

RUSSELL SANDERS

11-26-2021

THANKSGIVING CELEBRATION – LESSON 3

THE FIRST THANKSGIVING

When the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth, Massachusetts in December 1620 they were not the first English colony here, but they were the first to successfully survive over the long term. The Jamestown, Virginia Colony was the first English Colony, but that community did not survive but only approximately sixty years.

Of the 102 colonists, less than half survived to the end of the summer of 1621. It was a hard winter full of famine and disease that took its toll.

Fortunately, the native Wampanoag Indians were friendly. Governor John Carver signed a peace treaty with them on March 22, 1621, one month before he died. William Bradford was elected governor in this very first democratic body of politics in the New World.

The Indians played a key role in their survival. They taught the settlers how to plant crops that would flourish, how to fish, and how to harvest lobsters, clams, and mussels from the ocean. This was so successful that at the end of summer with fall coming on, they decided to celebrate with a fall feast.

Governor Bradford invited the Wampanoag chief and his immediate family to join the feast. Perhaps misunderstanding due to a language barrier, the chief showed up with about ninety from his tribe. The forty to fifty survivors feared the large group would eat up their entire winter storage of food, however the Indians brought a lot of food with them. The feast lasted at least three days or more.

An English hunting party had in four days taken a large number of fowls for the feast. It included some rather scrawny turkeys and other varieties of birds. However, the feast also featured fish, lobster, eels, mussels, corn, beans, and squash. Beer, wine, and liquor were present. Nuts and berries were their desert. There were no pies, no butter, and no wheat-based products.

They were thankful to both God and their Indian neighbors for their survival. This settlement of 40 to 50 people grew to over 7,000 people near the end of that century.

From the days of President George Washington there were some New England communities that would celebrate a time of thanksgiving, but it was President Abraham Lincoln that decreed it to be a national day of giving thanks to Almighty God.