

Thanksgiving in South Carolina

A HOLIDAY HISTORY OF REMARKABLE WEATHER

BY WES TYLER

In the United States, prior to 1939, Thanksgiving was observed on the last Thursday of November. Then, beginning in 1941, the national holiday was officially moved to the fourth Thursday of November. This nostalgic time of year has customarily been associated with a bountiful meal, celebrated with family and friends. Some may hold on to vivid memories of Thanksgivings past, and a few of us may even be able to recall what the weather was like!

This is a story about the history of Thanksgiving weather, as recorded by climatologists through the decades. Rankings and records will present those Thursday through Sunday holiday periods, from year to year, within the span of November 22 through 28.

South Carolina's weather observations for Thanksgiving Day and its holidays begins with the forty-one volunteer reports for the Columbia, South Carolina, November and December 1888 edition of the Department of Agriculture of South Carolina Monthly Report, South Carolina Weather Review, State Weather Service, cooperating with the U.S. Signal Service.

The state's latitude and sea level-to-mountain geography, along with the alternating placement and collisions of sub-tropical and continental air masses, offer the possibility of all four seasons in any late November. Highlighted below are the author's chronological selections of the holiday's most memorable weather phenomena.

A cold and wet fourth Thursday for Columbia on November 22, 1888. With temperatures hovering between 40 and 44 degrees and 0.61 inches of rain, the daylight hours were likely spent indoors and near a heating source. Newberry reports sleet on Friday.

On the fourth Thursday of November 23, 1899, St. Matthews (84 degrees) and Beaufort (83 degrees) both warm to their record highest temperature on what will become Thanksgiving Day.

In 1900, on November 22, Columbia observes its record warmest fourth Thursday November afternoon, with 81 degrees, still unbroken for the next 120 years. On the next day, Friday, Columbia reports 85 degrees and its record highest temperature for so late in a year.

Summer-like conditions on November 15, 1902, send the thermometer to 89 degrees at the small farming community of Seivern in Aiken County. With no autumn freezes yet affecting the central and southern counties, stray kernels of corn, left after the growing season's harvest, reemerge as new stalks, said to be a foot high. Charleston's commercial strawberries are plentiful leading up to the Thursday holiday. This warmth rapidly comes to an end on Thanksgiving, November 27, with a strong boundary of cold air that produces snow flurries seen in Batesburg, Lugoff and Bowman. Only a year later, on Thursday, November 26, 1903, and the next day, Friday, snow flurries are observed at Barksdale in Laurens County. Clemson College reports a present-day November record low temperature of 10 degrees that Friday morning (tied 1950).

A state record warmest Thanksgiving, on November 26, 1908, is set. The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Weather Bureau volunteer observer at Blackville, Miss M.E. Lange, reports 85 degrees and the highest South Carolina Thanksgiving Thursday

temperature known now for 113 years. Walterboro's 84 degrees on Thanksgiving climbs to 86 degrees on the next day, Friday.

It's a dry November 1909. No measurable rain falls at Jacksonboro. At Florence, the 0.20 inches total for the month remains as their driest of 114 measured Novembers. Greenville's November 25, 1909, Thanksgiving starts below freezing at 28 degrees, but rises to 68 degrees under a full day of autumn sun.

Thanksgiving, November 28, 1912, and for much of the state, the only known "white Thanksgiving." Within the circulation of a coastal gale and cold air forcing on its western periphery, pockets of heavy snow begin Upstate on Wednesday evening, November 27, and continue into the daylight of Thanksgiving Thursday. Little Mountain and Liberty snowfalls measure 4.0 inches and share the Thanksgiving Day heaviest South Carolina snowfall on record. Snow flurries are seen as far south as St. George, Summerville and Yemassee.

Amounts reported include:

- Chappells 3.2 inches
- Society Hill and Newberry 3.0 inches

- Greenville and Cheraw 2.5 inches
- Anderson, Spartanburg, Winthrop College, Greenwood, Heath Springs, Calhoun Falls and Winnsboro 2.0 inches
- Batesburg 1.8 inches
- Blackville 1.3 inches
- Columbia, Bowman, St. Matthews, Effingham, Smiths Mills, Kingstree and Conway 1.0 inch
- Ferguson 0.5 inch

Conway's November 22, 1917, fourth Thursday is observed as sunny and mild with 74 degrees. On Sunday morning, their thermometer reads 21 degrees. It's the same abrupt change for nearby Georgetown with a Thursday afternoon 73 degrees, then 22 degrees on Sunday morning.

