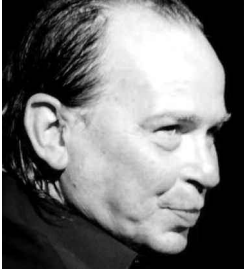


Investigation uncovers untidy Thansksgiving facts

Mike Hudson



It's Thanksgiving week, and here at the Niagara Falls Reporter we are thankful indeed. We're thankful about a lot of

things but one of the things we're most thankful about is the invention of investigative journalism, a technique employed here over the past 13 years to uncover all manner of misdemeanors, malfeasance and misconduct.

It's a funny thing. You can cast a routine look into what appears to be the most innocuous of topics sometimes, and before you've even barely scratched the surface, come up with the sort of controversial hullabaloo we specialize in here at your hometown newspaper.

Take the celebration of Thanksgiving Day, for instance.

Yeah, we all know the "official" version. Back in 1620 these Pilgrims fleeing religious persecution back in England came to the New World and almost starved to death. A bunch of Indians who would later regret it lent them a hand, showed them how to live off the land, and – sometime between September 21 and November 11 of 1621 – they all had a big three-day feast to celebrate the fact they didn't die.

So ever since then, we've all celebrated Thanksgiving in memory of the Pilgrims making it through that miserable first year, right?

No. In fact, the big party was completely forgotten about for more than 150 years, until 1789, when the Father of Our Country, George Washington, proclaimed a general day of Thanksgiving. He didn't even mention the Pilgrims, instead wanting to give thanks for our country's new Constitution and victory over the Brits in the Revolutionary War. In any event, he didn't even make it a holiday.

Another 70 years passed and our country was plunged into its' Civil War. A female do-gooder named Sarah Josepha Hale – best known as the author of "Mary Had A Little Lamb" – thought there should be a holiday for Thanksgiving and started writing articles about it in a magazine called Godey's Lady's Book. She finally got a meeting with the Great Emancipator, Abraham Lincoln, who was looking for some good PR to divert attention from the bloody conflict.

Lincoln declared the last Thursday

in November as a holiday, Thanksgiving, hoping that people would give thanks to him for having the day off work.

That lasted another 75 years, right up until the height of the Great Depression.

It was 1939. War had broken out in Europe, and the bread lines in America's cities seemed endless. Oakies fled the Dust Bowl and went to California to try and get in the pictures. John Steinbeck wrote about them.

You would think that the President of the United States would have enough on his plate without getting involved in when Thanksgiving ought rightfully to be celebrated but, when Franklin Delano Roosevelt saw fit to host a delegation of the nation's retailers at the White House, the seemingly unimportant matter went straight to the front burner.

Thanksgiving Day was to have fallen on November 30 that year, and the retailers complained they'd be left with only 24 shopping days until Christmas. Roosevelt, who liked a martini as much as the next man, relented, and declared that the Thanksgiving holiday would forever more be celebrated on the second to last Thursday in November, which happened to be November 23 that year.

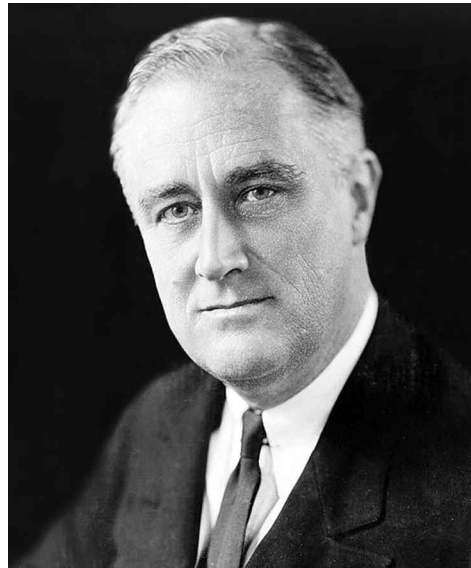
All hell broke loose. The Republican states that opposed the Roosevelt regime refused to declare the holiday, continuing to celebrate it on the last Thursday of the month, when Lincoln, a Republican, said it should be celebrated.

The Democratic states said the heck with Lincoln, Roosevelt was their man and his new Turkey Day deal was fine with them.

Individual businessmen picked one or the other day and families were torn asunder as some members got one day off and other members had to wait until the next week.

Tommy Taggart, then the mayor of Atlantic City, NJ, delivered a blistering speech, referring to the changed holiday as "Franksgiving," and, to make matters worse, the scheme didn't even work. Christmas spending was about the same as it had been the year before, the only difference being that shopping was evenly distributed throughout the season in the states that celebrated early while, in the states that kept the traditional date, businesses experienced a rush in the last week before Christmas.

Finally, on Dec. 26, 1941, the Roosevelt-friendly Congress made his earlier Thanksgiving holiday the law of



Did Franklin Roosevelt set date for Thanksgiving in USA to accommodate merchants?.

the land, all the better to present a unified front to the Japanese, who had bombed Pearl Harbor just three weeks earlier.

So there you have it, boys and girls. The dark underbelly of America's most homespun holiday has been revealed.

Be thankful, and have a safe and happy holiday.



Albany (right) and Niagara Falls (left) each in their customary poses.



Albany official shown managing Niagara Falls' affairs.



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