

Thanksgiving and Turkey and Football

by Lynne Belluscio

I often say that history is not written in stone. That certainly is true about the first Thanksgiving. In fact, historians cannot agree on the story of the first Thanksgiving. Some claim it can be traced to Texas, several years before the Pilgrims landed in Plymouth. There is also a story that English settlers in Virginia celebrated Thanksgiving in 1619. But one thing for sure, turkey wasn't on the menu – neither was mashed potatoes or pumpkin pie. But as a historian, I am not about to change my Thanksgiving menu because it's not historically accurate.

For my family, it was always turkey for Thanksgiving and Christmas, filled with my grandmother's recipe for stuffing. I have always baked the turkey in heavy-duty aluminum foil at 450 degrees and at the last minute, take off the foil so it would brown.

There is a difference between baking and roasting turkey. Historically, turkey was roasted on a spit in front of the fire, sometimes in a tin reflector, or tin kitchen. The brick oven could not hold the heat long enough to bake a turkey. I think that's why boiled turkey was popular at that time in the early 1800s.

The 1833 Cook's Own Book suggests that a turkey should be boiled in a floured bag so it can be served white, with a sauce. (I have never boiled a turkey, and probably never will). When the cast iron stove replaced the open hearth, women were faced with small ovens that could not hold a turkey, and in truth, they preferred meat roasted in front of the fire. So the early stoves had two little doors in front of the firebox, with a wide shelf where the tin kitchen could be placed. The little doors were opened, and the turkey was roasted in front of the fire.

I really wonder how popular turkey was in the 19th century. Lydia Child in *The Frugal Housewife* 1833 mentions turkey, but only to say that a "good sized turkey should be roasted two hours and a half or three hours; very slowly at first." Charlotte LeRoy's receipt book doesn't have a recipe for turkey. The Cooks Own Book suggests that



"Many a Christmas dinner has been spoiled by the turkey having been hung up in a larder and becoming thoroughly frozen; Jack Frost has ruined the reputation of many a turkey roaster."

In 1976, when we built our cooking fireplace and brick oven, I decided to cook Thanksgiving dinner in the fireplace. Trying to be prudent, I decided to roast a small turkey, about 13 pounds, but with no stuffing, since I was concerned that the internal temperature would not reach a proper degree. But the turkey took much longer than I planned, and I think we had it for dessert!

In 1910, a turkey story was reported in the *LeRoy Gazette*. It seems that Alexander Sutherland bought a live turkey for the traditional Thanksgiving dinner and brought it home and put it in a bag in the woodshed. He would "dispatch" it later. His wife had

to pluck the feathers and get it ready for the oven, but the turkey had other ideas. Sutherland heard a loud crash in the dining room and when he went to see what had happened he discovered that his Thanksgiving dinner had escaped from the woodshed and had made its way into the dining room. The frightened bird crashed into the china cupboard and broke the family set of china and did a pretty good number on the china cupboard in the process. The *Gazette* article doesn't mention what happened to the errant gobbler, but one can only suspect that it eventually made it to the dinner table - - on the everyday dishes.

Another story reported in the 1910 *Gazette*, included accounts of three football games that were played on Thanksgiving in LeRoy. The first game of the day was played at 10 am at the Summit Street field. The All-Le-

Roy Eleven played the self-proclaimed amateur champions of Rochester, the Dreadnaughts. Don McVean and Fenton Taylor scored touchdowns. The final score was 12 to 4.

The 1:30 game was between the LeRoy Stars and the East Ends from Buffalo. LeRoy lost the game 18 to 0. The Buffalo team was a lot larger than the boys from LeRoy. At 3 pm the High School played against Greigsville. It was a grudge match, since LeRoy had defeated Greigsville the Saturday before. This game was the final game of the season and LeRoy won 41 to 0. There were seven touchdowns. Three by Glidden, two each by Bundy and Kavanaugh. Glidden and Selden each kicked 3 goals. It certainly appears that Thanksgiving and football have been a part of LeRoy's history - way before there was television and the NFL.

Happy Thanksgiving