

ORIGIN OF PROCLAMATION

Washington's Thanksgiving Message Was Lost for Over One Hundred Years; Now is Safeguarded

Few Americans know that the original Presidential Thanksgiving Proclamation was lost for over a hundred years; that it was found at an auction sale in 1921; that it was bought by the Library of Congress for \$300; and that it now reposes in the archives of that institution—one of the most valuable documents in the world. The division of Information and Publication of the George Washington Bicentennial commission, in a statement issued this week relates the story of the lost proclamation.

On September 25, 1789, Elias Boudinot introduced the following resolution in the House of Representatives:

"Resolved, That a joint committee of both Houses be directed to wait upon the President of the United States, to request that he would recommend to the people of the United States a day of public Thanksgiving and prayer, to be observed by acknowledging, with grateful hearts, the many signal favors of Almighty God, especially by affording them an opportunity to establish a constitution of government for their safety and happiness."

Objections Are Raised
Harmless as this resolution seems, there were objections to it. In reading the annals of Congress of that period, we find that Representative Aedanus Burke of South Carolina thought we should not "mimic Europe" where they made a mere mockery of thanksgiving. Representative Thomas Tudor Tucker, also of South Carolina, argued that it was not the business of Congress to ask for a national day of Thanksgiving, saying that, "they (the people) may not be inclined to return thanks for a Constitution until they have experienced that it promotes their safety and happiness."

These objections, however, were overruled; the resolution was passed and sent to the Senate for concurrence. The Senate approved and appointed its committee to wait on the President. Washington complied with the request and on October 3, 1789, issued his proclamation calling for a national day of Thanksgiving on Thursday, November 26.

Lost and Found
And then the document dropped out of sight. It apparently was misplaced or attached to some private papers in the process of moving official records from one city to another when the capital was changed. However, it happened, the original manuscript was not in the official archives until 1921 when Dr. J. C. Fitzpatrick, then assistant chief of the Manuscripts division of the Library of Congress, and now editor of the forthcoming George Washington Bicentennial series of Washington's writings, "found" the proclamation. It was at an auction sale being held in the American Art Galleries of New York City. Dr. Fitzpatrick, an expert in Washingtonia, examined the document and found it to be authentic.

It was written in long hand by Wm. Jackson, secretary to President Washington at the time, and was signed in George Washington's bold hand. Dr. Fitzpatrick purchased the document for \$300 for the Library of Congress, where it is now kept as a treasure. And no amount of money could remove it.

The original Proclamation of Thanksgiving, and, indeed, the first Presidential proclamation ever issued in the United States, reads as follows:

"By the President of the United States of America,
"Whereas it is the duty of all nations to acknowledge

the providence of Almighty God, to obey his will, to be grateful for his benefits, and humbly to implore his protection and favor—and Whereas both Houses of Congress have by their joint committee requested me to recommend to the People of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer, to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many signal favors of Almighty God, especially by affording them an opportunity to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness."

Washington's Words
"Now, therefore, I do recommend and assign Thursday, the 26th day of November next, to be devoted by the People of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being who is the beneficent Author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be—That we may then all unite in rendering unto Him our sincere and humble thanks—for His kind care and protection of the People of this country previous to their becoming a Nation—for the signal and manifold mercies and the favorable interpositions of His providence, which we experienced in the course and conclusion of the late war—for the great degree of tranquillity, union, and plenty, which we have since enjoyed—for the peaceable and rational manner in which we have been enabled to establish constitutions of government for our safety and happiness, and particularly the national One now lately instituted—for the civil and religious liberty with which we are blessed and the means we have of acquiring and diffusing useful knowledge; and in general for all the great and various favors which He hath been pleased to confer upon us.

"And also that we may then unite in most humbly offering our prayers and supplications to the great Lord and Ruler of Nations, and beseech Him to pardon our national and other transgressions—to enable us all, whether in public or private stations, to perform our several and relative duties properly and punctually—to render our national government a blessing to all the People by constantly being a Government of wise, just, and constitutional laws, discreetly and faithfully executed and obeyed—to protect and guide all Sovereigns and Nations (especially such as have shown kindness to us) and to bless them with good Government, peace, and concord. To promote the knowledge and practice of true religion and virtue, and the increase of science among them and us—and generally to grant unto all mankind such a degree of temporal prosperity as He alone knows to be best.

