



## The Order of Good Cheer

Good morning,

On November 14, 1606, a thanksgiving feast was held by the inhabitants of Port-Royal in modern-day Nova Scotia. This was far more than just a standard “harvest festival.” For the people of Port-Royal, the feast was a matter of pure survival. The previous year, many of the settlers had become sick with scurvy. One of Port-Royal’s leaders, Samuel de Champlain, described it this way:

*During the winter, an illness attacked many of our people. [It] increased to such a degree that they could hardly eat anything except in liquid form. Their teeth barely held in place...which caused them to bleed extensively from the mouth. Afterwards, severe pain developed in their arms and legs, which became swollen and very hard, and covered with spots like fleabites. They could not walk due to the tightness of the nerves. Consequently, they had almost no strength and suffered unbearable pain. They also had severe cramps in the loins, stomachs and bowels, together with a very bad cough and shortness of breath. Unfortunately, we could find no remedy to cure these symptoms.<sup>1</sup>*

To prevent such a disaster from happening again, Champlain founded a society called “l’Ordre de Bon Temps,” or “The Order of Good Cheer.” The society’s goal was to improve the nutrition of the settlers before the next winter struck so they could stave off another wave of scurvy.

It was the help of the local Mi’kmaq Nation, however, that ensured Port-Royal’s survival. The Mi’kmaq showed the settlers which foods would get them through the winter – most notably cranberries, which are high in Vitamin C. (Today, we know that Vitamin C is the key to preventing scurvy.) With this knowledge, the Order held a series of weekly feasts, each designed to make the settlers as healthy as possible before the cold set in. At the most famous of these feasts – the one on November 16, 1606 – many of the neighbouring Mi’kmaq people were invited to join in.

While it’s interesting to look at historical events like this, it’s probably a stretch to connect our current Thanksgiving holiday with the one held so many centuries ago. It wouldn’t be until 1879 – two-hundred and seventy-three years later – that Thanksgiving (with a capital T) became a national holiday. In the meantime, many of the traditions we now associate with Thanksgiving came from harvest festivals and sporadic, one-off holidays that individual communities would hold beginning in the late 1700s.

Despite that, we still think it’s important to remember the story of Port-Royal, the Mi’kmaq Nation, and “The Order of Good Cheer.” That’s because the story shows exactly why Thanksgiving is so important now.

These days, most of us will never have to worry about scurvy. Most of us will never have to wonder how we'll survive the winter. Advancements in food production, nutrition, medicine, construction, electricity, and a hundred other areas have created a world where we can expect to live well into our golden years...

And that, to us, is worth celebrating.

When we compare our lives and lifestyles with those of our ancestors, we realize just how much we have to be thankful for. Country and community. Family and friends. Health and vitality. Rights and freedoms. Fun and games. While it's easy to take these things for granted, truly pondering them on Thanksgiving makes us realize just how valuable they really are – because many of our ancestors didn't have them to the extent that we do. Because our ancestors knew those things could vanish in an instant.

Of course, we still have our own challenges to face. Our own worries, our own problems, our own questions, both as individuals and as a nation. That will always be so. But this holiday, for us, is truly a chance to be of "good cheer." Because we have so many things to cheer about! So, this Thanksgiving, let's all spare a thought for those who came before us...so we can recognize all the things that have come after.

So that we can truly cherish and pass on the things we have now.

On behalf of everyone at the SM Financial Group, we wish you a safe and happy Thanksgiving!

Sincerely,



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Sources:

1 "Champlain's Description of Scurvy," *Government of Canada*, <https://parks.canada.ca/lhn-nhs/nb/stcroix/culture/scorbut-scurvy>



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