



HAPPY THANKSGIVING!

It seems impossible, but Thanksgiving is just around the corner. It finishes a close second to Christmas as my favorite holiday, and I look forward to the four or five relaxing days spent with family and friends as we celebrate all that we have to be thankful for in our lives in this wonderful country. But that anticipation and excitement are dampened just a bit by the fact that Thanksgiving also signals, at least unofficially, the end of the best of all seasons. I don't like to think that this autumn is soon to be over. And it also marks the end of another golf season and, surprisingly, that tugs at my heartstrings too. But the days and months and time itself march on and just as we've all caught our breath we will be thinking of next year's opening day of golf at our golf courses.

Harriet Beecher Stowe, known best for her book "Uncle Tom's Cabin," wrote a book titled "Oldtown Folks" that captured the whole spirit and body of New England. In that book she wrote of Thanksgiving at Oldtown:

"There were, however, some few national fetes: — Election day, when the Governor took his seat with pomp and rejoicing. The Fourth of July took high rank, after the Declaration of Independence; but the king and high priest of all festivals was the autumn

Thanksgiving.

When the apples were all gathered and the cider was all made, and the yellow pumpkins were rolled in from many a hill in billows of gold, and the corn was husked, and the labors of the season were done, and the warm, late days of Indian Summer came in, dreamy and calm and still, with warm trances of benignant, sunny hours at noon, there came over the community a sort of genial repose of spirit, — a sense of something accomplished, and of a new golden mark made in advance on the calendar of life, — and the deacon began to say to the minister, of a Sunday, "I suppose it's about time for the Thanksgiving proclamation."

Thanksgiving Day Proclamations were a tradition in New England. Mrs. Stowe continues:

"Those labors that ushered in the great Thanksgiving festival were always entered into with enthusiasm. There were signs of richness all around us, — stoning of raisins, cutting of citron, slicing of candied orange-peel. Yet all these were only drawings and intimations of what was coming during the week of preparation, after the Governor's proclamation had been read.

The glories of that proclamation! We knew beforehand the Sunday it was to be read, and walked to church with alacrity, filled with gorgeous and vague expectations.

The cheering anticipation sustained us through what seemed to us the long waste of the sermon

and prayers; and when at last the auspicious moment approached, — when the last quaver of the last hymn had died out, — the whole house rippled with a general movement of complacency, and a satisfied smile of pleased expectation might be seen gleaming on the faces of all the young people, like a ray of sunshine through a garden of flowers.

Thanksgiving was now dawning! We children poked one another, and fairly giggled with unreprieved delight as we listened to the crackle of the slowly unfolding document. That great sheet of paper impressed us as something supernatural, by reason of its mighty size, and by the broad seal of the State affixed thereto; and when the minister read therefrom, "By his Excellency, the Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, a Proclamation," our mirth was with difficulty repressed by admonitory glances from our sympathetic elders. Then, after a solemn enumeration of the benefits which the Commonwealth had that year received at the hands of Divine Providence, came at last the naming of the eventful day, and, at the end of all, the imposing heraldic words, "God save the Commonwealth of Massachusetts." And then, as the congregation broke up and dispersed, all went their several ways with schemes of mirth and feasting in their heads.

Most proclamations are necessary and traditional formalities, filled with trite phrases and collections of "whereas" and theretofores." They are all about the same, with minor changes to suite the different occasions they declare. Below is a notable exception, prose filled with the warmth of the day proclaimed and creating a groundswell and filling one's imagination with thoughts of autumn, of family and a meal of turkey and pumpkin pie. It was written by Wilbur L. Cross, a scholar and long-time editor of "The Yale Review" and governor of Connecticut in the mid-1930's. Governor Cross penned this proclamation for Thanksgiving Day of 1936 and I offer it to you and your families with the thought and hope that Thanksgiving 1985 will be your happiest.

MSM