

Thanksgiving in Early San Diego

PROCLAMATION

In conformity with the customs of other States and Territories, and in order that the people of California may make a general and public acknowledgement of their gratitude to the Supreme Ruler of the Universe for his kind and fostering care during the past year, and for the boundless blessings which we now enjoy, it is recommended that Thursday, the 29th day of November next, be set apart and kept as "day" of Thanksgiving and Prayer.

--Brig. Gen. Bennet Riley, Governor of California, Oct. 21, 1849

As the military governor of the territory of California, General Bennet Riley issued the first Thanksgiving proclamation almost a year before statehood. The announcement received scant attention in San Diego. With a town population of about 650 people—many of whom were Spanish-speaking *Californios*—the New England tradition meant little.

The first local notice of Thanksgiving may have been an item in the San Diego *Herald* on November 20, 1851, which announced a proclamation from Gov. John McDougal. Otherwise, San Diego newspapers took little notice of the holiday in the next several years other than printing the annual proclamations of U. S. presidents.

In 1872, Alonzo Horton's dour secretary Jesse Shepherd complained in his diary: "Thanksgiving Day has not been very well observed. Too tired to work and too forgetful of comforts enjoyed . . . May our ingratitude be forgiven."

But in the mid-1870s, with San Diego enjoying a modest boom that raised its population to about 2,500, Thanksgiving finally established itself as a local tradition. The holiday followed a common pattern: closure of most businesses for the day, church services in the late morning, socializing with family and friends in the afternoon, a lavish dinner, followed by entertainment in the evening.

"There will be union Thanksgiving services in the M. E. Church, on Thursday, at 11 a.m. Sermon by Rev. Mr. Gates, of the Baptist Church," read a newspaper announcement for 1876. Ecumenical services were often held in a one church--representing many faiths--and always included a "thanks offering, for the benefit of the poor."

But church was merely a precursor to the more popular public entertainments. "We publish this morning the programme for the Grand Vocal and Instrumental Concert and Dramatic Entertainment to be give at Horton's Hall on the evening of the Thanksgiving Day," the *Union* announced on November 21, 1874. "This will be in every respect the grand entertainment of the

NEW TO-DAY.
THANKSGIVING EVENING,
NOVEMBER 30, 1876.
At HORTON'S HALL,
MR. J. H. RICHARDSON respectfully
announces to the public of San Diego
that he will exhibit his new scenic painting,
(size 10x20 feet) entitled
DESMOND'S DREAM,
Or the Wreck of the Yacht Restless.
The scene is located on the Pacific ocean, in
the vicinity of La Jolla; time during a Cali-
fornia golden sunset. Many points of interest
will be shown on the scene, as photographed
by Mr. Parker, and pencil sketches by Dr.
Remondino. Also in addition to the above, a
beautiful Winter "Christmas Snow Storm;"
scene, San Diego in 1880, showing the Texas
Pacific Railway, cars, depot, &c. Also several
other California scenes; altogether twelve Tab-
leaux, with music on the piano.
Admission.....25 cents
Reserved Seats.....50 cents
Doors open 7; commence at 7.45.
DESMOND'S DREAM;
Or the Wreck of the Yacht Restless.

San Diego Union, Nov. 29, 1876.

season, and of course the seats will be filled.”

The entertainment for 1876 was a fine art exhibit at Horton’s Hall. Artist J. H. Richardson announced the showing of his 10 x 12 foot scenic painting “Desmond’s Dream, Or the Wreck of the Yacht Restless.” For an admission price of .25 cents (.50 for reserved seats) the public could view the painting “located on the Pacific ocean, in the vicinity of La Jolla; time during a California golden sunset.” The exhibit also included photographs from San Diego’s leading photographer, J. C. Parker, and pencil sketches by Dr. Peter Remondino—all accompanied by music on the piano.

The art display appeared to be a mixed success. The *Union* reported the entertainment “was highly relished by all who were present; although we fear that late turkey dinners kept away several who wished to be there.”

Thanksgiving dinner that year was celebrated most grandly at the Horton House, San Diego’s largest hotel. In addition to turkey with oyster stuffing, the showy menu for the day offered twenty varieties of roasted, boiled or cold meats; eight different entrees including *Animales d’Agneau* or *Fricandeau* of Veal; sixteen different vegetables; and over a score of desserts choices.

The fare was less ostentatious at a Thanksgiving barbecue—“a novelty here” in 1884 to celebrate the election of the Democrat Grover Cleveland. An estimated 800 people crammed Leach’s Opera House on D Street (Broadway, across from Spreckels Theatre) to feast on “a prepared ox, roasted whole, four sheep, one hog and a large quantity of turkeys and chickens.” Music, speeches, and dancing followed the barbecue.

