The Pilgrims were Separatists, NOT Puritans. The Puritans believed in a state church with mandatory attendance and other forms of coercion to achieve religious conformity. The Separatists rejected the whole idea of a state church and the coercion that went with it.

mostly from The Indian Who Made Thanksgiving Possible by Austin C. Kutz-Marks (University Christian Church)

Why had the Pilgrims come to these cold and inhospitable shores of Massachusetts? Because they believed in a purer and simpler approach to God than practiced by the Church of England, they were persecuted because of their convictions. In 1608 they fled to Holland to escape. But that didn't work out either; so they adopted a bold plan to leave Holland, for the New World…America. The Pilgrims had intended to go to Virginia, but whether because of poor navigation, or other unknown factors, they ended up in what would become Massachusetts, instead. And they would never have survived there were it not for one Christian Indian.

Perhaps in all history, no group of people, no heritage of faith, no national life has owed so much to a single individual. Let us call him THE INDIAN WHO MADE THANKSGIVING POSSIBLE. Records of him exist in several of the Pilgrim's writings. His name was TISQUANTUM, or as he came to be known, SQUANTO. [Have any of seen the Walt Disney studios movie about him, *Squanto: A Warrior's Tale* ? It's just as well if you haven't seen it, because it is riddled with inaccuracies and doesn't give a good picture of the man or the history.]

From the beginning, Squanto's destiny was strongly linked with that of white folks. In 1605, an English exploring party, led by Captain George Weymouth, captured several Indians in New England. They took these Indians home to England, as a sort of souvenir. Among these was Squanto, a young brave of the Patuxit tribe. There is evidence that he was well treated by the British, but he constantly longed for his native land, his home.

Nine years later, in 1614, when Captain John Smith set out for the new world on a mapping expedition, Squanto sailed with him. The fleet landed at Thieves' Harbour, later to be known as Plymouth, Massachusetts. Squanto returned to his tribe, but not for long. One of the ships in Smith's fleet remained in the new world, when the other sailed. Its commander, Captain Thomas Hunt, was instructed to trade with the Indians and collect a cargo of beaver pelts and fish. In the course of this trading, Captain Hunt, a ruthless man, lured 27 Indians aboard his ship to trade beaver skins, where he bound them and threw them into the hold of the ship. This was a betrayal of Captain Smith. Captain Hunt was so totally despised by the English for this act of treachery (he jeopardized English trading relations with the Indians), that his career as a ship captain was over. Captain Hunt took Squanto and the other kidnapped Indians to Malaga, Spain, where he sold the Indians as slaves. Squanto was purchased by local friars who treated him well, and who instructed him in the Christian faith.

Some years later, he managed to get back to England. There, John Slanie, treasurer of the Newfoundland Company, discovered him and took him into his home. Again, Squanto yearned for his own native land. Slanie's friend, Captain Thomas Dermer, was planning an exploration of New England. Slanie arranged for Squanto to accompany him. Squanto was to be released to his homeland at the conclusion.

In 1619, Squanto came home again, probably the first American Indian to make two roundtrips to Europe! Dermer's first port of call was the Island of Monhegen, off the coast of what is now called Maine. Here they took on fish and picked up Samoset, a chief of the Wabenake Indians. (William Bradford specifically states on two separate occasions that Samoset learned his English from fishermen who came each year to fish off the coast of Maine, where Samoset lived.) They then sailed for Thieves' Harbour, dropping anchor there about six months before the arrival of the Pilgrims. Squanto was home again, but it wasn't really home anymore. During his absence, a plague had exterminated all his tribe. He found only empty fields, deserted villages with some of the dead lying unburied in crumbling huts. After this tragic homecoming, Squanto went to live among the Wampanoag, a neighboring tribe. But they were not his people, and Squanto was restless and unhappy. Squanto (Patuxit) and Samoset (Wabenake) stayed with the Wampanoag under the leadership of Massasoit.

MEANWHILE, BACK AT THE RANCH …

The Separatists left England for Holland for reasons of religious liberty; they were persecuted as heretics by the Church of England.
Both the Pilgrims and the Jews were victims of religious persecution.

- The Sephardic Jews were expelled from Spain in 1492; they scattered and eventually settled in different parts of Europe and the Middle East. A small group of Jews made Holland their home.
- The Pilgrims escaped England in 1608 to avoid the increasing intolerance of their Separatist views by the Bishop of Lincoln and Archbishop of York.
  - [The History channel wrote, "The Pilgrims, English Separatists that came to America in 1620, were even more orthodox in their beliefs than Cromwell. As a result, Christmas was not a holiday in early America. From 1659 to 1681, the celebration of Christmas was actually outlawed in Boston..."]

