

A look back at Thanksgiving prices 50 years ago – November 26, 2023

It's three days after Thanksgiving 2023. More than likely both your refrigerator and your stomach have forgotten how full they were a very short time ago. Whether you shopped for a home-cooked meal or ate at a restaurant, you undoubtedly were aware of food prices this year.

Let us look back at what they were 50 years ago — November 1973. Thank goodness for access to a very helpful resource available to anyone — the Carroll County Times Archive. Whether you hope to find the score of a Western Maryland College football game in the 1950s, a wedding in the 1930s, or the price of groceries in November 1973, the Archives is there with an answer, and a godsend for those who write columns!

Turkeys haven't increased in price as much as beef since 1973, but nobody this year paid \$0.79/pound for a Swift Butterball turkey like those advertised by George's Super Thrift in Eldersburg 50 years ago. Mash's semi-boneless hams (butt half) were \$1.09 a pound. A shank half was \$0.89 a pound.

In central Maryland, many families find a Thanksgiving dinner isn't complete without oysters. Markets in November 1973 were selling 12-oz. cans of fresh standard oysters for \$1.69 - \$1.79. Yum! Another local favorite to accompany turkeys and mashed potatoes then and now is sauerkraut. That was a real bargain 50 years ago — three 27 oz. cans for only \$1.00.

Looking at prices of other items important for preparation of a feast — Land O'Lakes butter was \$0.89 a pound and two standard cans of cranberry sauce went for \$0.49 whether you liked it jellied or whole berry style.

Each year a home-prepared Thanksgiving meal is special and followed by the joy of raiding the refrigerator for leftovers the following day! If you eat dinner early on Thursday afternoon, someone probably disappears into the kitchen that evening, hauls the turkey out of the refrigerator, and nibbles among the drumsticks and wings.

Families who wanted to give mom a rest by going out for dinner in 1973 might have tried the holiday meal offered at a relatively new restaurant on East Main Street in Westminster named Cockey's Tavern. The price was \$4.95 per person. For that you had an appetizer, turkey, stuffing, sweet or mashed potatoes and, of course, sauerkraut. There was no mention of dessert, but a holiday meal would not have been complete without some kind of pie.

Beginning in 1971, Cockey's Tavern grew as a local favorite for meals served in an attractive setting. When built around 1820, Cockey's served as a tavern before passing into private hands for several generations. Then, in the 1920s, it became Hoffman's Inn — both a boarding house and eatery. The boarders, often local single school teachers, ate three meals a day prepared by the marvelous chef, Thelma Hoffman. Outsiders occasionally enjoyed Thelma's meals, but it was not a true restaurant. Thelma retired in 1969 and the building returned to some of its original purpose as Cockey's Tavern.

How much did a Thanksgiving meal cost if you and your family ate out this year? Searching online I found some local restaurants offering meals beginning about \$30 but soaring much higher with special treats included. Surely those meals were delicious, but the image of a dining table dominated by a glorious, brown turkey isn't possible in a restaurant.

How and where you celebrated Thanksgiving this year, I hope you had a lovely holiday. Now we are moving on to Christmas. At the east end of Westminster's Main Street, the Historical Society of Carroll County has decorated its three historic buildings inside and out — the Sherman-Fisher-Shellman House, the Kimmey House, and Cockey's Tavern. All of them will be open on Saturday, December 2 from 2 to 6 p.m. for the public to enjoy.

Mary Ann Ashcraft is a volunteer at the Historical Society of Carroll County.

Image 1: Source – submitted Caption: Cockey's Tavern as it appears today at 216 East Main Street, Westminster. In 1973 it was operating as a restaurant and serving Thanksgiving meals to the public.

Image 2: Source – submitted Caption: Thanksgiving menu at Cockey's Tavern in 1973 for \$4.95.

Image 3: Source – submitted Caption: Cockey's Tavern brochure from 1987.