

THANKSGIVING



W A T E R H O U S E S Y M B O L I S M N E W S L E T T E R # 6 5

SPECIAL SYMBOLS

- Apples convey earthly desires, the Fall of Man and discord
- Beans convey false philosophy, energy and ghosts
- Candles convey life, especially that of an individual and hope
- Wheat conveys prosperity, wisdom the bounty of the earth

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One of the symbols connected to Thanksgiving is apples. They convey earthly desires, indulgence of earthly desires, the Fall of Man, procreation, discord, immortality, rejuvenation, death, beginning, autumn, but also herald of spring, deceit, unity, temptation and sexual enjoyment.

Apples are the attributes of the Three Graces, Venus and Venus' handmaidens. If you see three apples in iconology, it is the attribute of Saint Dorothy.

After the Roman Empire overtook the Celts, some Roman traditions filtered into the Samhain festival celebration. One was worshipping Pomona, the goddess of the harvest. She was most often seen sitting on a basket of fruits and the apple was considered her sacred fruit. The game of bobbing for apples was derived

apples

from this ritual, and it was believed that whoever bobbed the first apple would the next to marry.

This Thanksgiving postcard



was mailed in 1912 and was done by the Stretcher Lithography Company. At that time, it was important to send your family and friends Thanksgiving postcards.



Albrecht Durer's Adam and Eve

CORNUCOPIA

Cornucopia conveys abundance and nourishment, commonly a large horn-shaped container overflowing with produce, flowers, nuts, other edibles or wealth in some form. Originating in classical antiquity, it has continued as a symbol in Western art, and in

North America is particularly associated with the Thanksgiving holiday.

I remember as a child seeing a cornucopia in the middle of the dining room table with apples, nuts, and small pumpkins coming out of it.



Coat of arms of Copiapó, Chile

C O R N

Corn conveys fertility, germination and growth, development of a potentiality, health, plenty, peace, prosperity and a spermatid image.

In the photograph to the right, the ear of corn cut by a sickle being held by a hand is the symbol of life cut short and mourning or death.

The hand can also be a reference to God and the idea that God chooses when and where we all die. Even though we die here on earth,

we will have eternal life.

The epitaph on this stone is pretty remarkable. At the top, we see "The Reapers are the Angels" and the bottom, we see "As a Shock of Corn in His Season".

In other words, God decides when it is one's time to go. Once again, the ear of corn is a symbol of fertility and rebirth.

The connection to Thanksgiving is that the Native Americans discovered corn.



Burial Hill, Boston, MA

We can only be said to be alive in those moments when our hearts are conscious of our treasures.

~ Thornton Wilder

Pumpkins convey autumn, feminine symbol of containment and the worlds—earthly and celestial.

Most Thanksgiving tables include the customary and delicious 'Pumpkin Pie.' Pumpkin was a staple food for the pilgrims. Even the leaves of the pumpkins were used in dishes.

Another reflection of Thanks-

giving's history as a harvest celebration is the presence of fall fruits such as gourds. Pumpkins are native to North America and as such are an appropriate decoration for American Thanksgiving tables. Many gourds are especially suited to use as decorations for Thanksgiving because of their rich autumnal colors. Special white varieties are making an appearance in recent years to add a modern twist to this tradition.



B E A N S

Beans convey false philosophy, energy, ghosts, resurrection, reincarnation and a humble food,

Native Americans taught the pilgrims to grow beans near corn stalks so that the vines could grow on it like a pole, hence the term 'Pole Beans'. Along with corn and squash,

these beans were known as one of the Three Sisters, or three staple foods that grew well together. While pole beans could grow up the corn stalks, squash could be planted between the corn rows.

The connection to Thanksgiving is that beans are included in many dishes.



TURKEYS

Turkeys convey arrogance, pride, foolishness, lunacy, senseless anger, ostentation and vanity.

Perhaps the most essential image of Thanksgiving in America is the turkey. While it's unlikely that the Pilgrims dined on turkey during their celebration in 1621, the bird is the focal point of many present-day holiday meals and often literally occupies a good portion of the Thanksgiving table. Turkey is so central to the holiday, in fact, that Thanksgiving is sometimes re-

ferred to as "Turkey Day." As such, images of turkeys are prevalent in Thanksgiving decorations. From decorations with friendly cartoon birds to tracings of small hands with added gobbles to realistic feathered figures, representations of the turkey are a part of many Thanksgiving celebrations.

