25 Little Known Facts About Thanksgiving - mental_floss on YouTube (Ep. 36)

List Show
https://youtube.com/watch?v=nvjAS7uzwJs
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John Green: Hi, I'm John Green. Welcome to my salon. This is Mental Floss on YouTube and did you know that pilgrims did not actually wear buckled hats? I know, your whole life is a lie! Buckles didn't even become fashionable until the 18th century and that is the first of many little-known facts about Thanksgiving that I'll be sharing with you today. I'll let you recover from the buckle thing during the intro.

intro music

JG: Thanksgiving didn't have religious origins, so it actually is a great way to kick off your war on Christmas. And sadly not the kind of harvest festival that features Lil' Sebastian. Anyone, Parks and Rec? No? Just me? All right. This confusion usually comes from a failure to distinguish between Pilgrims and Puritans. Both celebrated Thanksgiving on the North American continent, but Pilgrims refers to any original settlers of Plymouth whereas Puritans were what your English teacher kept trying to tell you about when you were studying *The Scarlet Letter*. For a better understanding of that distinction, look! I made you a Crash Course video.

JG: But of course harvest festivals pre-dated European colonists arriving in America, meaning that Thanksgiving didn't *really* originate in American. Plus, there was more than one first Thanksgiving. These celebrations that colonists brought over from Europe probably took place all over America--or at least the East Coast--at different times with different people. We do generally trace Thanksgiving back, though, to a 1621 three-day festival celebrated by the Pilgrims who maybe, possibly, depending on who you ask, also invited some Wampanoag Indians to join.

JG: So, not only did the Pilgrims not wear buckles, they also probably were not wearing black and white. Especially considering that black fabric was extremely expensive at the time.

JG: Also, the American Indians were not wearing loincloths. I mean, if you've been to New England in November, you'll note that it's COLD.

JG: And while we're dispelling myths, here are some items that you probably wouldn't have seen at one of these harvest festivals back in the 1600s: turkey, pumpkin pie, sweet potatoes, mashed potatoes, cranberry sauce. They probably had goose or duck instead of turkey. The meals might have even included swan or passenger pigeons and also seafood. There also was probably nuts and corn and pumpkin, but no pumpkin pies. So this year, I challenge you to celebrate like real pilgrims and share a lovely meal of passenger pigeon with your family on Thanksgiving. What's that, Mark? They're *extinct*? Ah, that's too bad. Eh, whatever. Regular pigeon will do, too.

JG: As for logistics, forks had not yet been invented. So the only silverware that could have been found at the meal were knives and spoons. Here at Mental Floss, we're all about educating, so I am now going to do a historically accurate demonstration of what the Pilgrims looked like at their harvest festivals. Because I am a scientist, I shall now demonstrate how to eat bread with only a spoon and a knife. This is-- *laughs* No wonder they were so hungry. Mmmm. Delicious.

JG: For a long time, a misconception has persisted that Native Americans taught Pilgrims about popcorn and even brought it to the first Thanksgiving, but, sadly, that is untrue, which explains why they were eating passenger pigeon.

JG: So why do we celebrate this functionally random festival that didn't even involve loincloths? Well, we have Sarah Josepha Hale to thank for that. She was a magazine editor who spent 17 years of her life campaigning for a nationally recognized Thanksgiving. The campaigning included writing letters to at least five presidents, including Zachary Taylor, Millard Fillmore, Franklin Pierce, James Buchanan, and, finally, Abraham Lincoln.

JG: It was Lincoln who made Thanksgiving an official national holiday in 1863. I assume Franklin Pierce could have done it, too, but he was too busy running people over with his horse. Side note: I'd just like to point out that Abraham Lincoln created an entire holiday because someone requested it via letter, but Bill Clinton couldn't even answer my e-mail about Socks the Cat. So thanks, Abraham Lincoln, and also Abraham Lincoln.

