

QUOTIDIAN

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PRELUDE

After a brief interlude, I have decided to put forth an issue detailing the history of that most American of holidays, Thanksgiving. As you return from a weekend of abundance and fellowship, I hope the knowledge you gain here will give you a greater appreciation and understanding of this great tradition.

QUOTES OF THE WEEK

“The discovery of a new dish does more for human happiness than the discovery of a new star.”
—Anthelme Brillat-Savarin

“Thanksgiving is a typically American holiday... The lavish meal is a symbol of the fact that abundant consumption is the result and reward of production.”
—Ayn Rand

“I would maintain that thanks are the highest form of thought, and that gratitude is happiness doubled by wonder.”
—G.K. Chesterton

THIS WEEK IN HISTORY

DECEMBER 1, 1824: For the first and only time in American history, a presidential election is decided not by the electoral college, but by the House of Representatives. The 12th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution stipulates that if no candidate has a majority of the electoral votes, “the House of Representatives shall choose immediately, by ballot, the President” “from the persons having the highest numbers not exceeding three on the list of those voted for as President.” Each state was allowed a single vote, and a simple majority conferred the presidency.

The election of 1824 marked the end of the “Era of Good Feelings,” a period of American history known for its lack of partisan politics. During this time, the Federalist Party was extinguished (in the nearly unanimous election of 1820, in which James Monroe received all but one of the electoral votes), and the Democratic-Republican party governed without any substantial opposition.

For this reason, the 1824 election saw four candidates, each from the same political party, vying for the presidency: Andrew Jackson, the hero of New Orleans; John Quincy Adams, son of former president John Adams and Monroe’s Secretary of State; William Crawford, Monroe’s Secretary of Treasury; and Henry Clay, Speaker of the House. While each candidate was from the same party, their views differed along sectional lines; Jackson was largely supported by the south, (*continued pg. 2 col. 2*)

3 WORDS

Memorize these by week’s end and you shall quickly develop an enviable lexicon.

This week’s theme: words related to eating and feasting.

gourmand (GOR-mawnd) *noun*

1. one who is excessively fond of eating and drinking
2. one who is heartily interested in good food and drink

Ex. My father is a regular gourmand; he can recommend a good glass of wine with any meal.

sybarite (SIB-uh-rite) *noun*

1. a person whose chief interests are luxury and the gratification of sensual appetites

Ex. That old sybarite is easy to entertain! Just give him some feminine distractions and a glass of wine and you won’t hear from him all night.

regale (ri-GALE) *verb*

1. to entertain richly or agreeably
2. to give pleasure or amusement to
3. to feast oneself

Ex. After we had sated ourselves on ham and mead, the bard regaled us with tales of kings.

ETYMOLOGY 101

The origin of: smorgasbord

A smorgasbord is a large quantity of variegated food, typical of many a Thanksgiving feast. The word comes from the Swedish *smörgåsbord*, which literally means “bread and butter table” (from *smorgas* “open-faced sandwich” + *bord* “board” or table). A smorgasbord is a traditional Swedish feast consisting of hot and cold meats, smoked and pickled fish, meatballs, eggs, salads, and cheeses. The large quantity of food originates from large country gatherings where many people brought a single dish and arranged them on long tables. Typically, cold dishes are consumed first, followed by hot dishes and—occasionally—desserts. The word became popular in this country only recently, when 1940s diners would advertise “all you can eat” smorgasbords for a pittance. Today, the word also means “a hodgepodge” or heterogeneous mixture.

The origin of: turkey

“The large, ungainly bird that is known scientifically as the *Meleagris gallopavo* was first domesticated by the Aztecs, Mayas, and other civilized Indian tribes of Mexico and Central America. At the time of their conquest of the New World, the Spanish began exporting the domesticated fowl to the Old World.” The fowl was first introduced into the lands bordering the Mediterranean early in the 16th century, and was subsequently domesticated throughout northern Europe and England.