Wild turkeys are spotted many times on the Cape gathering in different parts. Last week, I spotted them in Sandwich's Bayview Cemetery.



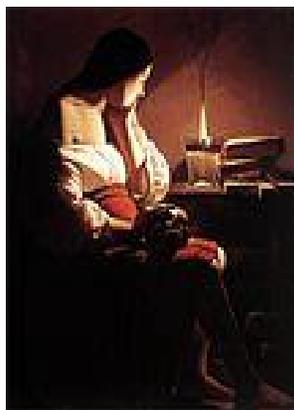
CANDLES

Candles, which are used as part of Thanksgiving decorations, convey life, especially that of an individual, hope, learning, festivity, the eternal soul, charm against evil spirits, Christ as the light of the world and romance.

Indispensible to many holidays, candles can provide an especially warm glow at Thanksgiving. A candle with a rich, warm scent of apple or harvest spices may help to set the mood around the holiday. A collection of votives in any

room can create a festive glow. Candles surrounded by flowers and fruits make for perfectly elegant Thanksgiving table centerpieces.

Many artists throughout history portray candles in their work. One example is Georges de La Tour (March 13, 1593 – January 30, 1652) who was a French Baroque painter that spent most of his working life in the Duchy of Lorraine, which was temporarily absorbed into France between 1641 and 1648.



Georges de la Tour
Magdalene with the Smoking Flame, c. 1640
Los Angeles County Museum of Art

Give thanks
for unknown
blessings
already on
their way.

~ Native
American
Saying

WHEAT

Wheat conveys prosperity, wisdom, the bounty of the earth, the bread of the Eucharistic and a spermatic image.

In Renaissance art, wheat is related to the harvest and summer even though wheat is harvested in the fall. Wheat is one of the basic foodstuffs and thought of as a gift from God particularly because its origin is unknown. It also denotes immortality and resurrection

because it is used as a harvested grain.

The association with immortality may also be connected in ancient Greece and Rome who sprinkled wheat or flour on victims' heads before they sacrificed them. Other connections to wheat include prosperity, wisdom, bounty of the earth, and unification.

Wheat is part of the Thanksgiving decorations.



Springwood Cemetery, Greenville, SC

**What are your ideas
for future newsletters?**



**WATERHOUSE
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The mission of Waterhouse Symbolism is to research and document symbols locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.

NOTES FROM THE EDITOR

I always think of November and the celebration of Thanksgiving as the moment for us to stop and think of all the things to be thankful for. Even though our country is in a terrible economic downtown, we all have our health, family and friends to be thankful for. We also have our interests which in many cases are very diverse.

Happy Thanksgiving!

Take care,

Richard Waterhouse

FOLLOW UP FROM LAST MONTH'S ISSUE

In last month's issue, I showed the two stones of "Hanging from the Cross". Janet Seapker and Cathy Vogel identified where the subject matter comes from.

Janet explains that "Hanging on the Cross" monuments were take-offs of J. A. S. Oertel's painting "Rock of Ages." "He painted a young girl in the congregation for this scene while he was the rector of St. James's Episcopal Church here in Wilmington. It became a very popular picture in the Victorian era. I know you've seen it. Then it became the symbol for the Rock of Ages monument company, but they don't seem to use it anymore. The image to the right is for the wife of the main mortician in

Wilmington, NC. I don't know who fabricated the marker."

Cathy explains that "in regards to "Hanging on the cross" (Mike Brubaker), how about "Nothing in my hand I bring: simply to thy cross I cling" v.3 "Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me?"

The original painting that the sculpture was based on by Oertel was probably painted in the 1870's. It was sold in 1875 and the auction house explains about Mr. Oertel that "the versatility and genius possessed by Mr. Oertel are known and appreciated by a large circle of connoisseurs. This is the only opportunity to acquire any of his work for some five years, and, as he goes abroad."

