



# WOMPATUCK NEWS

Volume 1, Number 5

Friends of Wompatuck State Park

Fall Edition, 2007

## NEMBAFEST and the Landmine Classic at Wompatuck



September 8th and 9th this year saw the return of two fantastic events to Wompatuck. The annual New England Mountain Bike Festival was held on Saturday, September 8th in South Field and featured organized mounting bike rides for riders of all abilities including children, food, tons of vendors, friendly competitions and a Kids Challenge around South Field. Estimates put the attendance at between 400-500 participants!

Many volunteers from both The Friends of Wompatuck and the New England Mountain Bike Association volunteered to make the day a huge success. It turned out to be a steamy day with temperatures near 90 but many of the vendors were providing free drinks for everyone to combat the intense heat. The day featured the Mountain Bike Olympics run by our own Paul Peaslee. Events included Huffy Bike Toss, farthest wheelie contest, and the traditional favorite, the log pull.



Jakob Oddleifson racing at the FOW Kids Challenge.

After the Olympics, the Friends of Wompatuck sponsored a Kids Challenge that involved groups of kids racing around inside the venue area to the cheers of everyone! All the kids received an award and heaps of praise for their efforts. After the main festivities were over, Root 66 held its Mountain Bike Short track Finals around the South Field area. They had

*continued on page 2*



*"The Mayflower on Her Arrival in Plymouth Harbor" by William Formsby Halsall (1841-1919).*

## Our Nation's First Thanksgiving

*By Jim Rose, FOW News Editor and Historian*

Although Chief Josiah Wompatuck was born six years after our nation's first Thanksgiving, he more than likely later became friends with the Wompanoag and English participants. The exact date of the first Thanksgiving in 1621 is not known, but it is assumed to be in late September or early October, soon after the crop of barley, beans, corn, peas and squash were harvested. It is also a period that Plymouth hosted a sizeable number of migrating birds.

A detailed eyewitness description of the celebration comes from Edward Winslow's *Mourt's Relation*: "Our harvest being gotten in, our governor sent four men on fowling, that so we might after a special manner rejoice together, after we had gathered the fruits of our labors; they four in one day killed as much fowl, as with little help beside, served the Company almost a week, at which time amongst other Recreations, we exercised our Arms, many of the Indians coming among us, and amongst the rest their greatest king, Massasoit, with some ninety men, whom for three days we

entertained and feasted, and they went out and killed five Deer, which they brought to the Plantation and bestowed on the Governor, and upon the Captain and others. And although it be not always so plentiful, as it was at this time with us, yet by the goodness of God, we are so far from want, that we often wish you partakers of our plenty."

The term Thanksgiving was first applied in the 1800s. Pilgrims did not use it themselves, since the event instead was a time of spiritual devotion. Everything the Pilgrims did revolved around a spiritual context. But as Winslow's description reveals, the celebration was similar to the traditional English harvest festival, a secular festivity dating back to the Middle Ages where villagers ate, drank and played games.

In the 1600s, a person's social standing determined where he or she ate. The choicest food was placed next to the most important people. Diners didn't sample everything on the table like we do today; they just ate what was closest to them. The most important table was

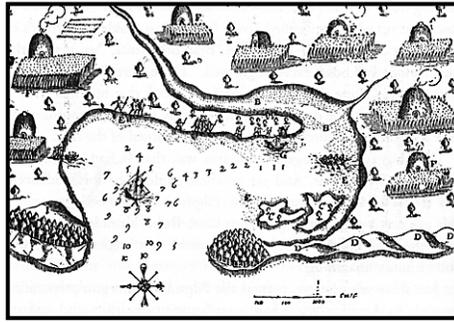
*continued on page 2*

## Our Nation's First Thanksgiving *(cont. from page 1)*

called the "High Table." The guests at this seating probably included Governor William Bradford, Captain Miles Standish (military leader who massacred six Indians in Weymouth in 1623), William Brewster (the Pilgrims religious leader), Chief Massasoit, and Squanto (he taught the Pilgrims how to plant native crops and was also an interpreter for them).

