uncooked poultry or meat should reach us on or before Nov. 18, that it may be cooked here.

"Contributions in money should be sent to THEODORE ROOSEVELT, Treasurer, No. 94 Maiden-lane, or to any member of the Committee.

"The time is short, and we trust no one will wait to be personally solicited. Will not some person in every city and town of the North and East, volunteer, however, to canvass his own city or town?

"The American, Adams, Harnden, United States, National, Kingsley, Hope and Long Island Express Companies, have generously offered to transmit to this city, free of charge, all boxes addressed as above, and it is not doubted that other express companies will do the same."

All loyal states quickly picked up the idea and issued requests in local newspapers for donations. The *Trenton Gazette and Republican* wrote that it was the duty "of every male civilian to buy a chicken or turkey for the troops." New Jersey citizens even contributed \$1500 for the purchase of cigars and tobacco.

The Northern press enthusiastically trumpeted the project, lauding local efforts and explaining how every citizen could add their support, whether a little or a lot. Because soldiers in the Union Army regularly got newspapers, they knew what was coming. The excitement mounted in the camps!

As the idea spread, the good feelings spread also. Over \$250,000 was eventually collected for the effort, in both money and in kind. Local citizens hosted units stationed near their towns and cities with "abundant dinners." Nor were hospitals forgotten. The real trick was how to provide a Thanksgiving feast for the Union

soldiers and sailors not stationed near a civilian center, and those whose units were within the geographical Confederacy.

The food went first to City Point, and from there to the camps. Normal supply systems were disrupted, causing General Rutherford B. Hayes to grumble, ". . . overcoats, stockings, shirts, etc., which are greatly needed, couldn't come because all the transportation was required to haul up the turkeys and Thanksgiving dinner!" When the food arrived, however, he added, ". . . everyone is jolly and happy."

From the *New York Times*, December 6, 1864 a soldier writes:

"Far away from the home and friends we so dearly love, exposed to hardships, danger and death, 'tis pleasing to us to know that we are still remembered in the prayers, sympathies and kindness of the loyal hearts of our noble States. When in the language of the song we are asked "Do they think of us at home?" our own hearts can willingly and gladly respond, "They do." The recent Thanksgiving present to the army is but one more evidence that we are not forgotten, nor can we ever forget those who, while they are enjoying all the comforts of home and plenty, still think of, and by their noble deeds testify that they remember the soldier."



Michigan Civil War Sesquicentennial
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The events discussed at the recent Civil War Sesquicentennial Reenactor Conference have been posted to the website calendar. There are 92 events with more to be added.

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