

THE NEW ENGLAND CHILD'S THANKSGIVING

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Saturday Evening Post, November 1912

Childhood celebrations of Thanksgivings past live on in the words and drawings of 19th century authors and artists. They recall the week-long preparations for the festive dinner, the anxiety of the school play, the high spirits of large family gatherings, the after-dinner romps, frolics, candy-pulls and dances.

The meaning of "family" had changed during the 19th century, evolving from a large extended clan including distant relatives and household help to the small nuclear family we recognize today. Domestic holidays helped define this new family.

By the beginning of the 20th century, childhood itself had become the object of nostalgia. The autobiographical writings of authors such as Charles Dudley Warner and Edward Everett Hale celebrated their own childhood, in recalling their youthful Thanksgivings. Writers of fiction, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe and Louisa May Alcott, created "old-fashioned" Thanksgivings centered around children and set in a rosy-colored past.

In actuality, New England childhood was diverse. Celebration of holidays depended on social status, economic means, and family dynamics. And the New England childhood was not confined to the states of the Northeast. As settlers moved west, the rituals of New England moved west as well. But whether lavish or meager, whether celebrated in Massachusetts or elsewhere, Thanksgiving in its 3 facets - learning, feasting, and playing - was an integral part of the lives of New England children.

LEARNING ABOUT THANKSGIVING



The story of the Pilgrims' First Thanksgiving is accurately recounted in *The Child at Home*, published by the American Tract Society in 1867. *Child at Home* was a newspaper designed to be shared by the entire family. The Victorians valued shared activities, including reading aloud.

Tableaux and textbooks

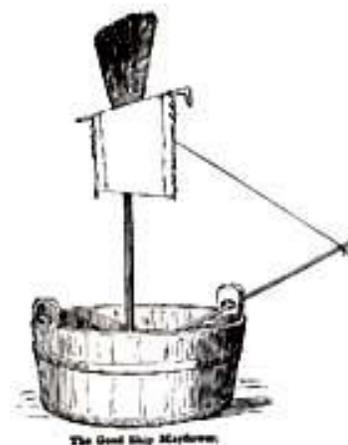
The Victorians were very fond of "home entertainments" when children (and often adults, as well!) would celebrate holidays by constructing stage settings, improvising costumes, and acting out historical events or scenes from stories. The Landing of the Pilgrims was suggested for a Thanksgiving celebration:

"Landing of the Pilgrims. Tableau 1. - The good ship Mayflower has just touched Plymouth Rock. Pilgrim Father stands upon the rock, and reaches down to help Pilgrim Mother to land.

The ship is a large wash-tub, which is placed in the center of the stage; its sail is a towel, fastened with pins to a stick, the stick being tied to a broom, as shown in illustration. It is held aloft by one of the children in the tub. Plymouth Rock is a table, occupying a position near the tub."

From: *The American Girls Handy Book*, by Lina & Adelia B. Beard. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887.

The home tableaux with a "washtub Mayflower"



By the end of the 19th century, home tableaux were evolving into school plays as teachers were provided with set pieces - recitations, essays, short dramas -

designed to integrate American holidays into the school curriculum.

"Miss May, in a pretty black lace dress, stood up and read the names of the pupils as they were to recite. First six little girls sang a song, Miss Davis playing the music for them, and then four boys had a recitation. Sunny Boy wished he had been one of the four; it wasn't half so hard to stand up there with three other boys and talk about Thanksgiving, as it was to have to face a roomful of people all by oneself. His turn came after the four boys had finished. He heard his name called and walked into the room and up on the platform and made a little bow. Then he looked at the audience. Now Sunny Boy had, in company with the other children, practiced reciting his piece on that very platform. But he had never looked into so many faces, and for the moment he forgot what he was to do. Then his mother's face seemed to stand out from the others, and she was smiling at him just as she smiled at home while listening to his recitation. Sunny Boy took a deep breath."

The school play



From:
Sunny Boy In School and Out,
by Ramy Allison White.
New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1921.

As the 20th century progressed, teaching about holidays - including Thanksgiving - became integrated into school textbooks.



Then they went home.
Jack and Jane said,
"Goodby! Goodby!"
Father and Mother said,
"Come again! Come soon!"

