A House in Jamestown, a Letter to Lincoln

Thanksgiving week in Chautauqua County, with a Jamestown Christmas, a race to remember Amy King, and the editor who wanted everyone at the table on the same Thursday.

THE POINT & PEN EDITORIAL DESK



The Fenton mansion on Washington Street in April 2024. The family knew it as Walnut Grove. "Historic Fenton Mansion, Jamestown, New York (USA)" by Charles (usf1fan2) on Flickr · CC BY 2.0 · resized and cropped to fit in print

In 1863, Reuben Fenton hired a Jamestown architect to build his family a house. That same year, a magazine editor in Philadelphia sat down to write Abraham Lincoln a letter. She wanted him to settle a question that seems peculiar now. When, exactly, was Thanksgiving? This year her proposed date comes around again, and the house on Washington Street has a holiday story of its own to tell. [1] [11]

Christmas at Walnut Grove

Before the Fenton mansion was a museum, it had a bride in its drawing room. Josephine Fenton held her wedding reception there after marrying Jamestown banker Frank Gifford. Her mother, Elizabeth, loved working in the garden. The family called the place Walnut Grove when they moved in, in 1864. Architect Aaron Hall had designed the red brick house for Reuben, who would shortly become governor of New York. [1] [2]

Those family details are worth taking along on Saturday, November 28, when the Fenton History Center opens its exhibit A Jamestown Christmas: The Traditions That Made Us. The opening runs from 1 to 3 p.m. at 67 Washington Street. The exhibit follows the customs that Jamestown families have passed down through the generations. [3]

Here's a question for the ride home, especially if you can get two generations into the same car. Which shop window did you go out of your way to see at Christmas? Give the person answering a minute. The name of the store might come back first. Who took them there is usually the better part of the story.

Two addresses for Thanksgiving morning

If you've run the Amy King Memorial 5K before, take another look at the starting line. This year the race takes place in downtown Jamestown on Thanksgiving morning, Thursday, November 26. Packet pickup and race-day registration run from 7 to 8:30 a.m. in the second-floor banquet room at the DoubleTree, 150 W. Fourth Street. For the 9 a.m. start, head to the YMCA at 101 E. Fourth Street. Walkers are welcome. The Y lists $40 through Wednesday and $45 on race day. Online registration comes to $43.40 with the processing fee and closes at 8 p.m. Wednesday. [4] [5]

Amy King was 29 and working as a flight attendant aboard United Airlines Flight 175 when she died on September 11, 2001. Her name has stayed on this race for more than two decades. Locally, that remembrance takes a practical form. It helps support YMCA programs for children and scholarships for graduating seniors at Southwestern Central School. There's room on Fourth Street to cheer for someone, too. [4] [5]

Two villages light their trees

In Fredonia, the place to remember is the gazebo at Barker Common. It's the setting for the village tree lighting during Miracle on Main Street, which runs Friday and Saturday, November 27 and 28. Festivals Fredonia also has something for the child who can't quite wait until Friday. On its festival page, Santa reads at the Darwin R. Barker Library and Mrs. Claus takes a turn at the Next Chapter Bookstore. Both story-time recordings can be watched from home. [6]

In Bemus Point, Santa has booked a firetruck. Light Up the Point begins at 5 p.m. Saturday, November 28, with a parade, caroling and the village tree lighting. The invitation to join the parade extends to people on bicycles, in golf carts and on foot. A decorated bike and a willing rider will do nicely. If you're watching from the curb, tuck a pair of mittens or some socks into your bag. Organizers are collecting those along with winter hats and coats. [7]



East Main Street in Fredonia's historic district, July 2015. "East Main Street (Fredonia, New York)" by Generic1139, Wikimedia Commons · CC BY 3.0 · resized and cropped to fit in print

A Saturday night on Washington Street

You can get to know one of Saturday's bands before the first chord. Brothers Matthew and Justin McCheskey of Early Attic sat down to talk about where the band had been and what they wanted to do next. WRFA kept their December 2025 conversation with Arts on Fire host Anthony Merchant in its listening archive. Put it on while you're doing the dishes. [9]

