

# THANKSGIVINGS PAST

By Dennis Wilson

This year, for the first time all the major retailers will keep their stores open all day on Thanksgiving. For many it is outrageous to try to draw shoppers away from this quintessential family holiday; a day steeped in our heritage as pilgrims and pioneers; a day when families draw together to celebrate the ties that bind, and the overarching providence of God. Certainly the good old days were different, weren't they? Maybe not.

Today many of us celebrate Thanksgiving (after a great meal) by sitting around the television watching football games. Those of us who hunt may leave the table and go to the woods and fields. A hundred years ago the themes were similar, with the exception that on those Thanksgiving mornings many went to church (which seems appropriate for a holiday with that name).

It may come as a surprise to some to find that high school football games were played on Thanksgiving. In 1908 Lancaster looked forward to a rematch with the Dubuque High School team. They had fought to a 0-0 tie weeks before and Dubuque wanted a rematch the Saturday before Thanksgiving to warm up for their big Thanksgiving day game with Des Moines. The game never happened because the Lancaster men missed the train. In 1926 Lancaster's fans looked forward to the big Thanksgiving day game with Monroe, which would determine the Southwestern Wisconsin Conference championship. On the afternoon of Thanksgiving Day in 1927 The Lancaster fans flocked to Fennimore to watch the gridders defeat Fennimore 13 – 0.

Commercial interests were concerned with Thanksgiving in 1939 just as they are now. Before 1941, the date for Thanksgiving was set by presidential proclamation. That proclamation invariably declared the last Thursday of November as the holiday. In 1939, the last Thursday fell on November 30th. Large retailers approached President Roosevelt requesting that he proclaim November 23, 1939 the holiday, so that the shoppers would have an extra week after Thanksgiving to shop. They persuaded Roosevelt that this would help to stimulate the economy. Since Thanksgiving of 1938 had fallen on the 24th of November, he saw no harm in making it the 23rd for 1939. When he proclaimed that Thanksgiving Day would be on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November, he sparked a firestorm of criticism.

Some Governors, including Wisconsin's Republican Governor Julius P. Heil, declared Thanksgiving would be the 30th. Helmar Lewis, mayor of Boscobel felt a declaration was needed from him as well. Boscobel, he said would celebrate on the 30th. Confusion reigned. Homemakers sent Western Union telegrams to the president asking when the turkey should be served. New York University wrote the President pointing out that they had a game on the 30th with Fordham in Yankee Stadium. Now that would be just another workday, and low attendance would make it a financial disaster for them and many other College football teams.



A man in West Virginia wrote the President asking him for further proclamations to, among other things "have Sunday changed to Wednesday, have it strictly against the will of God to work on Tuesday," and "have Thursday to be pay day with time and one-half for overtime."

The Attorney General of Wisconsin was asked for an opinion. Would State employees get the day off on the 23rd or the 30th if the President declared for the 23rd? He decided they would get both days off! "When the President of the United States proclaims the 23rd of November as a day of public thanksgiving" he said "there will be two thanksgiving holidays in the State of Wisconsin for this year." Since then, 1939 has been known as the year with two Thanksgivings. It must have been tough for those who prepared the turkeys and pies.

← Governor Julius P. Heil. The New York Times reported that Heil was known for clowning and silly antics.

Happy Thanksgiving everyone! May God bless you with real mincemeat, moist turkey, palatable stuffing, and plenty of pumpkin pie.



A HIGH SCHOOL TEAM PRACTICING IN 1902 – NO HELMETS, NO PADS, PLENTY OF PILING ON.



A HIGH SCHOOL TEAM OF 1908

← FOOTBALLS 1894-2013



THROWING A FOOTBALL 1908→