“From the beginning, the New World fowl was confused with a bird of African origin that had been known to the Mediterranean peoples since ancient times. This Old World bird was commonly known as the *guinea fowl* (also *guinea cock*) or *turkey-cock*. The name *guinea fowl* derived from the fact that it was sometimes exported from Guinea on the west coast of Africa by the Portuguese. The name *turkey-cock* derived from the fact that the fowl had been originally imported to Europe from territory that the Europeans thought of as Turkish. *Turkey*, to the Europeans of the sixteenth century, could refer to the whole of the Ottoman Empire, or to any or all various lands under Islamic domination. To Europeans of that period, Turkey suggested all that was mysterious, exotic, or merely novel. Thus, ‘Turkey’ was the actual or assumed point of origin for all manner of exotica.” It was only natural, then, that *turkey-cock* should become attached to those recently introduced birds that resembled the well-known guinea fowl. “Even after the New World bird ceased to be confused with its African cousin, the misnomer *turkey-cock* stuck.” In time, *turkey-cock* was shortened to *turkey*.

The first American colonists feasted on specimens of the once native wild turkey population; however, before long they were importing the domesticated European version of the turkey back to its native continent. Modern day turkeys are from this European stock, and are so renowned for their stupidity (inherited from years of farmyard breeding) that *turkey* is sometimes used today to refer to someone or something that is a complete failure.

Source: *The Merriam-Webster New Book of Word Histories*.

(continued from pg. 1, col. 1)

Adams by the northeast, and so on. Jackson won the most electoral votes (99), followed by Adams (84) and Crawford (41). Since none of the candidates had the requisite minimum 131 votes, the election went to the House. Clay, who received the fewest electoral votes (37), was not considered in the House vote.

Since Clay detested Jackson and tended to agree with Adams on political issues, he used his influence as Speaker to sway the vote in Adams’ favor. Perhaps in return for this showing of support, Adams later appointed Clay his Secretary of State, bringing about charges of a “corrupt bargain.” Jackson, who expected to win the presidency, campaigned on this issue for the next four years, and defeated Adams in a rematch in 1828.

Sources: wikipedia.org, u-s-history.com, *U.S. Const. amend. XII*.



Henry Clay
Speaker of the House, 1823-1825

NEAT-O A BRIEF HISTORY OF THANKSGIVING

Thanksgiving is like many other holidays that have survived the test of time: it is surrounded by many myths and is celebrated much differently today than it was originally. Thanksgiving is closely related to European “harvest festivals,” events celebrated since pagan times to celebrate successful harvests. Traditionally, harvest festivals were held in September, when the harvest moon—the full moon nearest the autumnal equinox—was visible. These days were marked by singing, dancing, praying, and the decorating of churches with baskets of food. The traditions of the harvest festivals were brought to the New World by explorers and pilgrims in the 16th and 17th centuries, and were frequently shared with the native population.

Feasts commemorating a successful harvest or acquisition of food were celebrated in North America as early as 1541, when Francisco Vásquez de Coronado and the Teya Indians tucked in at the Palo Duro Canyon in what is now Texas. Thanks was also given by Pilgrims who landed in the New World, likely in the form of a fervent prayer for surviving the treacherous, three month journey over the Atlantic.

The “real” first Thanksgiving feast that most of us are familiar with occurred in 1621, when the pilgrims at Plymouth Rock held a three day feast to celebrate a bountiful harvest. The Plymouth pilgrims had arrived on the *Mayflower* the prior winter, but conditions were so harsh that half of them perished. The Wampanoag Indians, who likely introduced the pilgrims to local foods and showed them how to capture native animals (including the wild turkey), were invited to the feast. With them came their chief Massasoit, who went out with his men and killed five deer for the feast table.

We know these small details about the first Thanksgiving feast because two colonists wrote brief descriptions of it in letters. However, they offer few clues as to what was actually eaten, or if the feast was a one time event or a regular association between colonists and natives.

While the Wampanoag Indians gave thanks or prayer on a daily basis, the pilgrims felt their bountiful circumstances required a special celebration. For this reason, the first Thanksgiving feasts were celebrated irregularly; different colonies set aside different days for giving thanks, and no uniform date was set until 1777, when George Washington declared a thanksgiving for his defeat of the British at Saratoga. In 1789, Congress asked Washington to declare a national day of Thanksgiving; he did so and set the date at November 26. Washington declared another day in 1795, and Adams after him declared thanksgivings in 1798 and 1799. Madison also declared a day of thanksgiving in 1815 to celebrate the end of the War of 1812.