Free dinners for the poor became common in the 1890s. Helping Hand, the Salvation Army, and the City Mission, all offered Thanksgiving dinners. School children contributed clothing and food. “Three thousand children in the public schools of this city made a lavish contribution to the poor yesterday,” announced the *Union* in November 25, 1897. “Parcels large and small, bulging pockets and bursting boxes, potatoes, flour, meat and money, bread and butter, cake and pie—wagon-loads were carried by the children to all the schools.” The charitable organizations distributed the gathered provisions throughout the city.

Outdoor sports at Thanksgiving were as popular as turkey in San Diego. A baseball game in 1874 was won by the “Bon Tons” over the “Dolly Vardens” by a score of 37-22. “The pigeon shooting match on the Railroad lands was largely attended Thanksgiving afternoon,” the *Union* reported in 1880. And in 1886 there was yacht

THANKSGIVING DINNER.

Thursday, Nov. 30, 1876.

SOUPS.		
Chicken, a la Reine.		English Pos.
FISH.		
BAKED.		BOILED.
Steels, Brown Sauce.		Rock Cod, Egg Sauce.
BOILED.		
Chicken, with Salt Pork, Egg Sauce.		
Leg of Mutton, Caper Sauce.		
Corned Beef, with Cabbage.		
Fresh Pork, with Turnips.		
		Sugar-cured Ham.
COLD.		
Roast Beef.	Pressed Corned Beef.	Dried Beef.
Mutton.	Ham.	Tongue.
Chicken.		
ROASTS.		
Turkey, Oyster Stuffing, Cranberry Sauce.		
Chicken, Stuffed, Red Currant Jelly.		
Young Goose, Stuffed, Bepanot Dressing.		
Surking Pig, Stuffed, Apple Sauce.		
Boaster Ham, Champagne Sauce.		
Spring Lamb, Mint Sauce.		
Saddle of Mutton.		
	Loin of Veal, Stuffed.	
Saddle of Venison, Grape Jelly.		Sirloin of Beef.
Black Brant, Catawba Jelly.		Rib of Beef.
ENTREES.		
1—Sauté of Quail, a la Maître de Hotel.		
2—Animales d’Agneau, Sauce Potrade.		
3—Beef Reauté, aux Champignons, a la Bordalaie.		
4—Ripe Croquettes, Blackberry Jelly.		
5—Chicken Salad, Dressed en Mayonnaise.		
6—Macaroni au Fromage de Parmesan.		
7—Fricandeau of Veal, au Petit Pois.		
8—French Panaché, Lemon Jelly.		
RELISHES.		
Mixed Pickles.	Olives.	Lettuces.
Celery.	Horseradish.	
Raw Tomatoes.	Worcestershire Sauce.	Cucumbers.
VEGETABLES.		
Boiled Potatoes.		Mashed Potatoes.
	Brown Potatoes.	
Green Corn.		Green Peas.
Turnips.	Stewed Tomatoes.	Cabbage.
Hominy.	Rice.	Spinach.
String Beans.	Boiled Onions.	Lima Beans.
Fried Parsnips.		Sweet Potatoes.
PUDDINGS. PASTRY. PIES.		
English Plum, Hard Sauce.	Green Apple.	Mince.
Chocolate Cream.		Meringue Lemon.
Apple Dumpling, Cream Sauce.		
DESSERT.		
Citron Cake.	Cinnamon Buns.	Lemon Squab.
Cocoanut Cake.	Vanilla Jumbles.	Ginger Snaps.
Current Cake.	Wafer Jumbles.	Lady Fingers.
Sponge Cake.	Jelly Roll.	Egg Kisses.
Almonds.	Grapes.	Oranges.
	Filberts.	Walnuts.
Wine Jelly.		Watermelons.
Apples.		Apricots.
Coffee.	Tea.	Chocolate.

*Persons having friends to meals will please give notice at the office. A notice cannot act on this Bill of Fare, will be charged for extra.
 Breakfast from 6:30 to 10. Lunch from 12 to 1:30.
 Dinner from 5 to 7.
 Dinner for Nurses and Children at 5.

racing on the bay “for those disinclined to attend the church services.”

By the 1890s, high school football was the entertainment of choice for Thanksgiving. Hundreds of sports fans took the streetcar in 1892 to Recreation Park near the corner of 25th (Evans) and Newton to see the Russ High School eleven defeat a team from the Y.M.C.A. In 1900 “more than a thousand people” flocked to an afternoon game at Bay View Park (Logan Avenue and Beardsley Street) between Normal School—the predecessor of San Diego State—and Russ High. The collegians defeated the high schoolers 15-12 in a three-hour game called by darkness.

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