HISTORY REFERENCE

Thanksgiving in Context

A short timeline of the U.S. holiday and the history that surrounds it.

Before 1620 — Wampanoag communities have lived in their homelands for thousands of years.

1621 — A harvest gathering involves Wampanoag people and English colonists at Plymouth. It is not the start of all traditions of giving thanks.

1789 — George Washington proclaims a national day of thanksgiving for November 26.

1863 — Abraham Lincoln proclaims a national Thanksgiving observance during the Civil War.

1941 — Federal law fixes Thanksgiving on the fourth Thursday in November.

Today — Families observe the day in different ways. Some Native people mark it as a day of mourning and reflection.

Sources: National Archives; Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian.

archives.gov/legislative/features/thanksgiving
americanindian.si.edu/nk360/Thanksgiving/timeline.html