Both the Jews and the Pilgrims settled in Holland, a haven for religious dissenters and minorities, because of the country's religious tolerance.

In Holland the Pilgrim exiles had their first personal contacts with Jews, and even held worship services in an Amsterdam synagogue before establishing their own church in Leyden. One of their ministers, Henry Ainsworth, studied Jewish Biblical interpretation with the leading Dutch rabbis. Significantly, like many of the more radical Protestant Reformers, the Pilgrims were deeply grounded in the

tradition of the Hebrew Bible. As they studied the Scriptures, they came to see themselves as the "People of Israel", and saw, in their own experience of oppression and marginalization, deep parallels with Jewish history. They believed that they, too, were slaves, fleeing Pharaoh - King James I - crossing the Red Sea of the Atlantic - in a pilgrimage toward the Promised Land of the New World. So great an emphasis was placed on the Hebrew Scriptures, that the greatest Pilgrim leaders, Elder William Brewster and Governor William Bradford, became devoted students of the Hebrew language, so that they could read the Bible in its original tongue. Attempting to reclaim a simple, "pure" form of Christianity as close as possible to the early Church of Jesus' time, the Pilgrims sought a model in the traditions of Jewish observance and worship. The Pilgrims only spent a decade in Holland before leaving for the New World (America), but they were certainly there long enough to interact with the local Jewish population; the Pilgrims also would have witnessed Sukkot celebrations while living among the Sephardic Jews of Holland.

The Pilgrims' trip to these shores: The sailing ship on which they traveled was 180 ton vessel, tiny by today's standards, packed with 102 passengers, 25 crew members: the living space for each about the size of a contemporary army cot. From its departure from Europe in July of 1620 until the final disembarking of the Mayflower to settle on the harsh New England coastline, it had taken a long eight months. It was not until the 21st of March that enough houses had been built so the settlers could depart the ship for land. Scurvy, pneumonia, and tuberculosis ravaged those pioneers. More than half of them died before the first winter ended. Four whole families were wiped out. Only five of eighteen wives survived. The servants and single men were reduced from 29 to 19. Food was in such short supply that for a time their daily ration for each was but six kernels of corn and a clam.

BACK ON THE ROAD AGAIN…

The Indians had good reason to be suspicious of the whites, so they kept their distance for some time after the Mayflower landed. During the Pilgrim's early months, the colonists only saw small parties of Indians off at a distance. Samoset, Squanto's friend, the Wabenake chief, made the first overture to the whites. Some time in late March, Samoset, escorted by a small band of the Wampanoag, entered the Plymouth territory. The other Indians remained in the woods on the far side of the stream. But Samoset marched confidently down the main street of Plymouth. He saluted the colonists in English he had learned from British seamen, tradesman, and from his friend, Squanto. Samoset was the first Indian with whom the Pilgrims had spoken, and they were amazed to find him so self-possessed and friendly. But his first visit proved to be a real headache. And after a few days, he sobered up sufficiently from the Pilgrim's brandy and gin to make his departure.

March 22nd, the day after the last colonists had come ashore, two Indians appeared, and there was alarm throughout the settlement. Captain Miles Standish and his miniature army were ready to defend. But it was Samoset and his English-speaking friend Squanto. They brought news of great importance. The great chief Massasoit was nearby and proposing to meet them in person. There followed a certain amount of diplomatic negotiation. Edward Winslow represented the colonists. Squanto was the interpreter. When chief Massasoit arrived, he wore a massive chain of bone beads with a long knife hanging down in front, and deerskin tobacco pouch behind. He was led to one of the houses where a colored rug and cushions were set out. With a flourish of trumpets, Governor John Carver entered. This conference, or pow-wow, resulted in a peace treaty (which lasted for the remaining 40 years of Massasoit's life and was renewed by his sons). After the meeting, Massasoit left, but Squanto stayed on.

It could be said of Squanto that he was host to the Pilgrims rather than their guest. As the only survivor of the Patuxit tribe, he owned the land on which the Plymouth plantation stood. Individual Indians did not own land; land was held by the tribe in common, but he alone could lay claim to that land now.