1919, and the driest November of recordkeeping for Meriwether (McCormick County), St. Matthews and St. Stephens. Each reporting no rain. On Thanksgiving Day, November 27, southerly winds and sunny skies move the afternoon temperature to 82 degrees and the state's warmest for Georgetown.

The record warmest Thanksgiving Thursday of 1908 is tied on November 24, 1921. The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Weather Bureau volunteer observer for Yemassee, W.C. Hutson, reports 85 degrees and shares the record with Blackville. Just 25 miles southeast, the U.S. Marine Corps, Parris Island Recruit Depot, reports 84 degrees on the same date. Edgefield's holiday period ends on Sunday, November 27, 1921, with a day of heavy rain leaving 3.68 inches.

Violent weather races through the Upstate on the Friday after Thanksgiving, November 26, 1926, with "hen's egg-sized" hailstones pelting Walhalla and Roebuck and an apparent tornado causing considerable damage across southeast Rock Hill.

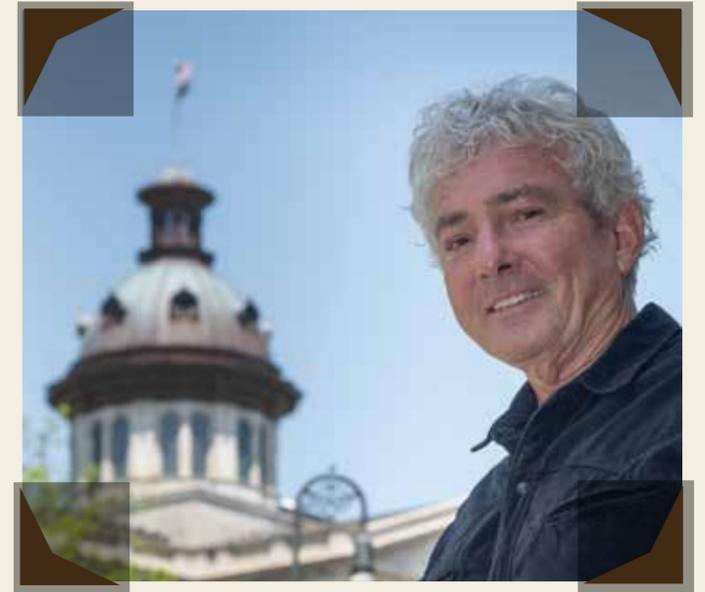
The holidays of 1929 are noted for the cold wave that arrives on Saturday, November 30. Caesars Head sets the state's record lowest November temperature (at that time) of 2 degrees. Beaufort's 65 degrees on Thursday falls to a Saturday morning low of 25 degrees.

The South Carolina lowest known Thanksgiving Thursday temperature occurs the very next year (1930) and again at Caesars Head. On the heels of a pre-Thanksgiving, Wednesday dusting of snow, the mercury sinks to 6 degrees. It's also the coldest Thanksgiving ever for Spartanburg. Their early morning low of 15 degrees just gets above freezing to an afternoon high of 35 degrees.

It's 1931, and the record driest November for Beaufort (0.20"), Sumter (0.12"), Edgefield (0.08"), Myrtle Beach (0.04") and Aiken (no rain). Wildfires and smoke are prevalent from the Piedmont to the coast. Darlington's thirty-day rainfall total of 1.55 inches is the state's greatest monthly amount and falls on just one day, the Friday after Thanksgiving, November 27. The 1931 South Carolina state average rainfall of 0.48 inches is the current lowest November average of record keeping.

Under clear skies, Aiken nearly matches the date's period of long-term average high temperatures with fourth Thursday through Sunday, November 23-26, 1933, readings of 67, 65, 65 and 67 degrees.

Society Hill ties their 1931 record warmest Thanksgiving on the fourth Thursday, November 22, 1934, with 83 degrees and a day



SCDNR CLIMATOLOGIST WES TYLER, now retired.

of short-sleeves dress. It's back to heavy coats on Sunday morning with a freezing 32 degrees.

Trace amounts of sleet and snow are observed from the mountains, southward into Columbia and eastward to Florence on the Saturday after Thanksgiving 1938. In 1939, and again on the Saturday after Thanksgiving, a sleet and snow mix falls at Columbia.

Camden's highest temperature ever for any November (90 degrees) is observed on November 22, 1942, and four days before Thanksgiving. Their 70 degrees on the Thursday holiday is still 10 degrees above the date's average.