"We had a fine Thanksgiving,"
said Father.
Jack said,
"We had a good time.
I like Thanksgiving."
"I like Thanksgiving, too,"
said Jane.
"Bow wow," said Terry.
"Meow, meow," said Kitty.

Thanksgiving time
(Happy times with Jack & Jane)
by Esther Schenk.
Chicago: Lyons & Carnahan, 1932-1937.

Thanksgiving time (Happy times with Jack & Jane), a primary school reader of 1932, uses simple words and repetitive phrasing to tell of a family celebration of Thanksgiving, complete with the story of the Pilgrims and the First Thanksgiving.
Sample dialogue:
"We had a fine Thanksgiving," said Father.
Jack said, "We had a good time. I like Thanksgiving." "I like Thanksgiving, too," said Jane. "Bow wow," said Terry. "Meow, meow," said Kitty.

Crafts and play

Paper dolls had become popular (and affordable) in America by the mid 1800s. Paper dolls were manufactured by publishing companies such as McLoughlin Brothers, who specialized in children's books. Paper dolls were also on occasion included as a free bonus in magazines and Sunday newspapers.

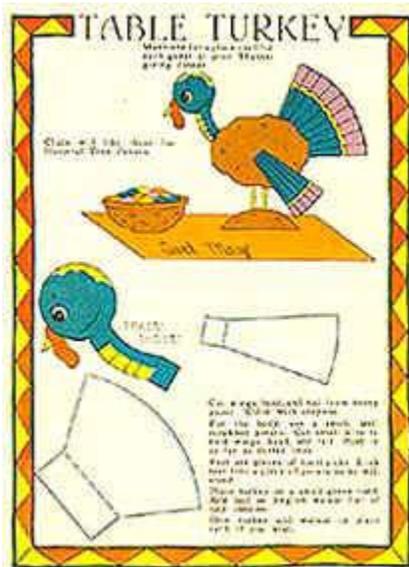


Paper doll page from the **Boston Globe**, November 24, 1895

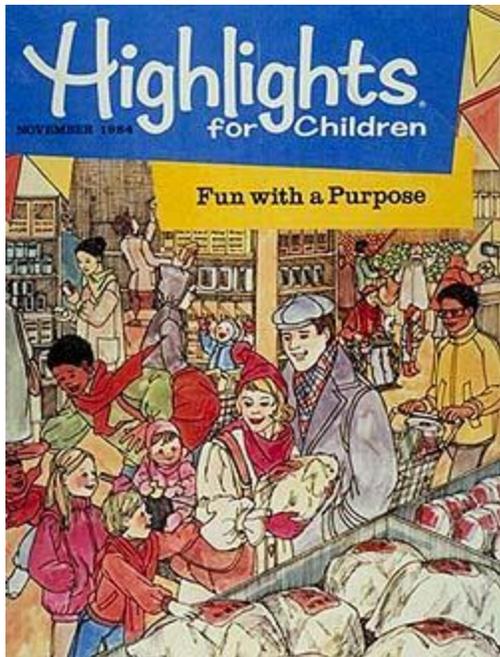


Paper doll page assembled - the Victorian family at Thanksgiving dinner!

Children's magazines, first published in the mid 1800s, continue to be popular today. These magazines have always contained seasonal activities and craft suggestions for their young readers.



From: **Children's Play Mate Magazine**, 1948.
DIRECTIONS: Cut wings, head, and tail from heavy paper. Color with crayons. For the body, use a small, well scrubbed potato. Cut small slits to hold wings, head, and tail. Push in as far as dotted lines. Feet are pieces of toothpicks. Stick feet into a piece of potato so he will stand. Place turkey on a small green card. Add half an English walnut full of tiny candies. Glue turkey and walnut to place card, if you wish.



Highlights For Children, 1984 "In this big picture find the scissors, cup, book, banana, butterfly, sea gull, paintbrush, sea horse, pencil, apple, fish and turkey."

THANKSGIVING: THE DINNER Preparation

"Thanksgiving would not have seemed to the children their own day if they had not been allowed to help in the preparation. .. First of all the apples had to be pared; and five little children, with knives in their hands and business in their faces, marched into the dining room to do it. The apples were in an immense basket on the dining-room table, and there were five plates for the five children to put their apple-parings on, and five dishes for the apples themselves to go into after they had been pared and cut in quarters."

