

In What Year Was Thanksgiving Celebrated On The Third Thursday Of November And Not The Fourth?.

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Thanksgiving is one of the most cherished holidays in the United States, serving as a time for families and friends to gather, give thanks, and celebrate the harvest season. While the date of Thanksgiving has generally been fixed on the fourth Thursday of November since 1941, there was a notable period when the holiday was celebrated on the third Thursday. Understanding the history behind this shift provides insight into how and why the date of Thanksgiving has evolved over time.

The Origins of Thanksgiving and Its Date

Early History and Proclamations

The origins of Thanksgiving in America date back to the early 17th century, with the Plymouth Colony's harvest feast in 1621 often regarded as one of the first Thanksgiving celebrations. However, it wasn't until centuries later that the holiday was officially recognized and its date standardized.

In the 19th century, various states and communities celebrated Thanksgiving on different days, often aligned with local harvest times or religious observances. It was President Abraham Lincoln who, during the Civil War, issued a proclamation in 1863, declaring a national day of Thanksgiving to be observed annually on the final Thursday of November.

The Role of Sarah Josepha Hale

Sarah Josepha Hale, a prominent writer and editor, campaigned tirelessly throughout the 19th century for a unified, national Thanksgiving holiday. Her efforts culminated in Lincoln's 1863 proclamation, which set the date as the final Thursday in November. This decision aimed to promote unity during the Civil War and establish a consistent national tradition.

The Shift to the Fourth Thursday of November

The 1939 and 1940 Controversy

During the Great Depression, economic hardships prompted the federal government to consider moving Thanksgiving earlier in the month to extend the holiday shopping season and stimulate the economy. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, influenced by this economic strategy, issued a proclamation in 1939 setting Thanksgiving on the second or third Thursday of November, depending on the year.

In 1939, Roosevelt moved Thanksgiving to the second Thursday, which was November 23, aiming to extend the holiday shopping period. However, this decision was met with mixed reactions, with many states choosing to stick to the traditional last Thursday.

In 1940, Roosevelt again moved the holiday, this time to the third Thursday of November, which fell on November 21. This move was part of his effort to boost economic activity, but it caused considerable confusion and disagreement across the country.

The Formalization of the Date in 1941

The controversy over the date led to widespread debate and some states choosing to observe Thanksgiving on the fourth Thursday, while others followed Roosevelt's earlier proclamations. To resolve this inconsistency, Congress passed a joint resolution in 1941, officially establishing Thanksgiving as the fourth Thursday of November starting from 1942.

The resolution was signed into law by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who believed that fixing Thanksgiving on the fourth Thursday would provide consistency and stability across the nation.

In What Year Was Thanksgiving Celebrated On The Third Thursday?

The Key Year: 1939

The pivotal year when Thanksgiving was celebrated on the third Thursday of November was 1939. This was the first year Roosevelt moved the holiday earlier from the traditional final Thursday. Specifically:

- Date of Thanksgiving in 1939: November 23
- Reason for the change: To extend the holiday shopping season during the Great Depression
- Impact: Some states, such as New York, adopted the new date, while others, including Texas and Colorado, continued to observe the traditional last Thursday, leading to a fragmented national observance.

It's important to note that in 1939, the third Thursday of November fell on November 23, which was the date Thanksgiving was celebrated that year under Roosevelt's proclamation.

The 1940 Observance

In 1940, Roosevelt moved Thanksgiving further earlier to the third Thursday again, which was November 21. However, this change was less widely accepted and caused confusion.

- Significance: The consistent use of the third Thursday during these years marked a departure from the previous tradition of the last Thursday.
- Public Response: Many Americans found the change disruptive, leading to protests and confusion.

Why Did the Date Keep Changing?

Economic Motivations

Roosevelt's desire to extend the holiday shopping season was a primary reason for moving the date earlier. The idea was that an earlier Thanksgiving would give retailers a longer period to promote holiday sales during a challenging economic period.

Public and Political Backlash

Many Americans cherished the traditional date, and the inconsistent observance led to widespread dissatisfaction. Some states refused to change the date, leading to a patchwork of Thanksgiving celebrations across the country.

Legal and Legislative Resolution

To resolve the confusion, Congress officially set the date as the fourth Thursday of November in 1941, with the law taking effect in 1942. This decision aimed to balance the economic interests with public sentiment and create a uniform holiday nationwide.

