



# Secret history of Thanksgiving

By Erika Enigk

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**Y**ou've probably heard the story about the Pilgrim feast in 1621. And you might have heard that George Washington declared a Thanksgiving holiday on Nov. 26, 1789, but just for that year. So where did Thanksgiving come from as the event we all know today? You might be surprised at the answer.

## Sarah had a little idea

In 1846, a magazine writer and editor named Sarah Hale had an idea. She was already very successful, having written many books and poems, including "Mary Had a Little Lamb." Her main job, though, was running a magazine called Godey's Lady's Book. She loved the idea of turning Thanksgiving into a national holiday and began putting recipes in her magazine for the dishes we all know of today as Thanksgiving food — turkey, stuffing and pumpkin pie. She put editorials in her magazine about how the country should have an annual holiday. She wrote letters to the governors of all the states and to President Abraham Lincoln. Finally, in 1863, Lincoln declared Thanksgiving a national holiday.

## Thanksgiving and the Civil War

The United States was going through some difficult times during the last part of Sarah Hale's Thanksgiving campaign. In 1861, the Civil War had begun, and when Lincoln declared an official Thanksgiving celebration it was to say thank you to Union soldiers for their victory at Gettysburg. From then until



1939, Thanksgiving was a national holiday held on the fourth Thursday of November each year. President Franklin Roosevelt tried for a few years to move it to the third Thursday to give people more time between the holidays to do Christmas shopping, but in 1941, he finally agreed to put Thanksgiving on the fourth Thursday, and that's where it's stayed.

## Sarah Hale's legacy

If you've ever visited Mount Vernon, George Washington's home, you've benefited from another one of Sarah Hale's accomplishments. She worked to preserve it as a symbol of patriotism. She also raised money to build the monument commemorating the Battle of Bunker Hill in the Revolutionary War. That monument is in Massachusetts.



**Sarah Hale.**  
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## Activity: Write a poem like Sarah

Take Sarah Hale's most famous poem and make it your own by filling in the spaces according to the directions.

[Your name] had a little [kind of animal].  
Its [thing] was [color] as [thing].  
And everywhere that [your name] went  
The [same kind of animal] was sure to go.  
It followed [him/her] to [place] one day  
That was against the rule.  
It made the children laugh and play  
To see a [same kind of animal] at [same place].



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## WORD FIND

Mary  
Lamb  
Food  
Turkey  
Stuffing

Holiday  
Sarah  
Hale  
Pilgrim  
Lincoln

G	I	O	J	F	W	R	J	L	Y
F	O	G	M	J	X	P	D	I	E
X	V	H	Q	Z	M	D	Z	N	K
G	D	H	Y	R	C	O	B	C	R
S	Y	P	Q	E	H	O	O	O	U
T	A	I	J	I	B	F	X	L	T
U	D	L	S	H	A	L	E	N	L
F	I	G	A	J	Z	V	G	A	B
F	L	R	R	Y	R	A	M	E	A
I	O	I	A	Q	L	B	Y	J	S
N	H	M	H	S	G	L	Z	K	A
G	D	S	Y	N	N	Z	Z	U	M

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