Outside of the "High Table," the majority of the guests stood, squatted, or sat on the ground, clustering around open fires where venison and waterfowl turned on a spit and varieties of meat and vegetable stews simmered. Besides ducks and deer, there was a good supply of wild turkey in 1621. Turkeys were not a new discovery to the English. When the Conquistadors arrived in Mexico in the early 1500s, they found the Indians had domesticated their turkeys for consumption. By 1575, the domesticated Central American turkey made its way to the English table. However, the wild turkeys of New England were much bigger and faster.

The Pilgrims also added seafood to their Thanksgiving celebration. In the autumn, bluefish, cod, eels and striped bass were caught as well as shellfish such as oysters, clams and lobster. Pilgrim William Bradford recalls the feast in *Of Plimoth Plantation*: "For some were thus employed in affairs abroad, others were exercised in fishing, about cod and bass and other fish, of which they took good store, of which every family had their portion. All the summer there was no want; and now began to come in store of fowl, as winter approached, of which this place did abound when they came first



*Map of Plymouth Harbor drawn by French explorer Samuel de Champlain in 1605.*

(but afterwards decreased by degrees). And besides waterfowl there was great store of wild turkeys, of which they took many, besides venison, etc. Besides, they had about a peck of meal a week to a person, or now since harvest, Indian corn to that proportion."

The Pilgrims didn't use forks until the last decades of the 17th century. They ate with spoons, knives and fingers. They wiped their hands on cloth napkins, which they also used to pick up hot food. However, the Pilgrims were without pumpkin pies, cranberry sauce and mashed potatoes.

Today, Americans think of the English as having bland food, but the Pilgrims used many spices including cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg, salt, pepper, and dried fruit. They brought sugar over on the *Mayflower*, but at the time of the feast the supply was small. The Pilgrims didn't have ovens, so pies, cakes and breads weren't available. But they did cook sump, a corn-based porridge.

The food that was eaten at the feast would have seemed fatty by our present standards. Yet it was probably healthier for them then, seeing they were more

active and needed the protein. They were more concerned about the plague and the pox than clogged arteries. Vegetable dishes, one of the mainstays of our modern celebration, didn't contribute to the feast as much. Depending on the time of year, many vegetables weren't available to the Pilgrims. Albeit they did consume beans, cabbage, corn, onions, peas and squash.

Between meals the Pilgrims and Wompanoags played games for entertainment. The Indians might have taught the English the Pin Game, where a player attempted to toss a small ring onto a pin. Blind Man's Bluff may have been played as well. Target shooting was a popular sport among the English to see who was the best shot. In addition to sports, both the English and the Indians enjoyed singing and dancing.

For the Pilgrims at the first Thanksgiving, the Indians were not a despised band of savages. They were human beings similar to themselves. Edward Winslow recounts they were "very trustworthy, quick of apprehension, ripe witted and just." Without Massasoit and Squanto to rescue them with food and advice, the Pilgrims might not have survived. As it was, half of the original Mayflower passengers perished that first winter.

The Continental Congress issued the first official Thanksgiving Proclamation in America in 1777. Abraham Lincoln declared Thanksgiving a Federal holiday as a "prayerful day of Thanksgiving." In 1939 President Franklin D. Roosevelt set the date for the holiday to take place on the fourth Thursday of November. ■

## NEMBAFEST and the Landmine Classic at Wompatuck *(cont. from page 1)*

the highest number of participants of any short track event this year! The racers rode around the South Field area so they were in view of the hundreds of spectators. By the time the day wound down, everyone was tired but pleased the event went off without a hitch.

Sunday brought the Landmine Classic Mountain Bike Race. This is the FOW fundraiser of the year. Most of the money we utilize for projects is supported by the funds we raise by sponsoring and organizing this race. This year

featured co-organizer's Kevin Chichlowski and Eric Oddleifson's devilish 22 mile course to truly test rider's mettle. The Landmine Classic is part of the Root 66 race series in New England and is the longest point-to-point race of the series. The day was cloudy and rain threatened but that did not stop the huge crowd we had. Over 275 racers competed that day, which is over a 100 more than last year! Despite the punishing course, riders enjoyed the unique challenge of such a long course over difficult

terrain. As a result, FOW was able to raise enough money to support our activities for the next year! Thanks to so many volunteers who supported the race that day. The event truly would not have been a success without the help of so many people.

So, put September 6th & 7th on your calendars next year!! We will again be hosting NEMBAFEST with the Landmine Classic the next day on Sunday. ■

Eric Oddleifson, FOW Secretary