

The First Thanksgiving

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Contrary to what you may have read in your United States history book if you grew up in a state other than Virginia, the first Thanksgiving celebration was held at Berkeley Hundred plantation in the colony of Virginia on December 4, 1619. I know the story about the Pilgrims' harvest celebration at Plymouth Colony, but that did not take place until 1621.

Actually there were many "thanksgiving" celebrations during colonial times throughout the new World as there were throughout Europe where it was the custom to celebrate with a feast when the crops were bountiful, major feats had been accomplished or tragedy had been averted. President George Washington's proclamation making November 26, 1789, Thanksgiving Day had nothing to do with the Virginia or Massachusetts celebrations, but rather came as a result of suggestions that there be a day to "acknowledge with grateful hearts the many signal favors of Almighty God, especially for affording them an opportunity to establish a Constitution of Government for their safety."

For whatever its origins, Thanksgiving Day serves as a reminder of the many blessings we have as Restonians, Virginians and Americans. Even with the economic slump, we enjoy a standard of living unsurpassed in the history of the world. While our material goods are numerous, the intellectual, cultural and educational opportunities in our very diverse region are without parallel.

As for me on Thanksgiving Day, I am honored and thankful to represent the people of the 36th legislative district. But with all our advantages I remain concerned that I represent the needs and interests of those who are not doing so well and may need government services. The challenges get greater as the budget gets even tighter.

The 2003 General Assembly convenes on January 8. Over the next several weeks I will be sending out a voter survey and holding public hearings to determine the public's interests and ideas in what the legislature should be doing. We are at a particularly critical juncture as state government is being scaled back. I hope all readers of this column will participate in these opportunities. As always, I can be contacted at kenplum@aol.com with questions, suggestions and ideas.

Virginia held the first Thanksgiving celebration as you may have just learned from this column. And in the early centuries Virginia led the nation in so many different ways. But that was a long time ago. Certainly we want to be thankful for all we have, but maybe we can spend a few minutes on this Thanksgiving Day thinking about ways we can once again be leaders.