Thanks to Squanto and their strong faith in God, the Pilgrims were so optimistic for the future that, when the Mayflower lifted anchor on April 5th, not one of them returned on it. Instead, they were busy planting their Indian corn. Squanto was their agricultural advisor. He told them, "the time for planting is when the leaves of the white oak are as large as a mouse's ear." He also taught them how to set traps for herring. Herring were used to fertilize the ground in which the corn was to grown. Three in each hillock, their noses together and their tails fanning out. He cautioned the Pilgrims to put guards over the fields to prevent other animals from digging up the fish.

By autumn, the Pilgrims had much to be thankful for.

https://www.hebrew4christians.com/Holidays/Fall_Holidays/Sukkot/Thanksgiving/thanksgiving.html
It is likely that the Pilgrims learned that Sukkot commemorated Israel's deliverance from their religious persecution in ancient Egypt at that time. After they emigrated to the "Promised Land" of America, it is not surprising that the Pilgrims may have chosen the festival of Sukkot as the paradigm for their own celebration. As the Torah commands: "[Celebrate the feast] so that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God" (Lev. 23:39-43). The highly religious Pilgrims regarded their perilous journey to the new world as a type of "Exodus event" and therefore sought the appropriate Biblical holiday to commemorate their safe arrival in a land full of new promise...

http://www.mechon-mamre.org/jewfaq/holiday5.htm
Many people in the USA, upon seeing a decorated sukkah for the first time, remark on how much the sukkah (and the holiday generally) reminds them of

Thanksgiving. This is not entirely coincidental. The American Pilgrims, who originated the Thanksgiving holiday, were deeply religious people. When they were trying to find a way to express their thanks for their survival and for the harvest, they looked to the Bible for an appropriate way of celebrating and based their holiday in part on Sukkot (facts somehow not taught in US public schools!).

http://www.baldwinpergolas.com/sukkah.php

The Sukkot explanation of Thanksgiving fits better with the meticulous research of Mayflower historian Caleb Johnson, who believes that the original Thanksgiving was a harvest festival (as is Sukkot), that it was observed in October (as Sukkot usually is), and that Pilgrims would not have celebrated a holiday that was not in the Bible (but Sukkot is in the Bible). Although Mr. Johnson claims that the first Thanksgiving was "not a religious holiday or observance," he apparently means this in a Christian sense, because he goes on to say that the first Thanksgiving was instead "a harvest festival that included feasts, sporting events, and other activities," concepts very much in keeping with the Jewish religious observance of Sukkot.

Perhaps their chief blessing was Squanto. It was he whom they sent to Chief Massasoit to join the Pilgrims in a feast of thanksgiving. It was expected the chief would bring his brother and a small company of braves. When he arrived with 90 men, outnumbering his hosts by 40, the colonists were unquestionably taken aback! The high spirits of the Indians broke the pattern of Pilgrim seriousness, making the first Thanksgiving into a three-day time of feasting and revelry. The Pilgrims' "First Thanksgiving" most likely occurred sometime in October, and was not a religious holiday or observance, but rather a harvest festival that included feasts, sporting events, and other activities. "Our harvest being gotten in, our governor sent four men on fowling, that so we might after a special manner rejoice together after we had gathered the fruits of our labors ... many of the Indians coming amongst us, and among the rest their greatest king Massasoit, with some 90 men, whom for three days we entertained and feasted, and they went out and killed five deer, which they brought to the plantation and bestowed on our governor, and upon the captain [Myles Standish] and others."

