

# Myths about the Mayflower

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The Mayflower was a ship that brought a group of English settlers to North America. In later years, those settlers became known as the Pilgrims. The Pilgrims left England in the fall of 1620, and were attempting to land near the mouth of the Hudson River. Instead, they ended up on the shore of Cape Cod Bay, where they established a colony in 1621. The new colony, which they named Plymouth, was the first permanent European settlement in New England.

The story of the Pilgrims and their thanksgiving feast has since become one of the best-known in American history. However, you may not know it as well as you think. Discover the facts behind some common Thanksgiving myths.

**MYTH: The first Thanksgiving was in 1621 and the Pilgrims celebrated it every year thereafter.**

**FACT:** The first feast was not repeated, so it was not the beginning of a yearly holiday. In fact, the colonists did not even call the day Thanksgiving. To them, a thanksgiving was a religious holiday in which they would go to church and thank God for a particular event, such as the winning of a battle. During the 1621 feast the Pilgrims and Wampanoag Indians danced, sang songs and played games. If it had been a religious holiday, such recreational activities would not have been allowed. The feast was a nonreligious celebration, and would never have been considered a thanksgiving in the Pilgrims' minds.

**MYTH: The original Thanksgiving feast took place on the fourth Thursday of November.**

**FACT:** The original feast in 1621 occurred sometime between September 21 and November 11. Unlike our modern holiday, it was three days long. The event was based on English harvest festivals, which traditionally occurred around the 29th of September. Such festivals were held to celebrate the annual harvesting of crops.

In 1623, the colonists suffered through a long period of drought. A day of fasting and prayer was declared as a way of petitioning God for rain. The day was then changed to one of thanksgiving because the rain came during the prayers.

In the following years it gradually became the custom in New England to celebrate thanksgiving every year after the harvest.

During the American Revolution a yearly day of national thanksgiving was suggested by the Continental Congress. In 1817, New York State adopted Thanksgiving Day as an annual custom. By the middle of the 19th century many other states had done the same. In 1863, President Abraham Lincoln made the last Thursday in November a national day of

thanksgiving. He most likely picked that day to honor the November 21, 1620, anchoring of the Mayflower at Cape Cod.

Because November sometimes has five Thursdays, and sometimes four, President Franklin D. Roosevelt decided to fix Thanksgiving's date even more firmly. In 1939, he set the date for Thanksgiving to the fourth Thursday of every November. Congress approved the switch in 1941.

**MYTH: The Pilgrims wore only black and white clothing. They had buckles on their hats, garments and shoes.**

FACT: Buckles did not come into fashion until later in the 17th century. As for black and white clothes, they were commonly worn only on Sunday and on formal occasions. Women typically dressed in red, green, brown, blue, violet and gray. Men wore clothing in white, tan, black, green and brown.

**MYTH: The Mayflower was headed for Virginia, but due to a navigational mistake it ended up in Cape Cod, Massachusetts.**

FACT: The Pilgrims were indeed planning to settle in Virginia. However, what they called Virginia was not at all the same thing as the modern-day state of Virginia. Instead, the name referred to the entire Eastern Seaboard of what is now the United States. The Pilgrims had intended to go to the Hudson River region of present-day New York State, which would then have been considered "Northern Virginia." However, rough seas prevented them from reaching their destination.

The Pilgrims first landed on Cape Cod, at what is now Provincetown. A few weeks later they moved to the shore of Cape Cod Bay. They settled beside a sheltering harbor and established the colony of Plymouth. The harbor became known as Plymouth Harbor.

## Quiz

- 1 Based on information in the article, which of the following statements is TRUE?
- (A) The Pilgrims originally intended to land the Mayflower near Cape Cod Bay.
  - (B) The first Thanksgiving involved singing, dancing and playing games.
  - (C) The Pilgrims celebrated the first Thanksgiving toward the end of November.
  - (D) The first Thanksgiving was a religious holiday for Wampanoag Indians.
- 2 Select the paragraph from the section "MYTH: The original Thanksgiving feast took place on the fourth Thursday of November" that explains when Thanksgiving is celebrated today.
- 3 Read the selection from the introduction [paragraphs 1-2].

*The story of the Pilgrims and their thanksgiving feast has since become one of the best-known in American history. However, you may not know it as well as you think.*

How does this selection contribute to the development of the article's MAIN idea?

- (A) It argues that many people do not know the stories connected to Thanksgiving.
  - (B) It implies that there are unsolved mysteries about the origins of Thanksgiving.
  - (C) It suggests that people disagree about what happened on the first Thanksgiving.
  - (D) It introduces the idea that there are misconceptions about Thanksgiving.
- 4 What is the connection between the introduction [paragraphs 1-2] and the final section, "MYTH: The Mayflower was headed for Virginia, but due to a navigational mistake it ended up in Cape Cod, Massachusetts"?
- (A) The introduction provides facts about the Mayflower's voyage across the Atlantic; the final section summarizes the first Thanksgiving feast.
  - (B) The introduction explains that there are many myths about the Pilgrims and Thanksgiving; the final section gives an example of a Thanksgiving myth.
  - (C) The introduction describes the Pilgrims' journey to America; the final section explains why the Pilgrims landed in a different location than originally planned.
  - (D) The introduction informs readers that the true Thanksgiving story is different than many believe; the final section explains how myths about Pilgrims developed.