JG: Anyway, if you're not already grateful to Sarah Josepha Hale for giving us all a day off of school and work, she is also awesome because she wrote "Mary Had a Little Lamb."

JG: Back to presidents. Before Thanksgiving became a national holiday, and was merely celebrated by some Americans, Thomas Jefferson called it "the most ridiculous idea."

JG: And FDR tried to move Thanksgiving one week earlier in 1939 in order to quicken the post-Thanksgiving holiday shopping because: the Depression.

JG: Then, to prevent this from ever happening again, in 1941, Congress officially declared Thanksgiving as the fourth Thursday in November. Ahhh, Congress in 1941, back when you could do things.

JG: Now, of course, we can't have an episode about Thanksgiving without talking a little bit about turkey. You probably already know that turkey and/or tryptophan is not actually responsible for your post-meal sleepiness. For more on that, check out Dr. Aaron Carroll discussing this very topic. No, you're tired because you've been drinking win all day to deal with your family and also because you do not want to continue to listen to your great-uncle talking your ear off about the NSA.

JG: Right, but a couple stats about Thanksgiving turkey. Minnesota is the state that produces the most turkeys.

JG: In 2012, 46 million turkeys were eaten on Thanksgiving, which is 736 million pounds of turkey.

JG: Those statistics, by the way, come from the National Turkey Federation, which is apparently a thing. I mean, does every animal have a national federation? Because my campaign starts now to get on the board of the National Pig Federation. What's that? Did I say the word pig? Time to put a quarter in the staff pork chop party fund.

JG: Football on Thanksgiving has been played since 1876 when Yale played Princeton, but the tradition continued with the NFL's first season in 1920 when six different games were played on Thanksgiving Day.

JG: But, of course, the Detroit Lions are most typically associated with Thanksgiving games. In 1934, G.A. Richards bought the Lions and scheduled a Thanksgiving game against the Bears. The only time the Lions have failed to play on the holiday since, was during World War II.

JG: There's actually a Thanksgiving Parade that's older than the one run by Macy's. 1920 saw the First Annual Thanksgiving Parade in Philadelphia. It was previously known as the Gimbel's Thanksgiving Day Parade, but it now has a much less commercial name: the 6ABC Dunkin' Donuts Thanksgiving Day Parade!

JG: Four years after Philadelphia's first parade, in 1924, came the

first Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, which featured animal from the Central Park Zoo... and no balloons. Which, of course, left out this guy, who is both a balloon and an animal. The animals included elephants, camels, and lions, presumably so people who attended the parade could say at dinner later that day, "Well, I'm thankful I didn't get eaten by that lion who was five feet away from me."

JG: This tradition lasted for three whole years until 1927 when the animals were left alone and Felix the Cat became the first ever Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade balloon.

JG: In the early days, the balloons were actually released at the end of the parade so that they could float around for a while. Of course, they don't do this anymore, which is why you rarely see an 80-foot-tall Kermit the Frog flying over New Jersey.

JG: By the way, the Macy's Parade did not occur during World War II. It was canceled and the rubber from the balloons was given to help the war effort.

JG: Thanks for watching Mental Floss here on YouTube, which is made with the help of all of these nice people. Every week we endeavor to answer one of your fascinating questions. This week's question comes from YouTube user mikatsu, who asks, "How do garden snails survive winter temperatures?"

They don't, mikatsu, they die. No, I'm just kidding! They hibernate

Thanks again for watching Mental Floss on YouTube. You know, Mental Floss isn't just a YouTube thing. It's also, like, a real life magazine and also there are lots of amazing t-shirts, like "Hokey Pokey Anonymous: The Place to Turn Yourself Around," which you can get at the Mental Floss Store--link in the video info. IF you use the code "YoutubeFlossers," you get 15% off. Happy Thanksgiving and thanks to all of you for giving us here at Mental Floss Videos so much to be grateful for. As we say in my hometown, "Don't Forget To Be Awesome."

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