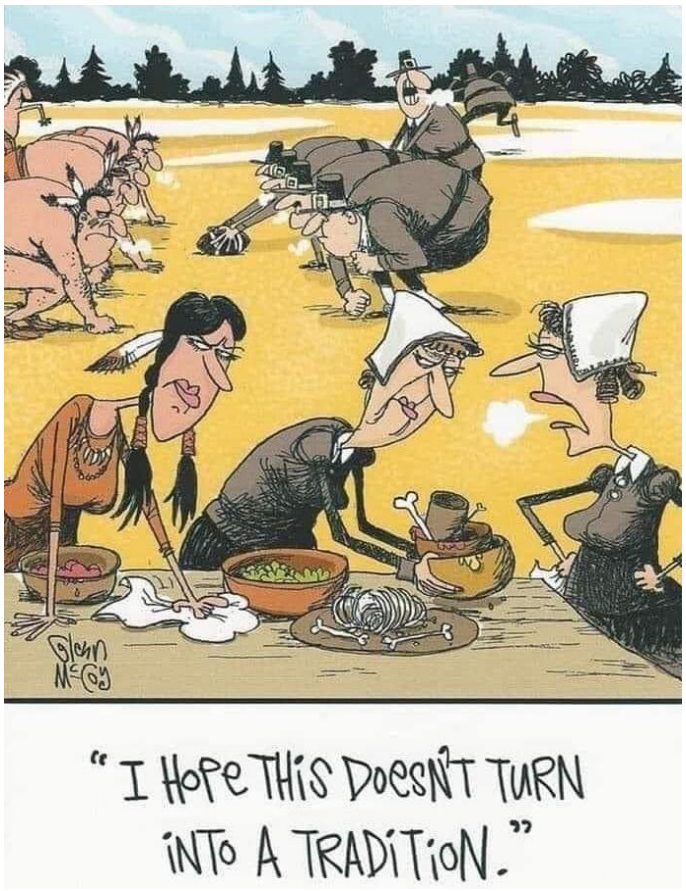
For their part, the Indians contributed five deer to the feast. In addition, the menu included: turkeys, wild geese, ducks, lobsters, eels, clams, oysters and fish. Though there were plenty of cranberries to be had, these were not eaten at the 1621 feast. Other wild fruits were included though: gooseberries, strawberries, plums, and cherries. The Indians had taught the Pilgrims how to dry these, as there was no sugar for making jams and jellies. The dried fruits were sometimes put inside dough cases, making them a forerunner of famous New England pies.

You don't hear much of it these days, the Pilgrims were highly skilled at brewing! Grapes, both white and red, grew in profusion. The vintage of wine being

somewhat young though, records say they added "strong water", probably gin left over from the Mayflower's supplies, to give their juice some zip.

There were biscuits and bread of English wheat. Corn was in many forms: parched, roasted, in hoecakes and ashcakes, and pudding made of cornmeal and molasses boiled in a bag. All these Indian dishes Squanto had taught the colonists to prepare. Also, he probably taught them the making of popcorn, an Indian delicacy, shaking it over hot coals in earthen jars, poring maple syrup over it and forming it into sticky balls. Venison, turkeys and geese were turned on spits. Lobsters and oysters roasted in the coals. Clam chowder and venison stew simmered in iron kettles.

All this was food was prepared by only five women with a few young girls and a handful of children for three days of feasting for a company of 140, 90 of them guests with huge appetites. Quite probably, the women and girls were not so thankful for all Squanto's Indian friends! While the women cooked, the men played. Does it sound too familiar? In those days they didn't have the Lions playing on T.V., though. Instead, the Indians competed in marksmanship with bows and arrows. The white and red men vied in leaping and jumping and racing.



Captain Miles Standish marched around with his little band of soldiers. Every man except Gov. Bradford and their acting minister, Elder Brewster, joined in the little parade. The Pilgrims shot blanks from their guns and blew their bugles loudly, both of which simply delighted their Indian guests. Indeed, it was a spirit

of joy and laughter and wholesome celebration for these colonists whose lives here thus far had been quite meager and severe.

There was one grace. No dishes to wash! They used, only knives, clamshells for spoons and wooden trenchers to eat from.

Thanksgiving 1621, was a festive statement of THANKS TO GOD due to a Christian American Indian and his friends. His name was Tisquantum, known as Squanto, of the tribe Patuxit. He was their host. He was their coach. He was their enduring friend. Thanks to him, those inhospitable shores became understandable and productive. Thanks to him, there was peace and mutual support between colonists and native Americans. The following year as he lay dying Squanto, desired that Gov. Bradford pray for him, that he "MIGHT GO TO THE ENGLISHMEN'S GOD IN HEAVEN." The Pilgrim's called him “St. Squanto” and sainted surely he was. His story might challenge each of us to follow in his steps. Our lives my not be so adventurous, full so much drama, but each of us is given length of years, skills, and opportunities to make life better and safer. Each of us has opportunity to welcome the stranger, the foreigner, the needy, the weak. Each of us can become the cause of another’s Thanksgiving. Like “St. Squanto”, let us live a life that blesses others.

Psalm 100

A psalm of thanksgiving.
Shout joyfully to YHVH, all the earth!
Serve YHVH with gladness.
Come before His presence with joyful singing.
Know that YHVH, He is Elohim.
It is He who has made us, and we are His.
We are His people, the sheep of His pasture.
Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise!
Praise Him, bless His name.
For YHVH is good.
His lovingkindness endures forever, and His faithfulness to all generations.