

A WOMEN'S THANKSGIVING EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION

by Marie Coady

The first Thanksgiving was held in November of 1621. I'm sure everyone knows the story. The Pilgrims had a really tough winter in 1620 and lost a lot of their town folk to disease and starvation. So when the harvest the following year was bountiful, they invited about 91 local Indians to join them and had a feast.

What you probably don't know is, that historic feast lasted three days and left Pilgrim women gasping for breath. While the women raced around like roadrunners waiting on the men, those lumps of lard sat around watching football, burping and patting each other on the back for three days. Needless to say there was not another Thanksgiving celebration until 1676, and that celebration was held on the twenty-ninth of June so the kids could play outside.

Thanksgivings after that were sporadic. Since there was no CNN or Headline News, Colonial women were able to keep the whole thing on the QT. Until Samuel Adams opened his big mouth and got all thirteen colonies worked up about Thanksgiving just like he did about the Revolution.

"It is...recommended...to set apart, Thursday the eighteenth of December next, for a solemn thanksgiving and praise, that with one heart and one voice the good people may express the grateful feelings of their hearts and consecrate themselves to the service of their divine benefactor..." (Samuel Adams, November 1, 1777)

Yeah right! What's it to him? He doesn't have to cook.

Adams then toasted the crowd with his newly brewed beverage, appropriately named Samuel Adams beer. Some of the more cynical among the Patriots claimed that with December 18 being so close to Christmas, maybe Sam was just trying to boost sales for his new beer, thereby connecting Samuel Adams beer forever with the holiday season and guaranteeing his ancestors a life of trust funds and winters on the Rivera.

Although there is no concrete evidence to that rumor, some historians do believe it may have been a ruse organized by a disgruntled Guinness salesman designed to stir discontent against Adams and destroy his credibility as a rebel liquor distributor.

In any case, Colonial women were not thrilled to have this newest holiday so close to Christmas. So from 1778 on, they claimed it unpatriotic to stuff yourself on turkey and pumpkin pie while the troops were starving at Valley Forge. That tactic worked for eighty-six years, in spite of the efforts of a

deranged woman who was the nineteenth century's equivalent to Martha Stewart.

Sarah Josepha Hale, editor of the Boston Ladies Magazine, waged a forty year campaign to make Thanksgiving a national holiday in spite of the fact sales at her magazine slumped. This crazed woman, who married money, had a cleaning woman, cook, gardener, laundress, chauffeur, etc., obviously couldn't relate to the ordinary housewife struggling with a thirty pound turkey. After all, the heaviest thing she had to lift was a glass of Chablis as she presided over an elegantly set table lined with guests.

After forty years of nagging, Abraham Lincoln, the same man who stood up to the South, caved. And in 1863 he proclaimed Thanksgiving a national holiday with these words:

"We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of Heaven; we have been preserved these many years in peace and prosperity; we have grown in members wealth and power as no other nation has ever grown, and we must set aside a day to offer our thanksgiving."

I suppose we should cut him some slack. He did have a lot on his mind, like the Civil War and John Wilkes Booth. But the man had freed the slaves, for heaven's sake, and here he is condemning women to turkey basting and potato peeling in perpetuity. This was no Emancipation Proclamation for women.

Then along came Franklin Roosevelt, who changed Thanksgiving to the third Thursday of the month instead the fourth. His justification for this was, that women would have a longer time to shop for Christmas presents.

No!! Really!! That was his justification.

Many have the suspicion that Eleanor was behind the whole thing. It was rumored that she was always the last one to leave the department store on Christmas Eve. I believe Joyce Kearns Goodwin mentioned on CSpan's "Booknotes" program that Eleanor had been seen being dragged out of the men's department one Christmas Eve after the closing bell had tinkled and a recording was bellowing, "The store is now closed." Or maybe I heard that on Geraldo.

But just like they do to our present First Lady, Hillary Clinton, a hue and cry rose up from the Congress, claiming the change of date was merely a plot to raise campaign money from Macy's and an Asian supplier. As a result, two years later, Roosevelt changed Thanksgiving back to the fourth Thursday of the month and it remains that way today.

I know it's of little consolation to those of you who count Kentucky Fried Chicken as a home cooked meal, but women are expected during this blessed holiday season to stuff, baste, peel and mash all the while smiling till their cheeks hurt. That's both sets of cheeks.

Oh, for the days when all I had to do was show up at my mother's with the kids in tow. And I used to think that was tough.

I wouldn't want you to think I'm bitter and don't enjoy this time of warmth and reunion. Please know that I am not at all resentful. I love every minute of the stuffing, basting, peeling and mashing. Really!!

But I do have one friend who gets a little cranky during the holidays. I have to give her credit though. She has found a productive outlet to deal with her feelings of anger and frustration. She makes up recipes.

Years ago she sent me one of her original recipes for stuffing. She claims it has provided her with years of contentment. She said it's like owning a nuclear weapon. You don't actually have to use it to feel its power over everyone. I'm confident she has not used it yet, because her kitchen is still intact, and she is still stuffing, basting, peeling and mashing.

But let me pass on her recipe to you to use as a safety valve for any feelings of resentment you may have toward your holiday guests, but I beg you not to use it. It could start a nuclear war.

POPCORN STUFFING

Toast Bread for Stuffing
Shred bite-size pieces into a bowl
Add sage, onions
Moisten with chicken bullion
Add 3 c of popcorn kernels
And mix together

Next, set oven to 350 degrees and evacuate the kitchen immediately. Because when that corn starts a'popping, that turkey is gonna explode across the room like a Saturn missile, guaranteeing that next year you will eat Thanksgiving dinner anywhere but your house.

© Copyright 2000, Marie Coady