GIVING THANKS

Thanksgiving has been a cornerstone of colonizer mythology for centuries, telling a story about how the Pilgrims celebrated after struggling to survive in a place that was new to them. Of course, Indigenous people have a role in the story as guests invited to give thanks alongside the intruders. While there are kernels of truth woven into this myth – the local Wampanoag were on peaceful terms with the colonizers and may have been involved in feasts with them – the fact is that traditions of giving thanks among Indigenous people of the Americas has a long and deep history that continues to this day. The first Thanksgiving in North America did not involve colonizers. It happened thousands of years before colonizers and was entirely Indigenous in origin.

It's true that most societies throughout history, including those of Europeans, have had celebrations that give thanks, but in America, colonizers attempted to displace Indigenous traditions with their own. Traditions of showing respect for resources and giving thanks existed for millennia among Indigenous groups before the arrival of Europeans and formed an important part of Indigenous culture. The story of colonizer Thanksgiving also celebrates settler survival without acknowledging the important ways that Indigenous people ensured the survival of the colonizers – sharing knowledge and resources vital to existence in North America. In fact, all those foods that are associated with colonizer Thanksgiving – pumpkin, turkey, corn, potatoes, cranberries, etc. – were domesticated by Indigenous people in the Americas, not by colonizers. So, next time someone talks about the "first" Thanksgiving, remind them that it was Indigenous people and not the Pilgrims that celebrated it.



To see more Seminole History Stories, please visit the THPO website at www.stofthpo.com

Artwork: A Timucuan Family welcoming each other, by Bobby C. Martin (Muskogee Nation)
From the *Visualizing Indigenous Florida* Project.

TRIBAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE