

18th-Century Thanksgiving Dinner Offered At Wethersfield Museum

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WETHERSFIELD — Revolutionary War hero Silas Deane and his wife request the pleasure of your company for Thanksgiving dinner.

Your hosts will greet you in colonial garb at their Old Wethersfield [home](#). After a drink of Madeira wine – patriotic because it's not subject to British taxation – and listening to chamber music, you will join the Deanes for an authentic 18th-century Thanksgiving feast of venison pie, roast goose and pork, as well as various period vegetable dishes and desserts.

Such is the bill of fare for the Webb-Deane-Stevens Museum's second annual colonial Thanksgiving dinner on Sunday, Nov. 11.

The dinner has room for up to 140 guests at a cost of \$75 per person, including wine, hors d'oeuvres and tours of the Deane, Webb and Stevens [homes](#).

Adding to the authenticity, re-enactors playing the roles of Deane, his wife and servants will remain in character throughout the meal, museum media coordinator Julie Winkel said. During dessert, local food historian Paul Courchain will discuss details of the 18th-century menu, Winkel said.

"People can come and get an idea of what an authentic Thanksgiving meal would have been like during the Revolutionary War," Winkel said.

The dinner is based in part on a rare account of a 1779 Thanksgiving dinner in a letter written by Juliana Smith, Winkel said. The Sharon resident describes in sumptuous detail the huge meal prepared and consumed by her family and neighbors, including red deer, pigeon, goose, and mince pies, as well as Indian puddings, cakes and pies.

Smith mentions food shortages caused by the war, which she calls "our resistance to an unjust authority."

"Of course we could have no roast beef," she writes. "None of us have tasted beef this three years back as it all must go to the army, & too little they get, poor fellows."

Connecticut was the first colony to proclaim a Thanksgiving holiday, doing so in 1649, said Katie Sullivan, a guide at the museum. Other colonies followed suit, each setting a different day to give thanks to God for a good harvest, Sullivan said.

"You could have Thanksgiving in Connecticut and go up to Massachusetts and have it again with your relatives because everyone was different," she said.

Colonies set Thanksgiving for November or early December. The day varied from year to year depending on the harvest time, Sullivan said.

"If your harvest wasn't over, you're not going to have time to have a Thanksgiving," she said.

The holiday was always on a weekday so as not to interfere with Sunday church services. People went to church and then came home to Thanksgiving dinner, Sullivan said.

In 1863, President Abraham Lincoln made the holiday universal and set a date of the last Thursday in November, Sullivan said. Thanksgiving, however, didn't become an official federal holiday until 1941, she said.

The dinner is from noon to 2:30 p.m. Reservations are required. For tickets, call 860-529-0612, ext. 12.

To read Juliana Smith's full letter, go to <http://www.colebrookhistoricalsociety.org>.