Up until 1863, Thanksgiving was only sporadically declared a national holiday. Enter Sarah Josepha Hale*, an American personality grossly undervalued in our history for her contributions, yet integral to this autumnal celebration. For years, Hale, as editor of the widely read *Godey's Lady's Book*, had petitioned local and state government officials for recognition of a national Thanksgiving holiday. In Hale's opinion, there were “too few holidays.” The celebration (*continued pg. 4, col. 1*)

WELL I'LL BE THE ANSWER TO A QUESTION YOU NEVER ASKED

Is chocolate bad for dogs?

This is a pertinent question for the holiday season, since most people eat more chocolate this time of year, and may feel inclined to “share the love” with their canine friends. A bit of research yielded an unqualified *yes* to this question. The vet's advice? Do not, under any circumstances, give your pooch a piece. Not even a little chocolate chip, since a dog is likely to develop a craving for it and gobble up all the chocolate it can find, should it ever get the chance.

The potentially lethal ingredient in chocolate is *theobromine*, a type of alkaloid in the methylxanthine family. Methylxanthines occur naturally in dozens of plants, and include caffeine (found in coffee) and theophylline (found in tea). As far as humans are concerned, theobromine is like a milder version of caffeine; it is mildly diuretic, acts as a mild stimulant, and acts as a bronchodilator (that is, it relaxes the smooth muscles in the lungs, making it easier for people to breath).

Excessive amounts of theobromine can be poisonous and even lethal to dogs, since they are unable to metabolize it as quickly as humans. Dogs who have had too much chocolate exhibit telltale signs, including vomiting, diarrhea, hyperactivity, and heavy breathing. (*continued pg. 4, col. 2*)

(continued from pg. 3, col. 1) of Thanksgiving would have “a deep moral influence” and bring out “the best sympathies” in people. She argued most forcefully for a national holiday in an 1858 editorial in *Godey's* entitled “Our National Thanksgiving:”

We are most happy to agree with the large majority of the governors of the different States—as shown in their unanimity of action for several past years, and which, we hope, will this year be adopted by all—that the LAST THURSDAY IN NOVEMBER shall be the DAY OF NATIONAL THANKSGIVING for the American people.

Consecrate the day to benevolence of action, by sending good gifts to the poor, and doing those deeds of charity that will, for one day, make every American home the place of plenty and of rejoicing. These seasons of refreshing are of inestimable advantage to the popular heart; and, if rightly managed, will greatly aid and strengthen public harmony of feeling. Let the people of all the States and Territories sit down together to the “feast of fat things,” and drink, in the sweet draught of joy and gratitude to the Divine giver of all our blessings, the pledge of renewed love to the Union, and to each other; and of peace and good-will to all men. Then the last Thursday in November will soon become the day of AMERICAN THANKSGIVING throughout the world.

Hale may have seen the spiritual and communitarian aspects of Thanksgiving as a necessary counterweight to the growing moral restlessness of the nation as it descended into civil war. Her appeals finally reached amenable ears and, in the midst of that most brutal of American conflicts, president Lincoln saw fit to set aside Hale's chosen day to observe a new national holiday. On October 3, 1863, Lincoln signed the “Thanksgiving Proclamation.” Below is a short excerpt:

In the midst of a civil war of unequalled magnitude and severity...peace has been preserved with all nations, order has been maintained, the laws have been respected and obeyed, and harmony has prevailed everywhere except in the theatre of military conflict...and the country, rejoicing in the consciousness of augmented strength and vigor, is permitted to expect continuance of years, with large increase of freedom.

No human counsel hath devised nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God, who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy.”

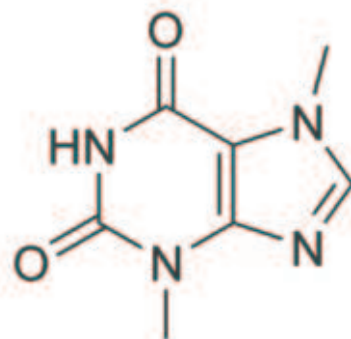
Thanksgiving has been celebrated annually in the United States since 1863, but not always on the day Lincoln proclaimed. In 1939, president Roosevelt, in an effort to ease the effects of the Depression, declared that Thanksgiving would be celebrated on the penultimate Thursday in November. Since the day after Thanksgiving has traditionally been the beginning of the holiday shopping season, Roosevelt (continued pg. 5)

(continued from pg. 3, col. 2) High levels of theobromine can lead to seizures, arrhythmia, and even death.

