



Thanksgiving

By Monroe S. Miller

Cheryl says the reason I like Thanksgiving so much is because I love to eat. She's at least partially right, no doubt. And I bet most Americans associate that meal of turkey and dressing, mashed potatoes and gravy, and pumpkin pie with Thanksgiving.

For so many years, the excitement of Thanksgiving in Wisconsin was amplified by the thought of gathering around the television to watch the Green Bay Packers do battle on the gridiron. Lombardi may have hated it, but the faithful of Wisconsin loved it. It seems as though in recent years the Packers have found their way back to that game. These holiday games rekindle many fond memories of Thanksgiving past.

I believe that autumn has always had special meaning for rural families like the one I was part of in my youth. Somehow this holiday signals the end of that season. The bitter sting of disappointment over a poor harvest has faded, and thoughts have turned to the next year. Next year will probably be better, farmers think. If the crops were abundant and profits good, Thanksgiving was the perfect time to gather and celebrate that good news. In a lot of ways, Golf Course Superintendents experience those same emotions. We have to think in longer terms

than a single season or one year because we know there will always be bad seasons to go with the good ones. Thanksgiving brings this reality to the forefront.

Some trace Thanksgiving back to the Harvest festivals of the Greeks and the Romans. Me? I think it's an all-American holiday. I'm not even sympathetic with those Virginia historians who claim the first Thanksgiving was held at Berkley Plantation in 1619, two years before the Pilgrims observed it in New England. In fact, I recall the minor hassle President Kennedy got involved with over this dispute. My memory tells me it was 1962. Virginians protested that Kennedy hadn't mentioned their state in his Thanksgiving Proclamation. JFK half apologized, pleading an "unconquerable New England bias". I guess I have that same bias.


We went to Plymouth, Massachusetts this fall as pilgrims ourselves to see where, over three centuries ago, the Mayflower landed in the New World. The story of the Mayflower and its long voyage, the misery and hardships of the Pilgrims, and the success of the Plymouth Colony are cherished stories that are extremely important in our heritage. They left Plymouth, England in early September of 1620 and headed for Virginia. Two months later they arrived, not in Virginia but on the Cape Cod shore. They had been diverted by a terrible storm. They explored the region for five weeks, tried to sail to Virginia and again were thwarted by strong winds. They then set sail and travelled to the bay Captain John Smith had mapped several years earlier, landed and established the Plymouth settlement.

That first winter was brutal and they were poorly prepared for it. Sickness, a lack of food and the harsh elements took half of their numbers to the grave. But the following spring brought renewed hope. They made friends with a group of Indians who taught them to hunt and fish and raise crops in this new land. The summer was good and the fall crops were bountiful. After the harvest, the Pilgrims joined their Indian friends in a three day festival - the first Thanksgiving - to give thanks for the many blessings they had received.

That first Thanksgiving marked gratitude for more than just a good harvest. It found the newcomers to America free from the tyranny of their home government, the reason they took such a great risk in the first place. They had maintained peace with their Indian neighbors. Their worst fears probably hadn't been realized; the greatest disasters and catastrophes hadn't happened. I'm sure they realized that if they worked hard the future held more plenty than want.

But wouldn't one guess they were most thankful for the same thing we should be today - opportunity? I believe that, on both counts. The Pilgrims had persevered and therefore gained opportunity—to worship as they pleased, to go where they wished, to be as successful as they wanted and to govern themselves. Their opportunity for freedom is one that has passed through the years to us today. That is an awful lot to be thankful for.

The story of bedraggled little band of foreign newcomers needs to be told more often. Their story makes each Thanksgiving we celebrate even more special.



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