

Name _____ Date _____ Period _____

Complete the graphic organizer below with the legends and realities of Plymouth.

<i>LEGEND</i>	<i>REALITY</i>

Things I didn't know about Thanksgiving

Plimoth Plantation, Massachusetts

Exploring the legends and realities of Thanksgiving

It's a familiar image at this time of year: somberly dressed Pilgrims gathered around a long table laden with turkey, cranberries, and other fruits of their labors. There are also a few Indians whom the Pilgrims have invited to join in the feast. After thanking God for their blessings, they all take part in the first Thanksgiving.

Familiar, but false, according to a Plimoth Plantation exhibit, "Thanksgiving: Memory, Myth, and Meaning," that reinterprets the famous 1621 harvest.

Current views of the holiday, according to this exhibit, are largely a romantic fiction manufactured by 19th century writers, artists, and politicians. They embellished the Thanksgiving story, creating a lopsided view that misrepresents the colonists' behavior and ignores the contributions of Native Americans.

In fact, says John Kemp, the plantation's associate director of Colonial interpretation, "The 1620s' colonists would be quite astounded" by contemporary Thanksgiving customs. "They'd see it as outrageous sin."

The nine-room exhibit uses original documents, paintings, drawings, cartoons, and a video of a live reenactment of the harvest festival to give a more accurate picture of what actually occurred:

The colonists who founded Plimoth Plantation in December 1620 never called themselves "Pilgrims." They were Separatists, right-wing Protestants who had broken from the Anglican Church. In Plimoth, they stole corn and other supplies from the local Wampanoag tribe, who saw them as disrespectful thieves. Still, the Native

Americans showed the English how to plant crops and, in March 1621, signed a mutual aid treaty in which each side agreed to defend the other if attacked.

In the fall of 1621, after their first harvest in the New World, the colonists celebrated by marching and firing their muskets. About 90 Wampanoag men, led by chief Massasoit, heard the noise and came to investigate, then joined in the festivities, which lasted at least three days.

The English – about 24 men, plus 28 women and children – were heavily outnumbered by the Natives. The tone of the gathering remains unclear. "It was a complicated event once Massasoit arrived," says Liz Lodge, director of museum programs. "It was a celebration, but there was wariness on both sides, and having so many Indians in their town might have been disconcerting to the colonists."

The only eyewitness account of the feast – in a letter colonist Edward Winslow wrote to an English friend on December 11, 1621 – says that the food included venison and some sort of fowl. Kathleen Curtin, the plantation's culinary historian, says it probably also featured hard corn that was dried, ground, and boiled with water to make a porridge-like dish, and perhaps also stewed pumpkin or squash.

Participants probably entertained themselves by singing, dancing, and playing ball and other games. Far from being somberly dressed, the colonists probably wore colorful doublets and waistcoats in yellow, red, blue, or purple.

The gathering most likely occurred in late September or early October. It wasn't dubbed

"the first Thanksgiving" until 1841, in a footnote to historian Alexander Young's *Chronicles of the Pilgrim Fathers*. It certainly wasn't the first Thanksgiving for the Wampanoag, who already celebrated Green Corn Thanksgiving and other ceremonies expressing gratitude for nature's gifts.

The colonists also had "Thanksgiving" days – holy days involving long hours of church worship – but this wasn't one of them. This was their first harvest feast.

The Plantation first declared a true Thanksgiving in 1623 to give thanks to God at the end of a severe drought, and a nationwide Thanksgiving was declared in 1777 to celebrate revolutionary victories at the battle of Saratoga. But Thanksgiving didn't become an annual national holiday until 1863, by proclamation of Abraham Lincoln. "He was hounded into it by Sarah Josepha Hale," editor of *Godey's Lady's Book*, a popular women's magazine, according to Kathleen Curtin. "To her, it represented a simpler time, when hearth and home were more important than technology and change."

The creators of the exhibit hope it will help people to become conscious of whose voice they're hearing when they read about Thanksgiving or other historical events. "To have a clear and accurate view," says Liz Lodge, "you need to consider many sources."

Original article by Judith Gaine