

[1845—Washington's First Thanksgiving](#)

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What Once Was: 1845—Washington's First Thanksgiving

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By Matthew B. Gilmore*

In November of 1845 Washington's newspapers, including the *National Intelligencer*, and *The Union*, reported on Mayor William Winston Seaton's proclamation of November 27 as a "Day of Thanksgiving," it being the city's first observance of the holiday. Maryland's Governor Thomas Pratt had issued a Thanksgiving proclamation earlier in October, also setting November 27 as the day for that states' observance.

A PROCLAMATION.

TO THE CITIZENS OF WASHINGTON.

Whereas the Board of Aldermen and Board of Common Council of this city did on the 3d instant pass the following preamble and joint resolution, to wit :

Joint resolution requesting the Mayor to set apart a day of Thanksgiving.

Whereas we approve the custom of setting apart a day of general thanksgiving and praise to the Creator of the Universe in the course of the autumn of each year, when the garners of the husbandman are full, and plenty overfloweth in the land ; and whereas the Governor of the State of Maryland, of which this city was once a part, has issued his proclamation setting apart a day in that State to be observed as a day of Thanksgiving : Therefore—

Resolved by the Board of Aldermen and Board of Common Council of the city of Washington, That the Mayor of this city be and he hereby is respectfully requested to issue his proclamation, setting apart such day of the present month as to him may seem proper, to be observed by the citizens of Washington as a day of thanksgiving and praise to God for his kindness and beneficence to the people of this nation.

SAMUEL BACON,

President of the Board of Common Council.

JAMES ADAMS,

President of the Board of Aldermen.

Now, heartily approving of the object of this Resolution of the City Councils, and in ready compliance with the request which it contains, I hereby appoint THURSDAY, the 27th of the present month, to be observed in this city as a day of general Thanksgiving and Praise to Almighty God ; requesting that all secular employment may be suspended during the day ; that all Ministers of Religion and their congregations, and all other citizens, may assemble in their respective places of worship, to offer up their gratitude and praise to the Creator of the Universe, for the manifold mercies with which he has favored our country during the past year, in its exemption from the visitation of war, pestilence, or famine, and for the enjoyment of peace, health, and plenty ; to implore of Him a continuance of these blessings, and to vouchsafe to us the preservation of public and domestic tranquillity, of social order, and of public and private virtue ; that He would be pleased to preserve and strengthen, by the ties of concord and affection, our National Union, and perpetuate in their purity our free institutions and public liberty ; that He would shed abroad through our land the spirit of brotherly love and toleration ; and, finally, that He would graciously infuse into all hearts the principles, and conform all lives to the practice, of the benign precepts of the Gospel of Peace.

Given under my hand and the seal of the city of Washington, this 12th day of November, 1845.

[L. S.]

W. W. SEATON, *Mayor.*

Proclamation, as published in the *National Intelligencer* newspaper's November 15, 1845 edition, of "a day of general Thanksgiving and Praise to Almighty God."

Seaton's proclamation had sparse local precedents. **[1]** The Thanksgiving holiday observance had New England, "Yankee," origins — primarily Connecticut and Massachusetts — but had recently slowly spread southward through the states. *Niles' Weekly Register*, in the last quarter of 1817, noted in passing Thanksgiving proclamations in New-York, Pennsylvania, the city of Charleston, and Vermont.

In 1832 Washington had had a special (one-off) day of thanksgiving for the departure of the cholera epidemic. The epidemic was a serious one - 1,000 cases were reported, half of them fatal. Washington's population at the time was only 24,000. **[2]**

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