Then hear the band onstage. Early Attic shares the bill with Teddy Long and Nights in Harmonia at WRFA's Harvest Sessions on Saturday, November 28. Music starts at 8 p.m. at Raven & Rune, 318 Washington Street in Jamestown. Admission is free. A raffle supports WRFA-LP, the community station at 107.9 FM that made the interview available in the first place. [8]

The hippo that got away

Keep an eye out for a blue hippopotamus on Thanksgiving morning. The last time Macy's went looking for this particular balloon, it had a head start on the search party. In the parade's early years, Macy's let balloons fly away at the finish and offered a reward for their return. After the 1931 parade, in Macy's telling, the blue hippo was last spotted sailing past the Empire State Building. Every other balloon from that year was accounted for. [10]

For the 100th parade, Macy's is bringing the character back. Families watching from Chautauqua County can catch the broadcast at 8:30 a.m. Thursday on NBC or stream it on Peacock. The route runs two and a half miles from Manhattan's Upper West Side to Herald Square. If there's a kid in the room who thinks grown-ups always know where everything went, save them the story of the hippopotamus. [10] [12]



Santa reaches 57th Street and Broadway in the 2008 Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. "Santa Claus arrives." by tweber1 on Flickr · CC BY-SA 2.0 · resized and cropped to fit in print

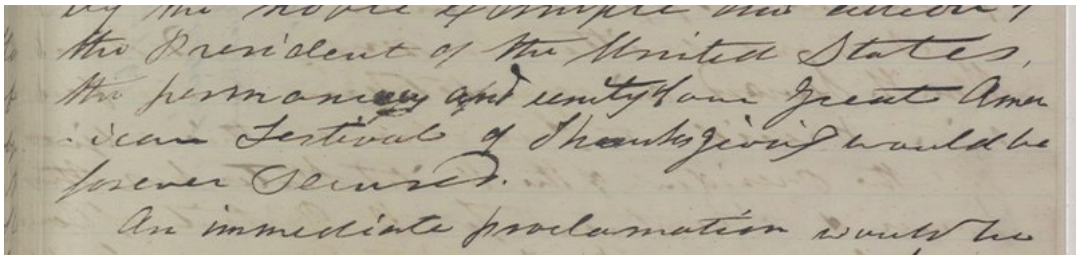
The editor who asked for a Thursday



Sarah Josepha Hale in an 1880 engraving by J. D. Buttre. J. D. Buttre / Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division · Public domain

Sarah Josepha Hale marked her letter to Lincoln “Private.” A few lines down, she assured him that the three papers she had enclosed were printed and would be easy to read. You can see the reason for the courtesy in her own handwriting. The lines are close together. She had a good deal to fit on the page. [11]

As editor of Godey’s Lady’s Book, Hale had spent fifteen years arguing for one Thanksgiving date across the states. She had written to governors. She had sent the idea to naval commanders. By September 1863 she knew what it was to get a kind reply and still have nothing settled. This time she sent the president a plan. He could name the day for the people under federal authority and invite the governors to do the same. She even supplied the date for that year, Thursday, November 26. [11]

