

The Pilgrims and America's First Thanksgiving

The evening in Denmark most families spend together is Christmas Eve. On that night you don't plan to be with your friends from school or your sport club. It is the night McDonald's can't compete with.

The duck, the pork roast, the gravy, the white and brown potatoes as well as the dessert with almonds bring back good memories and make your mouth water.

In the USA Thanksgiving seems to be the most important family gathering event and it leads over Christmas as the time most families get together. Young people away at college or university cross the states and fly home to be with their families for this very American occasion.

Thanksgiving is on the last Thursday in November and millions and millions of turkeys meet their destiny as stuffed roast turkey with mashed potato, gravy, sweet corn and cranberry sauce on that day.

In many families stories run of how it was the year grandfather had bought the biggest turkey ever seen, and how this fowl couldn't be squeezed into the oven, and how in the end both axes and saws had to be used to make the turkey fit into the oven.

Thanksgiving goes back to the early days of America, to the time when the Pilgrims, some of the first immigrants, came over on the "Mayflower".

The Pilgrims were families that had wanted to find freedom in the New World to worship God their way. In England they were persecuted because of their religion.

On Sept. 6, 1620 the Pilgrims set sail for the New World on a ship called the Mayflower. They sailed from Plymouth, England. The long trip was cold and damp and took 65 days.



Although they had first sighted land off Cape Cod they did not settle until they arrived at Plymouth, which had been named by Captain John Smith in 1614. It was there that the Pilgrims decided to settle. Plymouth offered an excellent harbor. A large brook offered a resource for fish. The Pilgrims biggest concern was attack by the local Native American Indians. But the *Patuxets* were a peaceful group and did not prove to be a threat.

The first winter was devastating to the Pilgrims. The cold, snow and sleet was exceptionally heavy, interfering with the workers as they tried to construct their settlement. March brought warmer weather and the health of the Pilgrims improved, but many had died during the long winter. Of the 110 Pilgrims and crew who left England, less than 50 survived the first winter.

On March 16, 1621, what was to become an important event took place, an Indian man walked into the Plymouth settlement. The Pilgrims were frightened until the Indian called out "Welcome" (in English!).

His name was *Samoset* and he was an Indian. He had learned English from the captains of fishing boats that had sailed

off the coast. After staying the night Samoset left the next day. He soon returned with another Indian named *Squanto* who spoke better English than Samoset. Squanto told the Pilgrims of his voyages across the ocean and his visits to England and Spain. It was in England where he had learned English.

Squanto's importance to the Pilgrims was enormous and it can be said that they would not have survived without his help. He taught the Pilgrims how to tap the maple trees for sap. He taught them which plants were poisonous and which had medicinal powers. He taught them how to plant the Indian corn.

The harvest in October was very successful and the Pilgrims found themselves with enough food to put away for the winter. There was corn, fruits and vegetables, fish to be packed in salt, and meat to be cured over smoky fires.

The Pilgrims had much to celebrate, they had built homes in the wilderness, they had raised enough crops to keep them alive during the long coming winter, and they were at peace with their Indian neighbors. They had beaten the odds and it was time to celebrate.

The Pilgrim Governor William Bradford proclaimed a day of thanksgiving to be shared by all the colonists and the neighboring Native Americans. They invited Squanto and the other Indians to join them in their celebration. Their chief and 90 braves came to the celebration, which lasted for 3 days. They played games, ran races, marched and played drums. The Indians demonstrated their skills with the bow and arrow and the Pilgrims demonstrated their musket skills.

All kids in America learn about these first Pilgrims. It is common for people to send a Thanksgiving card to relatives and friends.

Teksten er hentet fra:

<http://www.holidays.net/thanksgiving/pilgrims.htm>

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