The wettest November since records began is noted in 1947. All farm operations are interrupted by fields of standing water. At Branchville, measurable rain falls on twenty-one of the thirty days. Hartsville measures a November total of 11.46 inches, at Society Hill, 11.10 inches. Yet, an even wetter November occurs in 1948. Caesars Head receives 17.85 inches, the current November state record. Loris records its greatest November thirty-day rainfall total of 12.74 inches, 10 inches above the sites long term November average. Greenville measures rain on nineteen of the month's thirty days, adding up to 12.18 inches. For Calhoun Falls, it's their greatest four-day rainfall total over any Thanksgiving holiday period with 5.57 inches. The South Carolina state average rainfall of 8.71 inches in 1948 remains the current November record and far above the 126-year (1895-2021) state average of 2.71 inches.

By most accounts, the exceptional invasion of Arctic-sourced freezing in 1950 set a benchmark for Thanksgiving's weather. Despite being four weeks ahead of the official start of winter, it became South Carolina's coldest air of "any month" in ten years. Bishopville's Friday afternoon 65 degrees dropped 54 degrees in a short eighteen hours to a Saturday morning November record lowest temperature of 11 degrees. The Charleston Airport's mild 70 degrees on the Friday after Thanksgiving, November 24, plunged 55 degrees overnight to a Saturday morning 15 degrees, their all-



WINTHROP TRAINING SCHOOL during the great snow of 1912. Courtesy of The Louise Pettus Archives and Special Collections at Winthrop University.

time coldest November temperature. Face-stinging northwest winds and snowflakes shocked the Peninsula's early risers. Charleston's 3:00 p.m. Saturday "daytime high" temperature is just 25 degrees. On Saturday morning, November 25, Caesars Head's temperature has fallen 61 degrees overnight to the current South Carolina record coldest November reading of "minus 1." As daylight arrives, the city of McColl is in disbelief, waking up to a Saturday morning landscape covered in a 2.5-inch blanket of snow. The 13 degrees recorded on the following Sunday morning is McColl's current lowest November temperature since records began in 1936. For Yemassee, their 32-degree high temperature on Saturday continues as their November "lowest high" temperature ever recorded in more than 122 years of observations. Four persons, unwary of the danger, succumb to the unforgiving exposure. Even with timely United States Weather Bureau warnings and the surge of buyers for alcohol-based antifreeze, auto dealerships and garages are overwhelmed with cracked radiators and engine blocks. The thawing of ruptured water lines for homes, business properties, churches and schools keep plumbing services busy for weeks.

All time South Carolina November minimum temperatures set on November 25-26, 1950, include:

- Walhalla 9 degrees
- Calhoun Falls 10 degrees
- Greenville Downtown AP, Anderson, Aiken and Winnsboro 11 degrees
- Winthrop College 12 degrees
- Greenwood 13 degrees
- Orangeburg 14 degrees
- Society Hill 15 degrees
- Florence, Sumter and Myrtle Beach 16 degrees
- Charleston (City) and Beaufort 17 degrees
- Georgetown 18 degrees

Columbia's record eighteen consecutive Thanksgiving Thursdays without measurable rain comes to an end in 1957, with 0.59 inches on November 28. Flooding rains over the last sixteen days of November 1957 leave 11.84 inches at Ware Shoals, 11.66 inches at Kershaw, 11.57 inches at Anderson, 10.97 inches at Laurens and 10.30 inches at Whitmire.

Hampton reports the state's warmest day of the 1959 holiday period with 80 degrees on Friday, November 27. Winter-like cold races into the state on Sunday and Hampton's Monday morning, back-to-work week, starts at a shivering 20 degrees.

Saturday, November 26, 1960, and the state's only location to report a freeze over the holidays is in northern Spartanburg County. The thermometer at the historically cold observation site of Landrum cools to 32 degrees. This value, still 21 degrees higher than their date-record 11 degrees, observed in 1950.

Thanksgiving's 1961 noon-hour gathering on November 23 takes a frightening delay as "twisters" and hail travel through Orangeburg, Bamberg and Colleton counties, uprooting trees, downing electrical lines, destroying farm buildings and breaking windows.

Loris reports fog on the Thursday Thanksgiving morning, November 28, 1963, signaling a boundary of warm moist air

arriving and then becoming the holiday's warmest site at 78 degrees. Heavy upslope rains of 4.00 inches fall on Caesars Head on the next-day Friday before ending as light snow and leaving one-half inch on elevated surfaces. Winthrop College reports trace amounts of a snow-sleet mix at 5:30 p.m. on the same date.