"Given under my hand at the City of New York the third day of October in the year of our Lord, 1789.

(Signed)
GEORGE WASHINGTON."

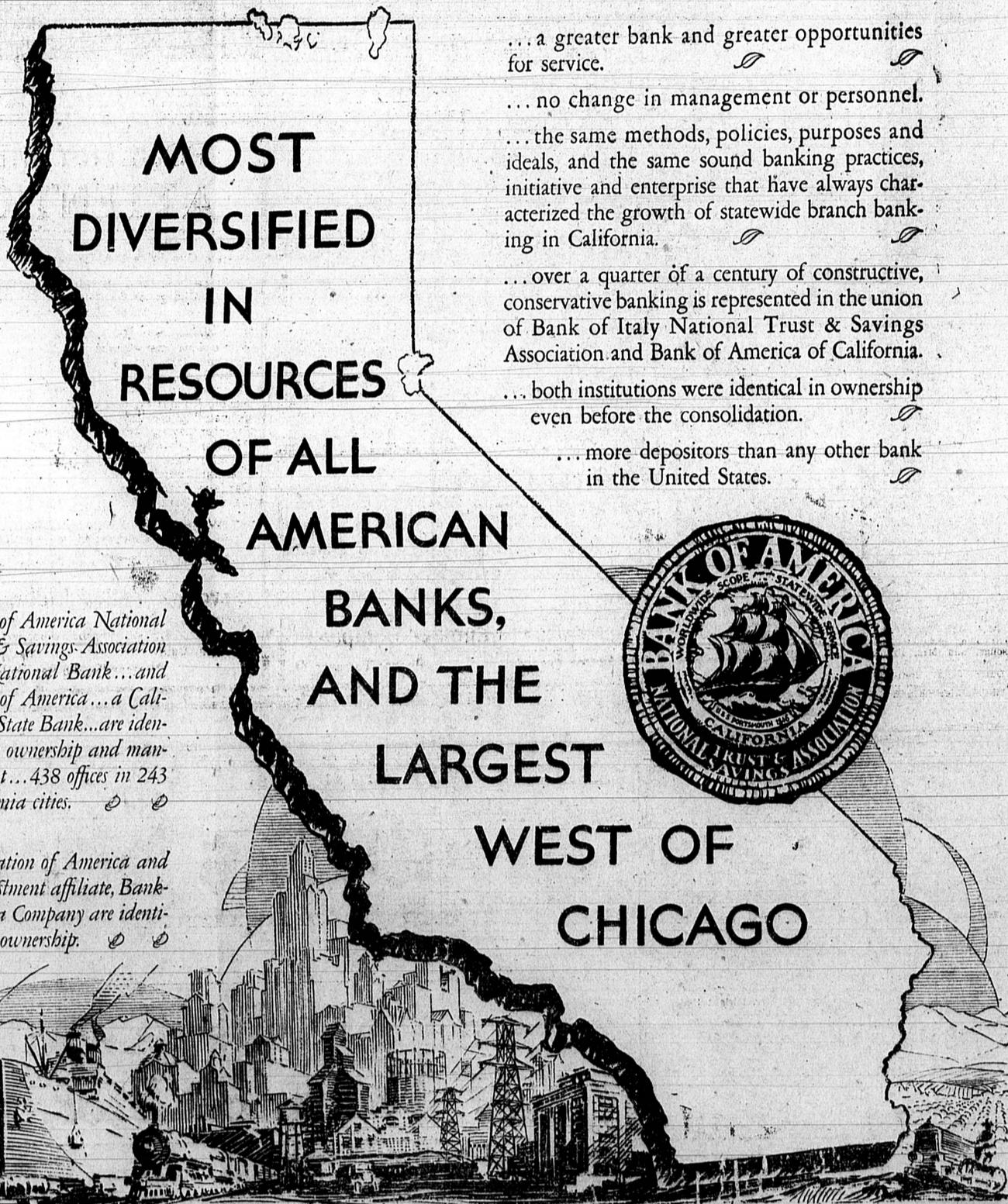
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