Summary: The Year When Thanksgiving Was Celebrated on the Third Thursday

- Primary Year: 1939
- Date of Thanksgiving: November 23
- Why it was on the third Thursday: President Franklin D. Roosevelt moved the holiday earlier to stimulate economic activity during the Great Depression.
- Historical significance: Marks the only year in the modern era when Thanksgiving was officially celebrated on the third Thursday of November.

Conclusion

The history of Thanksgiving's date reflects a complex interplay of tradition, economic considerations, political decisions, and public sentiment. The year 1939 stands out as the key moment when Thanksgiving was celebrated on the third Thursday of November, a brief but significant departure from the long-standing tradition of the fourth Thursday. Understanding this history underscores the importance of consistency and tradition in national holidays, as well as the ways in which economic and political factors can influence cultural observances.

Whether celebrated on the third or fourth Thursday, Thanksgiving remains a vital part of American culture, emphasizing gratitude, family, and community. The decision to settle on the fourth Thursday in 1941 has provided stability for decades, but the brief experiment with the third Thursday in 1939 remains a fascinating chapter in the holiday's history.

Frequently Asked Questions

In what year was Thanksgiving officially celebrated on the third Thursday of November instead of the fourth?

In 1939, President Franklin D. Roosevelt moved Thanksgiving from the traditional fourth Thursday to the third Thursday to extend the holiday shopping season.

Why was Thanksgiving date changed to the third Thursday in 1939?

The change was made to boost the economy during the Great Depression by extending the holiday shopping period.

Was the change to the third Thursday of November widely accepted when first introduced?

No, the change was controversial and led to confusion and opposition from many states and citizens.

Did all states adopt the third Thursday Thanksgiving date in 1939?

No, some states continued to observe Thanksgiving on the traditional fourth Thursday, leading to a lack of nationwide uniformity.

When did Thanksgiving officially become a fixed national holiday on the fourth Thursday?

In 1941, the U.S. Congress officially established Thanksgiving as the fourth Thursday of November, which has remained the standard since then.

Are there any years when Thanksgiving was celebrated on the third Thursday after 1939?

Yes, in 1939 and 1940, some states observed Thanksgiving on the third Thursday due to the initial changes, but the national standard was later fixed on the fourth Thursday.

What led to the final decision to fix Thanksgiving on the fourth Thursday of November?

The inconsistency and public dissatisfaction with the date change led Congress to pass a law in 1941, establishing the fourth Thursday as Thanksgiving Day nationwide.

Is the concept of Thanksgiving falling on the third Thursday still relevant today?

No, since 1941, Thanksgiving has been officially celebrated on the fourth Thursday of November in the United States.

Additional Resources

In What Year Was Thanksgiving Celebrated On The Third Thursday Of November And Not The Fourth?

The question of "In what year was Thanksgiving celebrated on the third Thursday of November and not the fourth?" taps into a fascinating aspect of American history and the evolution of holiday traditions. While most Americans are familiar with Thanksgiving falling on the fourth Thursday of November, there was a period when the date shifted based on presidential proclamations and evolving societal norms. Understanding this shift requires a journey through history, policy changes, and cultural considerations. This article will explore the origins of Thanksgiving, the key moments when its date was altered, and the specific year when Thanksgiving was officially celebrated on the third Thursday of November instead of the usual fourth.

The Origins of Thanksgiving: A Historical Context

Early Celebrations and the Establishment of a National Holiday

Thanksgiving's roots trace back to early colonial harvest festivals, notably in Plymouth, Massachusetts, where Pilgrims celebrated their first successful harvest in 1621. These early observances were local and varied regionally.

It wasn't until the 19th century that Thanksgiving became a more unified national holiday. Sarah Josepha Hale, a prominent writer and editor, campaigned tirelessly to establish Thanksgiving as a national holiday, culminating in Abraham Lincoln's proclamation during the Civil War in 1863, which designated the final Thursday of November as a day of thanksgiving.

The Role of Presidential Proclamations

From Lincoln onward, the date of Thanksgiving was primarily set through presidential proclamations, which could be influenced by political, social, and regional considerations. For many decades, presidents issued annual proclamations, often choosing a Thursday in late November, but there was no fixed date mandated by law.

The Shift from the Fourth to the Third Thursday

The Original Tradition: The Last Thursday in November

Historically, Thanksgiving was often observed on the last Thursday of November. This tradition was largely maintained until the 20th century, with presidents issuing proclamations that sometimes varied based on regional customs or personal preferences.

The 1939 and 1940 Changes

During the Great Depression, President Franklin D. Roosevelt faced economic challenges and sought to extend the holiday shopping season. In 1939, Roosevelt moved Thanksgiving up one week, declaring it on the second or third Thursday of November to lengthen the holiday shopping period. This change was controversial, with some states following the new date and others sticking to the traditional last Thursday.

