

Today in Columbus History:

On November 18, 1874, a story appeared in the Daily Columbus Enquirer-Sun entitled "Thanksgiving." The story was basically a notification that the newspaper would not be published on Friday November 20 to observe a day of Thanksgiving and Prayer on Thursday as proclaimed by Governor James Milton Smith. Another article on the same day mentioned that Dr. Lovick Pierce would be preaching at the Methodist church that day, as well. A local brief also stated that, "The thanksgiving turkies have been killed, and Georgians will eat them tomorrow."

At the time, the Columbus Enquirer-Sun was not published on Mondays to avoid working on Sunday to prepare them. Thanksgiving would work the same way. What was different this year was that the citizens of Columbus and the entire state of Georgia were treated to a second helping of the holiday. President Grant had already proclaimed Thursday November 26, 1874 as a national day of Thanksgiving in October. So, there were no papers in Columbus on the 20th or 27th of November that year.

Presidential proclamations of Thanksgiving date back to George Washington in 1789. John Adams and James Madison both proclaimed Thanksgiving holidays but Thomas Jefferson did not. No formal Thanksgivings were proclaimed after 1815. However, by 1854, 30 states and territories had Thanksgiving holidays. The Confederate States celebrated when Jefferson Davis proclaimed them in 1861 and 1862. An annual national holiday of Thanksgiving only started with Abraham Lincoln. He proclaimed the last Thursday in November as such in 1863 for the victory at Gettysburg and at the urging of Sara Josepha Hale. She was the editor of "Godey's Lady's Book" and the author of the poem "Mary Had A Little Lamb." She had lobbied U.S. presidents Taylor, Fillmore, Pierce and Buchanan to adopt a permanent national holiday. President Grant made Thanksgiving a federal holiday in Washington, DC in 1870. Congress followed in 1885 making it a paid federal holiday throughout the country.

Back in Columbus, another story entitled "Thanksgiving" appeared a week later, on November 25, 1874. This one was a long and scathing criticism of the conflicting proclamation. The paper recognized that Governor Smith was using the holiday to celebrate a political victory in the recent election, which it considered petty. It said, in part:

"Governor Smith, of Georgia, is, we think, a good man, and we have given him credit for strength, but Governor Smith of Georgia, betrayed an unexpected littleness when he exercised the prerogative of setting aside a special day of Thanksgiving for Georgia, and thus necessitated every law-abiding citizen's doing the unusual thing of thanking God one Thursday for the political success of a party, and then thanking Him in a general way the following Thursday for any favor He many have extended to us outside of His special interference [on] behalf of the Democratic party."

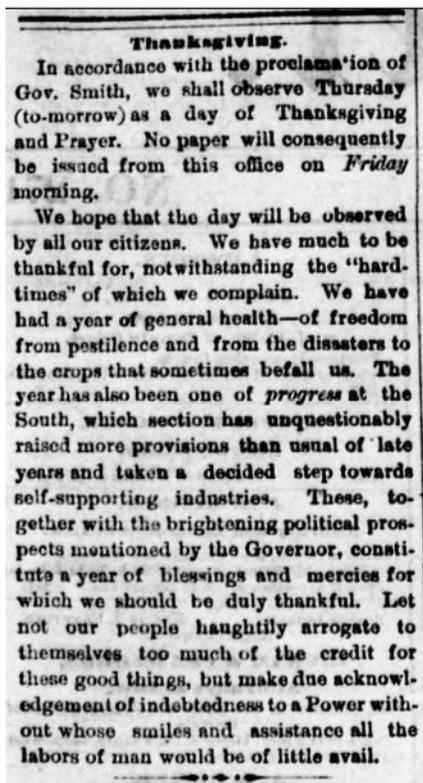
Governor James Milton Smith was a native of Twiggs County, Georgia but set up his first law office in Columbus in 1846. He joined the 13th Georgia Infantry as a Captain in 1862 and was promoted to Colonel by 1864. Wounded at Cold Harbor, he returned to Columbus where he was elected to the Confederate Congress, serving until the end of the War. After the War he resumed his law practice as one half of the firm Smith & Alexander. He was elected to the Georgia House of Representatives in 1870 and became the Speaker in 1871. He was elected governor after running unopposed later that year and served two terms. Smith then served a six-year term as Chairman of the Georgia Railroad Commission. He ended his career

as a Superior Court Judge in the Chattahoochee Circuit from 1888 until 1890. He died in Columbus on November 25, 1890. He was married twice. His first wife Hester Brown Smith died in 1880 and is buried in Gainesville, Georgia. Smith is buried with her. His second wife, Florida Abercrombie Wellborn Smith, was the widow of Samuel Wellborn and died in 1925. She is buried with her first husband in Linwood Cemetery.

Clipping from Georgia Historic Newspapers (GALILEO).

Daniel A. Bellware

Our weekly snippets of Columbus history are usually based on a few days-worth of searching through the most popular sources for Muscogee County history. Meant to inspire readers to explore more about Columbus history, they are not exhaustive dissertations on the topic and may contain mistakes. If you have corrections or additional information, feel free to share them with the group.



Columbus Enquirer-Sun, November 18, 1874, <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>



James Milton Smith from Wikipedia.org

**Observance of Thanksgiving Day by the
Methodists.**

The Methodists of the city and vicinity will unite in religious services to-morrow at St. Luke Church. At eleven o'clock in the morning the venerable Dr. Lovic Pierce will preach. This honored divine still preserves all the vigor of thought and force of expression that has through life characterized his sermons. His voice begins to fail somewhat. No wonder, when it has been exercised for ninety-one years.

Columbus Enquirer-Sun November 18, 1874, <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>

STATE OF GEORGIA.

PROCLAMATION.

By JAMES M. SMITH, Governor.

In grateful recognition of that Providence which has rewarded our labors with plenty, and protected our homes from pestilence; and in reverend acknowledgment of the signal favor of Almighty God, lately vouchsafed to our entire country, in arresting the evil tendencies of the times, and assuring a speedy restoration of fraternity and good government, I, James M. Smith, Governor of Georgia, do hereby designate and appoint Thursday, the 19th day of November, the present month, to be observed as a day of public Thanksgiving and Prayer.

I earnestly recommend that all the people of the State do, upon that day, abstain from their usual avocations, and, assembling at their places of religious worship, gratefully acknowledge the Divine favor in the past, and invoke its continuance upon us and our posterity.

Given under my hand and the seal of the Executive Department, at the Capitol, in the city of Atlanta, this seventh day of November, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and seventy-four.

JAMES M. SMITH, Governor.

By the Governor:
J. W. WARREN,
Secretary Executive Department.

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Columbus Enquirer-Sun November 10, 1874, <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>

—The thanksgiving turkies have been killed, and Georgians will eat them tomorrow.

Columbus Enquirer-Sun November 18, 1874, <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>