From: *Swallow Stories, No. VIII: Thanksgiving*, by Sallie Chester.
New York: American Tract Society, 1873.



Normal Instructor & Primary Plans, November 1919

Anticipation

"The New England boy used to look forward to Thanksgiving as the great event of the year... He was apt to get stents set him, - so much corn to husk, for instance, before that day, so that he could have an extra play-spell; and in order to gain a day or two, he would work at his task with the rapidity of half a dozen boys..."



Saturday Evening Post, November 1908

For days and days before Thanksgiving the boy was kept at work evenings, pounding and paring and cutting up and mixing (not being allowed to taste much), until the world seemed to him to be made of fragrant spices, green fruit, raisins and pastry - a world that he was only yet allowed to enjoy through his nose. How filled the house was with the most delicious smells! The mince-pies that were made!"

From: *Being a Boy* by Charles Dudley
Warner.Boston: James. R. Osgood & Company,
1878.

Participation

Edward Everett Hale, at age 70, remembered his childhood Thanksgivings of the 1830s:

"There would be a side-table for the children at which the oldest cousin in a manner presided, with his very funny stories, with his very exciting lore about the new life on which he was entering, either in the first class at the Latin school or possibly after he had left the Latin School. Occasionally the revelry at the side-table became so loud that it had to be suppressed by a word from the elders."



"Thanksgiving Dinner," *Harpers Magazine* 1858

"Of those first Thanksgiving Days my memories are simply of undisguised delight. I wonder now that I did not die the day after the first of them from having eaten five times as much as I should have done. But there seems to be a good Providence which watches over boys and girls, as over idiots and drunken people. This is sure, that I have survived to tell the story."

From: *A New England Boyhood* by Edward E. Hale.

New York: Cassell Publishing Co., 1894

Satisfaction



The Saturday Evening Post, 1938

THANKSGIVING: AFTER THE FEAST! PLAYING



"The Frolic" from *Harper's Magazine* 1866

"With all the gravity of the New England character there mingles much of humor and an undercurrent of mirthfulness, which no descent from a Puritan ancestry can overcome. Latent, and escaping the notice of a superficial observer, there are times and seasons when it becomes suddenly demonstrative, and then the New Englanders, making pleasure a duty, enjoy themselves quite as freely and as thoroughly as those who value pleasure as the chief object of life."

From "Thanksgiving in New England,"
Ballou's Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion,
November 1857.

**Thanksgiving play could take several formats -
decide on your choice!**



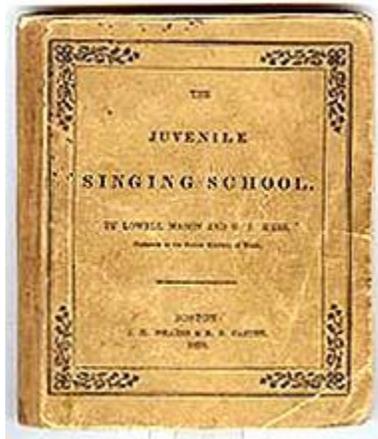
JUST MY LUCK! III.

AROUND THE HEARTH: Singing and story-telling

"It was now the fall of the year, in the month of November, and Winnie and Walter were looking forward with great delight to Thanksgiving. It was the plan this year, that their old grandfather and some of their uncles and aunts and cousins, should come and visit them, and spend Thanksgiving with them...

I shall not stop to tell you much about the day - how the little folks played together, and the old folks went to church - and how much they all enjoyed their nice Thanksgiving dinner. I shall leave all these things, because I wish to hurry along and come to the evening. It was agreed, in order to please the children, that when night was coming on, they should all gather around the bright open fire, in the large sitting-room, and tell stories ..."

From: **Winnie and Walter; or, story-telling at Thanksgiving**
 by Increase N. Tarbox. Boston: J.E. Tilton & Co., 1861.



"The thanksgiving table was covered with the usual fare: a turkey, chicken-pies, and roast beef, followed by abundance of pumpkin and squash pies, nuts, and apples; and for drink, good spring water.

