

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Thanksgiving 1879

The second most recognized holiday in America is Thanksgiving, superseded only by Christmas. A 2016 Harris Poll[®] found the vast majority (96%) of the U.S. population celebrates the day in some form or fashion, many with family and friends. For most, the highlight of the holiday is a tasty meal that includes the traditional turkey and ham accompanied by delicious sides and sweets.

Beyond scrumptious eats, Thanksgiving was originally intended to be a special day set aside to give thanks to God for His manifold blessings. Unfortunately, the primary purpose of the day has faded considerably over time due to growing secularism and commercialism.

First celebrated by the Pilgrims in 1621, more than two centuries passed before Thanksgiving Day was officially placed on the nation's calendar. At the height of the Civil War in 1863, U.S. President Abraham Lincoln proclaimed that Thanksgiving would be recognized annually in November.

The presidential proclamation, coupled with historical significance, should have more than sufficiently rallied universal acceptance and enthusiasm for a national Thanksgiving Day. But a short decade and a half later, some towns and communities were not celebrating this special day.

Available reports of news and happenings for Bucklesberry, La Grange and greater Lenoir County in 1879 indicated no organized preparation or public acknowledgment of Thanksgiving Day that year. In his commentary one week earlier, local newspaper editor James W. Harper admonished the community for its apathy:

1879, November 20: "Next Thursday the 27th is set apart by our President and Governor as a day for returning thanks to the Ruler of the Universe for the abundant blessings enjoyed by the people during the past year."

"Will the people of this section observe the day? We suppose not. They paid but little attention to it last fall and it is to be presumed that they will do likewise now. In fact, we don't suppose the people, judging by their actions, think the Lord has much to do with their prosperity or blessings. They are quick enough to acknowledge His omnipotence in adversity—during pestilence or famine—but they take credit to themselves for their good crops, for high prices, for health and intelligence."

"With such views on the question the people are right in paying no attention on National days of Thanksgiving. Cant and hypocrisy are despicable, and one who has no belief in the superintendence of God over the affairs of men, renders himself contemptible in pretending to offer thanks for something he doesn't believe he ever received."

"But if the people do believe that the God Who notes the fall of a sparrow, and numbers the very hairs of ones head, cares also for the material prosperity and mental progress of His choicest workmanship on earth, then in common decency they might cheerfully lay aside, for one day in the year, all secular pursuits and assemble together to render a united thanksgiving for unnumbered favors." (*Kinston Journal*)

More on the Thanksgiving of 1879 will be shared in the next Bucklesberry article.