So how much is too much? It depends on the age, size and health of the dog, and the type of chocolate consumed. Generally speaking, the sweeter the chocolate, the safer it is. White chocolate has the lowest levels of theobromine (1 mg per ounce), followed by milk chocolate (40-60 mg/oz), semisweet (150-260 mg/oz), and unsweetened (390-450 mg/oz). Toxic doses range from 9 mg per pound of dog for mild signs to 18 mg per pound of dog for severe signs. Thus, a mere gram of theobromine would cause severe problems for a 60 pound dog.

It takes about four days for chocolate to work its way out of a dog's system, but only 6 to 10 hours to work its way out of a human's.

Sources: chemistry.about.com, petcaretips.net, veterinarypartner.com, wikipedia.org.



*For you chemistry nerds—
the chemical structure
of theobromine*

(continued from pg. 4, col. 1) figured an earlier Thanksgiving would give merchants more time to sell their goods before Christmas. Roosevelt's declaration was not mandatory, however, and about half of the states went along with "Franksgiving." In 1941, Congress split the difference: it declared Thanksgiving would fall on the fourth Thursday in November, which isn't always the last Thursday of the month.

And what of the foods we typically eat at this most American of feasts? Turkey, cranberries, pumpkin, and sweet potatoes are all native to the Americas, and at least two or three of these foods could have been consumed at the original Thanksgiving feast in 1621. Furthermore, cranberries, pumpkins, and sweet potatoes are all harvested in the fall, so it is sensible that they should be present at a harvest festival.

*Hale is the little-known author of the famous children's rhyme *Mary Had A Little Lamb*.

Sources: wikipedia.org, twoop.com, csmonitor.com, bestyears.com, oceanspray.com.



LITERARY GENIUS

This well known poem about a New England boy's Thanksgiving trip to his grandfather's house was, like *Mary Had A Little Lamb*, written by a now obscure woman who was well known in her day. Lydia Maria Child was one of the first American women to earn a living writing. She authored several popular domestic advice books, including *The American Frugal Housewife* and *The Mother's Book*. This poem first appeared in *Flowers for Children, volume 2* in 1844.

A BOY'S THANKSGIVING DAY

by Lydia Maria Child

Over the river, and through the wood,
to Grandfather's house we go;
the horse knows the way to carry the sleigh
through the white and drifted snow.

Over the river, and through the wood,
to Grandfather's house away!
We would not stop for doll or top,
for 'tis Thanksgiving Day.

Over the river, and through the wood,
oh, how the wind does blow!
It stings the toes and bites the nose,
as over the ground we go.

Over the river, and through the wood,
with a clear blue winter sky,
The dogs do bark and the children hark,
as we go jingling by.

Over the river, and through the wood,
to have a first-rate play.
Hear the bells ring, "Ting a ling ding!"
Hurray for Thanksgiving Day!

Over the river, and through the wood,
no matter for winds that blow;
or if we get the sleigh upset
into a bank of snow.

Over the river, and through the wood,
to see little John and Ann;
we will kiss them all, and play snowball
and stay as long as we can.

Over the river, and through the wood,
trot fast my dapple gray!
Spring over the ground like a hunting-hound!
For 'tis Thanksgiving Day.

Over the river, and through the wood,
and straight through the barnyard gate.
We seem to go extremely slow—
it is so hard to wait!

Over the river, and through the wood,
Old Jowler hears our bells;
he shakes his paw with a loud bow-wow,
and thus the news he tells.

Over the river, and through the wood,
when Grandmother sees us come,
she will say, "O, dear, the children are here,
bring pie for everyone."

Over the river, and through the wood,
now Grandmother's cap I spy!
Hurrah for the fun! Is the pudding done?
Hurrah for the pumpkin pie!