After supper, several of the neighboring children called in to see Frank and Mary, and, after a game or two at blind-fold and hunt the slipper, the rest of the evening was delightfully spent in singing from the Juvenile Singing School, the Little Songster, and the Common School Songster."

From: "The Yankee Boy" in **The Moral Instructor**
 by Thomas H. Palmer. Boston: Wm. D. Ticknor, 1842.



"Roasting Chestnuts" from
Chatterbox Magazine c1880.

"They had a very pleasant time that evening, sitting by the blazing fire, and talking over their affairs, and cracking nuts, and popping some more corn."

From: **Mary and Ellen: or, The Best Thanksgiving.**
 Boston: James Munroe & Co., 1854.

COASTING & CANDY

"Thanksgiving day is a day appointed by the Governor for us to give thanks to God for the past season. It comes in Autumn just after the harvest which is the best time as we have then the remembrance of the goodness of God more fresh on our minds. It originated among our forefathers but no doubt it was meant by them that we should spend it in a very different manner from what we do. I will endeavour to show how it is generally spent nowadays. The

families nearest connected take turns in having each other to thanksgiving as it is called. In the forenoon there is a meeting at the various churches in town and then they go home not to continue in giving thanks to God but to...



"Coasting Out of Doors" from *Ballou's Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion*, November 1857.

"What is termed a 'side-hill,' meaning 'hill-side' is crowded with joyous youngsters gliding down over the smooth surface with the velocity of lightning"

feast on roast turkey, plum pudding and a variety of other good things! In the afternoon the boys generally kick football or skate, and in the evening commonly have what is called a "candy folic," that is making molasses candy."

**James W. Spooner of
Plymouth,
aged 13, 1844**

Molasses-Candy

2 cups brown sugar
1/2 cup of New Orleans molasses
2/3 cup of vinegar & water mixed
A piece of butter half the size of an egg.

When the candy hardens in cold water, pour into shallow buttered tins, and as soon as it is cool enough to handle, pull it until it is of a straw-color. Splendid!

From *The American Girls Handy Book*, 1887.

FAMILY GAMES

"Before long everyone was trying to escape from grandpa who was as eager for a game of Blind Man's Buff as anybody, and who at last caught Becky, who in turn caught Howard Colby because he didn't try to get out of her way.



"Blind Man's Buff" from *Harper's Magazine* 1857

This ended that game, but everybody was so warmed up to the fun that when it was proposed to carry on a game of Hide and Seek out of doors all agreed, and Edna was so convulsed with laughter to see her dignified, great-uncle Wilbur crouching behind a wood-pile and peeping fearfully over the top that she forgot to hide herself properly and was discovered by Ben in a moment."

From: *A Dear Little Girl's Thanksgiving Holidays*,
by Amy E. Blanchard. Racine, Wisc.: Whitman Publishing Co., c.1910.

BLIND MAN'S BUFF

One of the company is blindfolded and runs round to catch the others, who all try to keep out of his grasp, at the same time that they go as near him as they can.

If he catches one and cannot tell who it is, he must let her go and try again.

One who is fairly caught and identified, must take the blind man's place.



JUST MY LUCK! III.

From: *Our Young Folks* magazine, 1865.

OTHER VICTORIAN PARLOR GAMES

"...she had never spent a merrier, happier evening. Her own frank, pleasant manner had soon set her at ease with her young cousins, and she found herself entering into the spirit of "Puss in the corner," "Proverbs," "Guess my name," and "Cross Purposes,"

with quite as lively a sense of enjoyment."

From: "Rosa's Thanksgiving at Brookhaven" by S. Annie Frost.
In **Godey's Lady's Book**, 1868.

PUSS IN THE CORNER

A player is stationed in each corner of a room or rooms; a lone player stands in the center, this is "Puss." At the words "Puss in the corner!" all the players run to change corners. At the same time, the "Puss" in the middle runs to take possession of a corner before any of the others can reach it. If "Puss" succeeds in getting to the corner first, the one who is left out is obliged to become "Puss."

PROVERBS

One of the players is sent out of the room and the others decide upon a well-known proverb which the absent player must, by asking questions, guess on his return. The answers to the questions must each contain one word of the proverb, in order as the words appear in the proverb.

