

A Thanksgiving Celebration at Maple Bay

A group of Victoria boaters celebrate their holiday with turkey dinners and live birds

Story and photos by Marianne Scott

On Thanksgiving weekend, a group of pleasure boaters from the Royal Victoria Yacht Club congregated at Maple Bay Marina to enjoy the holiday. We'd left Cadboro Bay in our Hanse 411, *Beyond the Stars*, during the late afternoon on Friday to catch the tide, not wishing to fight the two-knot current. After a leisurely anchor behind Sidney Island, we continued north on a flood the next day. The dark-green firs, spruces and cedars were interspersed with gold, red and orange splotches. During the summer, it's difficult to recognize

Photo above - Thanksgiving weekend was complete with a cruise and changing tree colors. Photo below - A doggy park with plastic bags welcomes canine visitors.

the maples, elms, alders and birches that have carved out a small spot in the green plumage lining the shores. Fall reveals them.

We carefully cruised through the

Coal Island archipelago and noted the water-nourished black lichen making zebra stripes on the sheer cliffs. The weather was sunny, flocks of gulls were busy foraging and

seals lounged on their favorite rocks. Golden trees popped out like punctuation marks. A lone sportfish boat, its bow laden optimistically with huge coolers hugged the shore.

Photo below - Manwe, a bald eagle.





Photo right, top - A group of cruisers celebrate Canadian Thanksgiving at the Shipyard Restaurant. Photo right - Maple Bay Marina owner Carol Messier in her store. Photo below, bottom - Both Salt Spring Air and Harbour Air send floatplanes to Maple Bay.

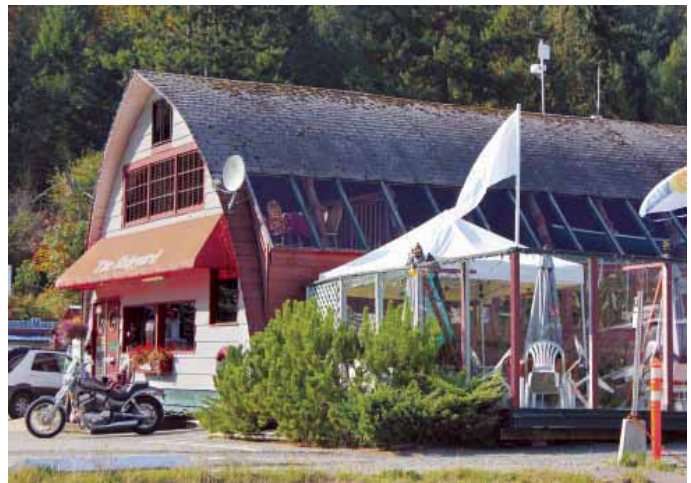


From Samsum Narrows, Salt Spring Island looked quite wild with few habitations. One house is obviously off the grid—an array of solar collector lay at a 30-degree angle, supplemented by another lot on the roof. I can imagine their battery banks to be a lot bigger than those on our boat *Beyond the Stars*. The wind came from the north and we power-sailed into it but still moved at nearly eight knots over the ground in depths of more than 400 feet. The late September rains had plumped up the mosses on the shore—they looked like meadows. We enjoyed

the scenery immensely. Except for navigating, there were no distractions, no electronic devices demanding attention—a true holiday.

Thanksgiving in Canada and the US

Yes, Canadians celebrate Thanksgiving too, just a bit earlier. Instead of the fourth Thursday in Novem-



ber, Canadians hold the statutory holiday on the second Monday in October. I'd been curious about the

history of both our events: The US version is a huge celebration followed by the year's biggest shop-

Photo below - A Harris hawk.



ping day—Black Friday. The Canadian version is much smaller (our biggest shopping day is on December 26, called “Boxing Day.”)

Naturally, the roots of festive holidays may be difficult to verify as their ancient histories have been lost in the mist of time. So it is with Thanksgiving. Undoubtedly, our holidays grew out of harvest festivals that have their origins in the era when agriculture became a local, settled enterprise. In the spring, May Day would be celebrated in hopes of a good harvest; Thanksgiving bookended the season, especially if crops had been bountiful.

According to some Canadian na-

tionalists, the first North American Thanksgiving was celebrated in 1578 on Baffin Island in Frobisher Bay—Nunavut today. Martin Frobisher, an ambitious navigator sailing during the time of Elizabeth I, made three voyages from Britain to find a shortcut to Asia and its rich spices, silks and porcelains through the Northwest Passage. He never succeeded, but he did find rocks which he mistakenly believed contained gold.

Frobisher persuaded a bunch of investors his find would lead to riches. They financed his third expedition but the ore turned out to be “fool’s gold,” iron pyrite. His



third voyage was fraught with bad weather, ice and lost ships so when he landed at 63 degrees north, he and his crew gave thanks for their survival. No turkeys were in sight.

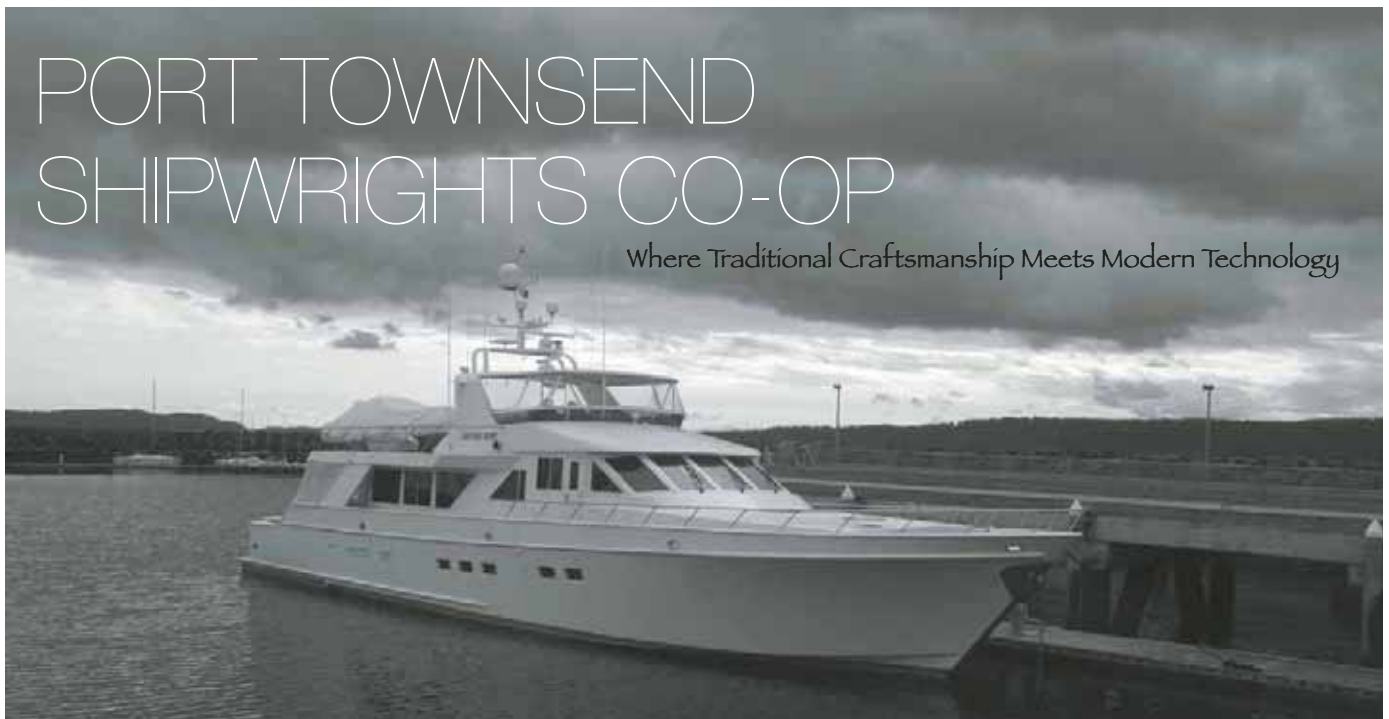
The American version is that Pilgrims at Plymouth Rock organized the first Thanksgiving in 1621 after a successful growing season. The exact date is unknown. Some historians theorize that these early colonists, with their strong Protestant faith, created this holiday to substitute for the many saints’ feasts that

had been part of Roman Catholic traditions that gave people frequent days off from work.

Thanksgiving days continued to be held with differing dates in the early colonies. After the American Revolution, those who remained loyal to the Crown took the holiday north to Canada. It was in the middle of the Civil War that Abraham Lincoln decreed that the Thanksgiving feast should be held on the fourth Thursday in November.

In 1863, Secretary of State Will-

Photo above - You can bring your own boat and park guests at a float home. Photo left - Vintage nautical parts line the grounds.



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iam Seward wrote: "The year that is drawing towards its close, has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies . . . It has seemed to me fit and proper that they should be solemnly, reverently and gratefully acknowledged as with one heart and voice by the whole American people. I do therefore invite my fellow citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are at sea and those who are sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next, as a day of Thanksgiving . . ."

Canadian Thanksgiving dates continued to dance around and it wasn't until 1957 that the second Monday in October became the fixed date. The October date was chosen in part because in most parts of Canada, winter arrives earlier and the harvest is in.

Maple Bay Marina

It's a pleasant protected place located on the south end of the bay in Bird's Eye Cove. Amazingly, the huge head of a California sea lion emerged again and again as we entered the bay, serving as a small welcoming committee. Equally hospitable are marina owners Carol and David Messier. They've run the business for the past 10 years and are continuing to make improvements. The way

Carol puts it, "even a bad day at the marina is a good day."

Permanent moorage is the marina's mainstay, but they certainly encourage transients and rendezvous. A fuel dock also attracts customers.

There's no village in Maple Bay, but the marina is one in miniature. Break something on your boat? You can find marine supplies at Lindstrom's which stocks an ample quantity of parts. Carol Messier has reorganized the store so that if you forgot your pasta, you can replenish. Knowing that sailors travel on

their stomach, she's also included a number of luxury foods—things like artichoke hearts and cocktail onions. Coffee in various forms is available as is an assortment of marine-related books. Small alcoves on the north side of the store feature local artists including paintings, glassware, ceramics and mosaics. Outside, showers and laundry are available. For a calendar of events supported by the marina, check www.maplebaymarina.com.

Maple Bay's grounds are good for strolling. A fenced area—the Dog's Head—allows cruising dog

lovers to curb their dog by making plastic bags available. A garbage can and drinking water for your pooch are also installed. A gazebo with picnic tables is available for happy hours and potlucks.

A walk around the docks shows a number of float homes on the south end. Some are artistically embellished; others have overflowing window boxes to make up for missing gardens. Several float homes are individually owned and two can be rented from the marina. They're often used for overflow guests from visiting boaters.

If you like to get some real exercise, you can hike—or bike—nearby Mount Tzouhalem. It's located in the municipality of North Cowichan and rises to 1,650 feet above Cowichan Bay and Quamichan Lake. The website explains that Mount Tzouhalem was originally called "shkewetsen," meaning "basking in the sun," after a huge rock on the side of the mountain resembling a frog warming itself. The name was changed in 1859, after the death of a warrior named Tzouhalem who lived in a cave on the mountain. He'd been exiled from his tribe after killing many people. I guess crime does pay, sometimes. You can pick up a trail map at the marina. Many of the trails are old logging roads rarely used for that purpose today.

Photo below - Float homes embellish the marina. Some can be rented.



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Carol Messier organizes trips for golfers who place their tees at either the Cowichan Golf and Country Club or at Duncan Meadows. The Seattle Yacht Club holds its annual international golf cruise here.

If you'd like a ride into Duncan, Carol delivers boaters in her van for \$5 round trip. Every Saturday year around, Duncan has a farmers' market that attracts vendors from throughout the fertile Cowichan Valley, a prime agricultural area. And, of course, Duncan touts itself as the "City of Totems" which you can view just by walking around. And then there's the Quw'utsun' Cultural and Conference Centre,

offering guests an authentic First Nations experience—interpretive tours, traditional art work and native food.

We must add that Carol is extremely accommodating. When one of our group got the flu and ran a high fever, she just handed over the car keys so he could be taken to a clinic.