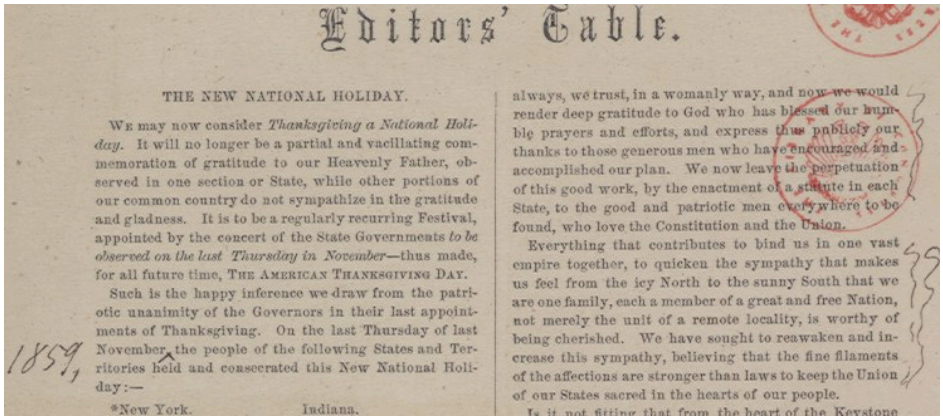


A detail from Hale’s September 28, 1863 letter to President Lincoln. Sarah Josepha Hale / Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Abraham Lincoln Papers · Public domain

Five days after the date on her letter, Lincoln issued his proclamation calling for Thanksgiving on the last Thursday of November. It took Americans considerably longer to settle which Thursday they meant. In 1939, Franklin Roosevelt moved the observance up a week amid concerns about the short Christmas shopping season. Some states followed him. Others kept the old date. A family crossing a state line for dinner could have had a perfectly good reason to ask when the relatives were eating. [11] [13]

Congress eventually settled on the fourth Thursday. Roosevelt signed the measure on December 26, 1941. This year, the fourth and last Thursdays happen to be the same day, just as they were when Hale wrote to Lincoln. If someone at your table still has a family letter tucked in a drawer, ask to see it. A signature and a date are a fine place to start. [13]

Sources & further reading



Editors' Table.

THE NEW NATIONAL HOLIDAY.

We may now consider *Thanksgiving a National Holiday*. It will no longer be a partial and vacillating commemoration of gratitude to our Heavenly Father, observed in one section or State, while other portions of our common country do not sympathize in the gratitude and gladness. It is to be a regularly recurring Festival, appointed by the concert of the State Governments *to be observed on the last Thursday in November*—thus made, for all future time, THE AMERICAN THANKSGIVING DAY.

Such is the happy inference we draw from the patriotic unanimity of the Governors in their last appointments of Thanksgiving. On the last Thursday of last November, the people of the following States and Territories held and consecrated this New National Holiday:—

*New York. Indiana.

1859,

always, we trust, in a womanly way, and now we would render deep gratitude to God who has blessed our humble prayers and efforts, and express thus publicly our thanks to those generous men who have encouraged and accomplished our plan. We now leave the perpetuation of this good work, by the enactment of a statute in each State, to the good and patriotic men everywhere to be found, who love the Constitution and the Union.

Everything that contributes to bind us in one vast empire together, to quicken the sympathy that makes us feel from the icy North to the sunny South that we are one family, each a member of a great and free Nation, not merely the unit of a remote locality, is worthy of being cherished. We have sought to reawaken and increase this sympathy, believing that the fine filaments of the affections are stronger than laws to keep the Union of our States sacred in the hearts of our people.

Is it not fitting that from the heart of the Keystone

The Editors' Table in Godey's Lady's Book takes up the new national holiday. Godey's Lady's Book / Library of Congress, Manuscript Division · Public domain

1. How the Fenton mansion was built
2. Meet the Fenton family
3. Fenton History Center holiday exhibit and opening hours
4. Jamestown Area YMCA race-day times, fees and addresses
5. Amy King's 2026 race and memorial
6. Festivals Fredonia program and recorded story times
7. Bemus Point parade, clothing drive and tree lighting
8. WRFA Harvest Sessions lineup and venue
9. Listen to Early Attic on WRFA's Arts on Fire
10. Macy's account of the missing blue hippo
11. Read Hale's letter to Lincoln and its transcript
12. Macy's 100th parade route and broadcast
13. National Archives on the two Thanksgivings and the 1941 law
14. Library of Congress on Hale, with archival illustrations
15. Fenton mansion photo license · Attribution 2.0
16. Fredonia street photo license · Attribution 3.0
17. Macy's parade photo license · Attribution-ShareAlike 2.0