Following the November 11, 1968, record-setting fifteen-inch snowfall at Caesars Head and the "just as rare" same-date two-inch snowfall at Pageland, many felt as if winter had come early. Union's 22 degrees on the Wednesday morning before Thanksgiving quickly changed seasons over the next 36 hours warming to a Thursday holiday afternoon temperature of 75 degrees. Florence is the state's only location on Thanksgiving 1968 to reach 80 degrees.

Bitter cold from a pair of successive polar fronts on November 20 and 23, 1970, send the Wednesday before Thanksgiving temperature to 8 degrees at Parr and 22 degrees at Sullivan's Island, both sites setting current November lowest temperature records, then to 16 degrees at Laurens on Thanksgiving morning, November 26. Hampton's 20 degrees marks their lowest Thanksgiving Thursday temperature of record. On the following Sunday, Hampton surprisingly soars back to 79 degrees. Peculiar was the fact that within this event's rush of deep winter-like cold, only a more often temperate Edisto Island observed any frozen precipitation; sleet on Tuesday, November 24.

West Pelzer reports a trace of snow on the Wednesday before and again on the Thanksgiving Thursday, 1972. Hilton Head's first freeze of the season is observed on Friday, November 24, with 27 degrees.

During the four-day Thanksgiving period of 1973, Columbia reports 79, 80, 83 and 83 degrees. That four-day average high of 81.25 degrees best their 1900 record of 80.25 degrees. On Sunday, November 25, 1973, the Sandhill Experiment Station in Richland County, records 88 degrees and the state's highest known temperature over any of the Thanksgiving's Thursday through Sunday holidays.

Greenwood's Thanksgiving November 28, 1974, sunrise of 19 degrees moves to a seasonal afternoon 56 degrees, still 12 degrees below the date's historical average. Trace amounts of snow fall at Pickens and Santuck on Sunday, December 1.

McClellanville reports 80 degrees on each day of the Thursday through Sunday period, November 22-25, 1979. At Ridgeland, it's 80, 80, 80 and 81 degrees, and at the Florence Airport, 78, 80, 80 and 80 degrees.

All-day rains over Calhoun Falls on Thanksgiving, November 24, 1983, continue into mid-day Friday and amount to 3.40 inches. A rainy Walhalla observes only a two-degree spread between a Thursday morning low temperature of 58 degrees and its afternoon high of 60 degrees.

Less than a week before the 1985 holiday, the state's latest named tropical cyclone, Tropical Storm Kate, crosses into the Hampton-Jasper county line from Georgia bringing twenty-four-hour rains of 5.04 inches at Union, 4.90 inches at Georgetown and a measured multi-day event total of 6.56 inches at Hampton. Winds along Edisto Beach reached 53 mph. 80-degree warmth is recorded for

eastern and southern counties on Thanksgiving, November 28, 1985. The temperature climbs to a near record 84 degrees at Lake City and Walterboro, 83 degrees at Summerville and 81 degrees at Loris, Brookgreen Gardens and Hilton Head. Storms develop on Friday with brief tornado touchdowns in Dalzell and Conway. At around 3:00 p.m., Chesterfield is hard hit by hailstones as large as "tennis balls" (2.50-inch diameter), causing extensive damage to rooftops and automobiles.

Caesars Head's 5.75 inches of rain for the twenty-four hours ending on the Wednesday morning before Thanksgiving, November 26, 1986, part of a three-day total of 7.97 inches, causes quite a show at nearby waterfalls for the park's visitors. Over the four-day period, no freezing temperatures are reported in South Carolina. Spartanburg's 34 degrees on Saturday, November 28, is the state's lowest temperature.

For the first and only occasion, measurable rain falls on Columbia each of the four holidays (November 26-29, 1987) totaling 2.63 inches. Chester's Friday, 7:00 a.m., twenty-four hour ending rainfall of 3.32 inches is their greatest amount ever measured for Thanksgiving or any November day in 92 years of observations.

