

## Untold Histories

Episode Title: The truth behind the traditions: Thanksgiving Unveiled

[Opening Music]

Intro:

Hello, history enthusiasts, and welcome to 'Untold Histories.' I'm Morgan Gurley, your guide on this journey through the truth behind Thanksgiving and the roots of its cherished traditions. Today, as we prepare for another feast this coming week, we'll peel back the layers of history to reveal the real story behind this beloved holiday.

### Part 1: How it happened

Our story begins in the early 17th century, in Plymouth, Massachusetts. Contrary to the popular narrative of a harmonious feast between Pilgrims and Native Americans, the reality is a bit more complex. The Wampanoag people had their own reasons for joining the Pilgrims, and the feast was more than just a celebration of gratitude. The dinner as we have all been told was meant to be a celebration of gratitude between the two groups, but this isn't quite the truth. Join me as we uncover the nuanced dynamics between the Pilgrims and the Wampanoag and how Thanksgiving became what it is today.

In 1621, Pilgrims did hold a three-day feast, which was attended by members of the Wampanoag tribe. However, typically, when these settlers had what they referred to as "thanksgiving" observances, they actually fasted rather than feasted. Historians believe that after the fasting had ended, the feast between the two groups began. But was this due to gratitude and rejoicing in the new world, or did the Wampanoag have a different reason? The leader of the Wampanoag Tribe had declared an alliance with the settlers, and members of the tribe were showing up to honor a mutual defense pact. This was only after they'd heard the Pilgrims shooting their guns in celebration and thought it was best to avoid combat. After some talk, they decided to spend three days together and join in a

feast—but this type of coming together did not become a warm, fuzzy tradition as you may have been taught in school.

## Part 2: The First Food

As the pilgrims and Native Americans set the table for their historical feast, it's important to talk about the first-ever Thanksgiving menu. The first Thanksgiving was far from the standardized turkey-centered affair we know today. Picture a table adorned with an array of dishes – venison, seafood, corn, and wildfowl like goose and duck. The feast was a melting pot of flavors, a true reflection of the diverse harvest shared between the Pilgrims and the native American tribe the Wampanoag. Colonist Edward Winslow, author of *Mourt's Relation: A Journal of the Pilgrims at Plymouth* wrote his first-hand account of the first Thanksgiving which did not include any explicit mention of turkey.

## Part 3: Thanksgiving?

From then on, Pilgrims technically did celebrate "thanksgivings" in their traditional way of fasting and praying, but many times this would happen after massacres of Native people, including in 1637 when Massachusetts Colony Governor John Winthrop declared a day of thanksgiving after volunteers murdered 700 Pequot people. This incident is also often cited as the first official mention of a "Thanksgiving" ceremony, and is another commonly cited origin story for the Thanksgiving we know today.

## Part 4: Modern Thanksgiving

After these meetings between the Native Americans and the pilgrims, Thanksgiving went dormant for many years. It wasn't until 1863 after the resurfacing of Winslow's accounts that Thanksgiving became an observed holiday annually. This is where Thanksgiving began its transformation from a regional celebration to a nationally recognized holiday. Sarah Josepha Hale, was an influential writer and editor, who campaigned for Thanksgiving to become a unifying national tradition. Thanks to her efforts, Abraham Lincoln proclaimed Thanksgiving a national holiday in 1863. But how did

this proclamation shape the way we celebrate today? After this declaration, turkey began to land on plates across America due to its uselessness for anything but meat. Americans found chickens and cows to useful to slaughter and began the tradition of the Thanksgiving turkey.

Closing:

And there you have it, the truth behind Thanksgiving and the origins of its cherished traditions. As you gather around the table this year, remember the complex history that has shaped this holiday into what it is today. This is Morgan Gurley, signing off from 'Untold Histories,' wishing you a Thanksgiving filled not only with delicious food but with a deeper appreciation for the rich tapestry of traditions that bind us across time. Until next time, happy uncovering!

[Closing Music]