

Today's Thanksgiving meals include turkey, (the typical main course,) cranberry sauce, stuffing, pumpkin pie, mashed potatoes, and other foods considered "American" since they are native to the New World. Before eating, most American families then go around the table stating what they are thankful are, and most would answer with friends, family, and the food they are about to eat. What most don't know is that the First Thanksgiving menu contrasted greatly from what it is today. Another disparity is what people are grateful for today versus what the pilgrims were thankful for in 1621.

When Thanksgiving rolls around, all most people can think of is the turkey. The truth is that we don't actually know for sure what exact bird was served at the First Thanksgiving. There were many wild turkeys around during the time, but there were also ducks, swans, and geese. ("The First Thanksgiving Meal.") Besides bird as meat, it is also said that there were five deer to feast on and possibly even lobster. Pilgrim Edward Winslow wrote of the Wampanoag Indians, the other attendees of the celebration, bringing the deer offering and of the abundance of lobster in the bay all summer. (Zielinski 6).

Another fan favorite of Thanksgiving for most is the bread-based stuffing. However, in 1621, Pilgrims stuffed their meat and fish with herbs, vegetables, and nuts to add extra flavor. (Zielinski 2). With the help of the Native Americans throughout the summer months, fruits and vegetables were plentiful by Thanksgiving. There was onions, beans, lettuce, spinach, squash, pumpkin, cabbage, carrots, and of course, the staple Pilgrim survival food, corn. Corn was served as crushed cornmeal, not on the cob as many enjoy it now. It is also possible that there was bread made from the corn present at the dinner. (Zielinski 4-5, 7). One essential item missing from that list was potatoes, preferably mashed by the people of today. The fact is that there was no form of

potatoes at the table of the First Thanksgiving celebration. By the time the Pilgrims set sail for the New World, potatoes were not popular enough to travel with them. For fruit, there was blueberries, plums, grapes, gooseberries, raspberries, and cranberries. At the First Thanksgiving, the Pilgrims and Native Americans did not enjoy a cranberry sauce like most do today due to the great decrease in sugar brought over by the Mayflower by November 1621. (“The First Thanksgiving Meal.”)

According to *The Stories of Pilgrims*, written by Margaret B. Pumphrey in 1912, there were indeed desserts at the First Thanksgiving. This included cookies, tarts, cakes, and pies. (Olsen 14). Though there was not enough technology to create crusts or bake these sweets in ovens, the Pilgrims quite possibly compensated for this by hollowing out pumpkins, filling out their shells with milk, honey, and spices, creating a custard from those supplies, and then roasted pumpkin over hot ashes. (“The First Thanksgiving Meal.”)

When I started this essay, I didn’t know “fare” had two meanings. I had always believed that fare was cost, so I was going to write a whole other essay. After doing research, I figured out “fare” could also mean food. However, I quickly realized there was a double meaning to *The Fare of the First Thanksgiving*. The Pilgrims left England to have religious freedoms. Around 100 people set sail on the Mayflower on September 6th, 1620 and left their old lives behind to begin again in the New World. When they arrived at Plymouth in December, one could not fathom that half of their population would be wiped out from sickness and starvation. Luckily, come spring, the Pilgrims befriended the Native Americans, who taught them how to grow corn, how to use fish as fertilizer, how to identify plants, how to get sap from the maple trees, and many other skills to help them survive. (Olsen 5-6). When we sit down at Thanksgiving today,

we don't think about the Pilgrims or what they sacrificed to come here and have the very First Thanksgiving. The Pilgrims however, had to pay for their Thanksgiving. What was the fare? The Fare of the First Thanksgiving was losing half of their people to have a new life absent of persecution. The Pilgrims were thankful to be alive, to have escaped the Church in England, to have met the Native Americans who would teach them how to survive, and to have these new lives. The Fare of the First Thanksgiving goes so much more beyond just the menu.

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