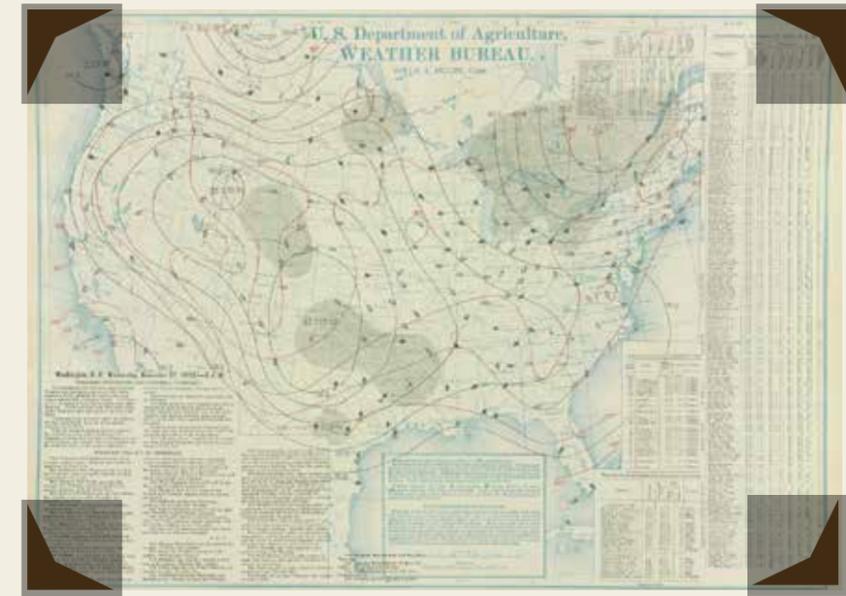
Steady rains beginning on Monday, November 22, 1999, continue through Thanksgiving for Jocassee 8 WNW (SCDNR Walhalla Fish Hatchery near Mountain Rest) totaling 4.97 inches, part of which 4.25 inches fall from 8:00 a.m. on Thanksgiving Thursday to 8:00 a.m. on Friday. Nearby Walhalla receives 4.41 inches over the same period.

At 7:00 a.m. on Tuesday, November 21, 2006 (2 days before Thanksgiving), the National Weather Service at the Charleston Airport reports "snow with thunder." A developing coastal storm produces gale force northerly winds all along the beaches. A rare and historic November snowfall of one-inch falls on Martin in Allendale County and Lodge in Colleton County. Snow flurries are observed in Aiken, Little Mountain, Columbia and Hemingway before changing to a cold and blowing rain. The two days of wet weather brought totals of 5.67 inches to Pageland, 5.42 inches at Bennettsville, 4.56 inches at Chesterfield, 4.15 inches at McColl and 3.94 inches at Winnsboro. Clearing sunshine is observed for the Upstate on Thanksgiving Thursday with noticeable warming. Table Rock records 68 degrees on the holiday and 72 degrees on the day after.

Thanksgiving Thursday, November 25, 2010, at Givhans, Charleston AP, Witherbee and the Beaufort Marine Corps Air Station is a "warm for the date" 81 degrees or close to 15 degrees above the long-term average high.

York's 20-degree morning temperature on Thanksgiving, November 28, 2013, climbs to just 42 degrees that afternoon making it their record coldest holiday average temperature at a sub-freezing 31 degrees.

Most of South Carolina is soaked from five days of rain preceding



A U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE WEATHER BUREAU MAP depicting the data for November 27, 1912 at 8:00 a.m.

Thanksgiving Thursday, November 27, 2014. Summerville measures 5.70 inches, Manning 4.78 inches, Ninety Nine Islands 4.68 inches and Hemingway 4.29 inches. A sharp cold front clears the state early on Thanksgiving Thursday with west winds gusting at 43 mph on Lake Murray. Friday morning temperatures fall to 22 degrees at Fountain Inn and a heavy frost is observed at the usually "freeze-protected" Daufuskie Island.

At 10:00 a.m. on Thanksgiving morning, November 26, 2015, ASOS runway instruments at Rock Hill York County Airport (KUZA) register a surface barometric pressure value of 30.73 inches of mercury (1040.6 mb). This is the state's highest known reading for Thanksgiving. At 3:00 p.m., a sunny and mild 72 degrees is noted at Columbia, Florence, Myrtle Beach and Mt. Pleasant.

Sunny, dry weather is observed on Thanksgiving, November 24, 2016. Moncks Corner, Charleston Airport and the Beaufort Marine Corps Air Station all share a high temperature of 81 degrees. Sumter's afternoon high temperatures for the Thursday through Sunday period repeats each day at 74 degrees. Table Rock's absence of rainfall from the last three weeks of October, through Thanksgiving Thursday (47 days), measured in total at less than one-tenth of an inch, sets the conditions for the largest forest fire on record for Pickens County. The "Pinnacle Mountain-Table Rock Fire," which began on November 9, consumes 9,500 acres through Sunday, November 27.

A review of 133 years of South Carolina Thanksgiving's most memorable weather ends on Thursday, November 25, 2021, with Barnwell's morning low temperature of 27 degrees, then a fast warming to the state's only location to reach 70 degrees.

Wes Tyler is a retired climatologist for the South Carolina State Climatology Office of the S.C. Department of Natural Resources.