

Grand Commandery Knights Templar of Virginia



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Knightly Greetings Sir Knights!

This month I want to provide you with a few thoughts on Thanksgiving and its meaning to us as Sir Knights.

Let's go back to Thursday, November 24, 1621. The colonists from England and the Native American Wampanoag people shared an autumn harvest feast that we acknowledge as one of the first Thanksgiving celebrations in the colonies. This tradition was individually celebrated by the various colonies and states. It wasn't until 1863 in the midst of the "War of the Rebellion" as the official U. S. war records refers to it, others may refer to it as the "Civil War," "War between the States," or "War of Northern Aggression," that President Abraham Lincoln proclaimed a national Thanksgiving Day to be held each November. Needless to say, there was, and still remains today, much controversy over this holiday and its meaning.

But there is more to the story. Who was Sarah Josepha Hale? Born Sarah Josepha Buell on October 24, 1788, in Newport, New Hampshire. From a tender age, she was curious, smart, and eager to learn. As a young girl, Sarah was taught by her mother about history and literature. Later, her brother Horatio taught her everything that he was learning as a student at Dartmouth College.

When Sarah was growing up, women were not accepted as teachers. However, this didn't stop Sarah from founding a private school when she was 18 years old. She taught until she met David Hale. They married in 1813. David encouraged Sarah to write short stories and articles. Many of these were published in local newspapers. Suddenly, in 1822, David died, and Sarah Hale was left to care for their five children. To make ends meet, she first operated a women's hat shop and later resumed teaching and writing. Soon, she published her first book of poems, including one that became the famous nursery rhyme "Mary Had a Little Lamb." In 1827, she published her first novel.

Throughout her time as an editor, Hale had written hundreds of letters to governors, ministers, newspaper editors, and every U.S. president with one request: that the last Thursday in November be set aside to "offer to God our tribute of joy and gratitude for the blessings of the year."

Native American harvest festivals had taken place for centuries in North America, and there had long been colonists' services to give thanks, but there had never been a Thanksgiving holiday.

In 1863, with the country torn by the Civil War, Hale's campaign finally got people's attention. That September, she put her thanksgiving message into an editorial and wrote to President Abraham Lincoln, urging him to make Thanksgiving Day a fixed national festival.

Lincoln liked Hale's idea. On October 3, 1863, he issued a proclamation declaring the last Thursday of November to be National Thanksgiving Day. He ordered all government offices in Washington closed on that day.

Hale enjoyed many Thanksgiving celebrations after that. She died on April 30, 1879, at the age of 90.

In 1939, President Franklin Roosevelt was pressured by store owners to move Thanksgiving Day to the third Thursday in November. They wanted more shopping days between Thanksgiving and Christmas. He did it, but millions of Americans continued to celebrate Thanksgiving Day on the last Thursday of November. In 1940, FDR realized his mistake. In the December 1941, he assigned the holiday to the fourth Thursday in November.

And as Paul Harvey would say, "and now, you know the rest of the story."

More than four-hundred years have passed since 1621 and each year we continue to celebrate this autumn feast called Thanksgiving. As Knights Templar we should treat every day as Thanksgiving Day. There are so many aspects of our lives we are grateful for and far too often we tend to take them and people for granted. I am thankful for our Lord, Jesus Christ, who was sent to die on a cross for my sins and give me the path to salvation. I am thankful for my country, The United States of America, for the religious freedoms we enjoy, paid for by our brave men and women of our military and our first responder communities every day. I am thankful for my wife and family, that love and support me unconditionally. I am thankful for our gentle craft that provide me a constant reminder of the way I should conduct myself in thought, actions, and words. I am thankful for my health, my profession, my brothers and sisters in my masonic family. I am thankful for the Valiant and Magnanimous Order; The Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of Virginia and the many Sir Knights that pray daily for me and for our continued spiritual growth in our communities.

This Thanksgiving I ask that you take time to contemplate all of those blessings you experience every day. Love your God, your family, your community, and your country. Thank those that support you in your masonic journey. I look forward to spending time with you as I travel throughout Virginia. Take good care and May God richly bless each of you.

Courteously,



S. K. Dennis M. Haas, KCT
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