

Ottawa Journal: The Origins of Christmas Turkey

By David Tilson, MP

There are many favourite Christmas traditions. One of the most popular and beloved traditions is Christmas dinner with all of the trimmings. We all have our own variations and interpretations of the Christmas dinner; however, for many households, the centerpiece of Christmas dinner is the Christmas turkey.

It's a tradition we can all remember growing up with, but may not be aware that its origins date back many centuries.

Christmas dinner can vary from country to country around the world. However, in many regions of the world, specifically countries that were former British colonies, Christmas dinner has ties to the English Christmas dinner, which most often consists of roasted meats and pudding of some form.

According to some sources, turkeys were first introduced to Britain more than 500 years ago by Yorkshireman William Strickland who, in 1526, came into possession of six turkeys from American Indian traders during his travels and sold them for two pence each in Bristol.

Previous to this, roast goose, beef, boar's head, or even peacock was the preferred meat for Christmas dinner. It has been said that Henry VIII was the first English King to dine on turkey; however, Edward VII was responsible for popularizing turkey for Christmas dinner. Turkey also came to replace peacock on the table of the Royal Courts.

Some sources credit Queen Victoria for helping to solidify turkey's place at the Christmas dinner table through her marriage to Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha of Germany. It has been said that he brought the tradition of turkey from his homeland to Britain and by the end of the nineteenth century, most people dined on turkey for their Christmas dinner.

It has also been said that up until the 1950s, dining on turkey for Christmas dinner was considered a luxury, as it was about this time when refrigerators became common in households and turkeys also became more affordable and accessible for families. According to some sources, it would take an entire week's wage in 1930 to purchase a turkey. It's also been said that turkey's popularity as the preferred roasted meat for Christmas dinner may also be attributed to the bird's larger size for a family dinner and its affordability.

We all eagerly anticipate Christmas dinner with the Christmas turkey or whatever our favourite Christmas dinner foods may be, as it completes the celebratory nature of the season known for peace, joy, and goodwill. It's the season of giving and is an excellent opportunity for all of us to extend generosity to those who are less fortunate, to ensure everyone shares in the joy and magic of the season, including a delicious Christmas dinner.

As the Member of Parliament for Dufferin-Caledon, I sincerely wish you a very Merry Christmas and that you may enjoy your Christmas dinner (whether it may include the infamous Christmas turkey or not) surrounded by loved ones and that it may be filled with peace and joy!