The Raptor Centre

Most of our group had signed up for a tour of the Raptor Centre, a nature center that specializes in training and working with captive-bred



Photo left - Tina Hein with a barn owl.

Photo above - A turkey vulture with its magnificent wingspread lands on Tina Hein's arm.



birds of prey, training their handlers and in educating the public about raptors. Carol took us to the center in shifts (again for the fantastic price of \$5 a head) and we congregated to see the birds up close. What an adventure!

At first, we only saw birds behind netting and fencing. Some were shy and hidden in dark corners and fairly invisible. But then we met Tina Hein, one of the bird trainers, who carried a barn owl on her gloved hand. We stood right next to her and the owl took no offence.

She then took us to an area where raptors were still chained in their individual space but could move around. Tina stepped into the birds' open cages and talked to the birds. Although wild animals, they obviously knew and trusted her, hopping right onto her heavy leather glove.

We were introduced to hawks, an eagle and owls. But that was the stationary part. We were directed to a seating area, and Tina, who has an incredible amount of energy and is obviously devoted to these magnificent, powerful birds, gave a flying



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demonstration. You can see why empires and kings have chosen some of these raptors as emblems of power.

One after another, Tina would call for a bird by name. The ferruginous hawk that had been tethered flew freely to her outstretched arm, would land and then take off, only to land again. Manwe, the eagle, was next. We were seated in a lower area and the bird would streak down right over our heads, the potent wings and giant wingspread causing enough draft to ruffle our hair. Although we ducked, we were delighted.

The saker falcon followed suit. It would fly in like a plane, land on Tina's arm, hop over to a bird stand and then hurry back. The barn owl was somewhat shy and kept flying up to a birdhouse in the trees behind us.

Finally, Tina introduced us to one of her favorite birds, one that is often maligned: the turkey vulture. Its wingspread reached six feet. The bird earned its name because its head resembles the unfeathered head of our Thanksgiving turkey. The lack of feathers is an evolutionary trait and keeps the head cleaner when the bird scavenges dead animals. It's that method of survival that makes it so unpopular.

But Tina explained that it's a most useful bird that contributes to a healthy environment. "They clean the place up, dispose of rotting meat," she said. "Their stomach acid is so corrosive they can even digest carcasses that carry botulism and anthrax. They are wonderful birds. Without them, we'd be exposed to many diseases."

Thanksgiving Dinner

After several hours with our feathered friends, we returned through the bucolic fields to the marina. We'd organized a dinner at the Maple Bay Shipyard Restaurant and Pub, with about 50 participants enjoying plates loaded with indigenous foods.

Most of us remember that turkeys are native North American birds, although they have been exported to Europe and are quite popular there too. But we might not remember that pumpkins, and all the other members of the squash family, are native to North America. According to Wikipedia, the term "squash" comes from "askutasquash" (which means "a green thing eaten raw")—a word from the Narragansett language.

Similarly, potatoes, which we ate in mashed form with turkey gravy, were originally cultivated in the Peruvian Andes. Spanish conquerors exported them to Europe but they didn't become popular for 200 years. Then they took off and now potatoes are eaten in most of the world.

Finally, cranberries are a North American fruit. Natives ate them as

food and in ceremonies. Not that all those things were available during the first Thanksgiving dinner held by the Pilgrims and Wampanoag at Plymouth Colony in 1621. According to research by the Smithsonian Institution, on that day, they ate venison, waterfowl, turkeys and corn.

After our pumpkin pie, each member of our group expressed his or her reason for being thankful. Many things were said. A frequent one was the joy of not having to cook a Thanksgiving dinner. Another was that we didn't have our holiday distorted by endless football games. By far the best one was thankfulness for a Thanksgiving in early October. "After all," he said, "it's great to be able to give thanks while still going cruising!" **nwy**

Marianne Scott is an award-winning writer who has covered the marine scene for well over a dozen years and has been contributing to *Northwest Yachting* since 2001. She sails with her husband, David, on their yellow Hanse 411, *Beyond the Stars*, throughout Puget Sound and British Columbia.

Marianne is also the author of *Naturally Salty, Coastal Characters of the Pacific Northwest* and of *Ocean Alexander—the first 25 years*.



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