For example, suppose the players decide on the proverb "Out of sight, out of mind." The first answer must contain the word "out." The second answer must contain the word "of." The third answer must contain the word "sight," etc.

If the questioner cannot discover the proverb, he must pay a forfeit.

Examples of forfeits: imitate a donkey, impersonate a tuba player, act a living statue, or - for the gentlemen - kiss the lady you love best (usually circumvented by kissing every lady in the room!).

DANCING

"And now, the dinner being cleared away, we youngsters, already excited to a tumult of laughter, tumbled into the best room, under the supervision of Uncle Bill, to relieve ourselves with a game of "blind-man's-bluff," while the elderly women washed up the dishes ... In the evening the house was all open and lighted with the best of tallow candles, which Aunt Lois herself had made with especial care for this illumination. It was understood that we were to have a dance."

From: **Oldtown Folks**, by Harriet Beecher Stowe.
Boston: Fields, Osgood & Co., 1869.



"The Thanksgiving Dance" from Harper's Magazine 1858

" 'Blind-man's buff,' 'Hunt the slipper,' 'Come, Philander,' and other lively games soon set every one bubbling over with jollity, and when Eph struck up 'Money Musk' on his fiddle, old and young fell into their places for a dance. All down the long kitchen they stood, Mr. And Mrs. Bassett at the top, the twins at the bottom, and then away they went, heeling and toeing, cutting pigeon wings, and taking their steps in a way that would convulse modern children with their new-fangled romps called dancing."

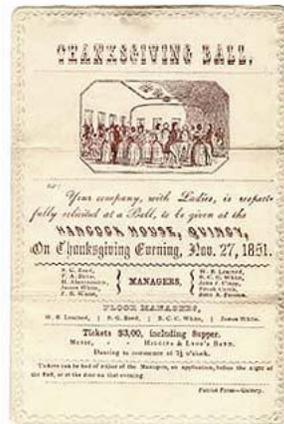
From: "Old-Fashioned Thanksgiving" by Louisa May Alcott
 St. Nicholas Magazine, November 1881.

Not all dances were in the home - many, beginning as early as the 1840s, were held in halls and ballrooms. Here are examples of Thanksgiving Ball invitations and dance cards for the young (and young at heart)!

Thanksgiving Ball invitations and dance cards



THANKSGIVING BALL
*Come let us in union meet,
 And spend Thanksgiving
 with pleasure sweet.*
 The Company of Mr. _____ and Lady is respectfully solicited at Capt. Benj. Hartson's Hall, in Columbia, on the 25th of this present month, at 4 o'clock, P.M....
 Columbia, November 13, 1841



THANKSGIVING BALL
 Sir: Your company, with Ladies, is respectfully solicited at a Ball, to be given at the HANCOCK HOUSE, QUINCY, on Thanksgiving Evening, Nov. 27, 1851... Tickets \$3,00, including supper. Music, -- Higgins & Lyon's Band. Dancing to commence at 7 1/2 o'clock.



ANNUAL Thanksgiving Ball
 at the Union House, Cuttingsville, Vermont, D.K. Butterfield, Proprietor, November 29th, 1888. Your company with Ladies Solicited.
 MUSIC Cornet Band Orchestra
 Tickets, \$2.00
 The card opens. On the left is the Order of Dances (26 with an intermission at the 12th). On the right are numbered lines for "Engagements" (dance partners).



The card opens to an insert page reading:
 ANNUAL Thanksgiving Ball
 at the Union House, Cuttingsville, Vermont,
 November 30th, 1893.
 Music: Rutland City Band Orchestra.
 Your company with Ladies Solicited.
 D.K. Butterfield, Proprietor. Tickets, \$2.00

On the interior left is the Order of Dances
 (24 with an intermission at the 12th). On the interior right
 are numbered lines for "Engagements" (dance
 partners).



The Family Dog presents
 Turkey Trot...

Announcing the Family Dogs winter dance-concert
 season, Thursday thru Saturday nights, with a gala
 giant Turkey Strut & Trot, Thurs. Nov 23 Thanksgiving
 at the Avalon Ballroom, San Francisco,
 featuring Big Brother & the Holding Co., Mt.
 Rushmore & Surprises...