In 1940, Roosevelt again moved Thanksgiving to the second Thursday of November, further complicating the tradition and causing confusion among the public and businesses.

The Official Federal Standard: The 1941 Act

The Uniform Holiday Bill

Recognizing the chaos caused by the inconsistent celebration dates, Congress introduced the Uniform Holiday Bill in 1939, aiming to establish fixed dates for certain holidays to promote economic stability and ease planning.

The Passage and Implementation in 1941

The bill was signed into law by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on June 16, 1941, and officially established Thanksgiving as falling on the fourth Thursday of November starting in 1942. The goal was to standardize the holiday across all states and avoid confusion.

Key points of the law:

- Thanksgiving would be observed on the fourth Thursday of November.
- The law took effect for the year 1942, ensuring a consistent date nationwide.

The Year When Thanksgiving Fell on the Third Thursday

The Year: 1939

While the 1941 law established the fourth Thursday as the standard, the first year when Thanksgiving was celebrated on the third Thursday of November was 1939.

- Why 1939?

Roosevelt, aiming to stimulate the economy during the Great Depression, moved Thanksgiving earlier in November in 1939 to extend the holiday shopping season. The presidential proclamation declared Thanksgiving for that year as the third Thursday of November, which was November 23, 1939.

- Impact and Confusion:

This decision was met with mixed reactions. Some states followed the presidential proclamation, celebrating on the third Thursday, while others adhered to the traditional last Thursday. This led to a period of inconsistency and public debate.

The 1939 Thanksgiving Date

- Date: November 23, 1939

- Day: Thursday

- Reason: To extend the holiday shopping season during the Great Depression

This marked the only year in the 20th century when Thanksgiving was officially observed on the third Thursday of November, prior to the 1941 legislation.

Why Was 1939 Unique?

Economic Motivations

Roosevelt's decision was driven by economic motives—by moving the holiday earlier, retailers hoped to boost sales during the critical holiday shopping period. This was a strategic, albeit controversial, move.

Regional Variations and Public Reaction

The move caused significant confusion and disagreement:

- Some states, such as Colorado and Texas, officially adopted the third Thursday.
- Others, including Ohio and Pennsylvania, continued to observe the traditional last Thursday.
- The media and the public debated which date was correct, creating a patchwork of observances.

The Legal and Political Response

The confusion and opposition to the 1939 change prompted Congress to act swiftly. While Roosevelt's proclamation was effective, it was met with resistance, and many states did not follow it.

The Transition to the Fourth Thursday

The 1941 Legislation

In response to the widespread confusion, Congress passed the Uniform Holiday Bill in 1941, which aimed to standardize Thanksgiving as the fourth Thursday of November.

The 1942 Adoption

Starting in 1942, all states officially observed Thanksgiving on the fourth Thursday, aligning the holiday nationwide and resolving the controversy initiated by Roosevelt's 1939 proclamation.

Summary Timeline

Year	Thanksgiving Date	Key Events and Notes
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1621	Varies (local harvest festival)	Early colonial celebrations
1863	Last Thursday of November	Lincoln's proclamation, popularizing the date
1939	Third Thursday (Nov 23)	Roosevelt moves Thanksgiving earlier for economic reasons
1940	Second Thursday (Nov 21)	Further shifting of the date
1941	Law enacted to set the fourth Thursday	Standardization begins
1942	Fourth Thursday (Nov 26)	Official nationwide observance begins

Conclusion: The Significance of 1939

In what year was Thanksgiving celebrated on the third Thursday of November and not the fourth? The answer is 1939. That year, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, in an effort to prolong the holiday shopping season during the Great Depression, officially declared Thanksgiving on the third Thursday of November. This move was part of a broader attempt to influence holiday shopping and economic activity, but it sparked controversy and led to a period of inconsistent observance across the United States.

The 1939 Thanksgiving remains a unique and notable moment in American holiday history—highlighting how economic considerations and presidential policies can influence cultural traditions, even those as deeply ingrained as Thanksgiving. Ultimately, the move was short-lived, and the nation settled into a standardized date with the 1941 legislation, which has held ever since.

Final Thoughts

Understanding "In what year was Thanksgiving celebrated on the third Thursday of November and not the fourth?" offers insight into the complexities of holiday traditions, legislative influence, and societal responses. It exemplifies how historical circumstances, economic strategies, and political decisions can shape longstanding cultural practices, leaving a lasting imprint on national history.

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