

The First Book of Factoids

Sam Vaknin

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Title: The First Book of Factoids

Author: Sam Vaknin

Release Date: July, 2005 [EBook #8421]

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[This file was first posted on July 9, 2003]

Edition: 10

Language: English

Character set encoding: Latin1

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The First Book of Factoids

1st EDITION

First Published in the
Links and Factoids Study List
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/linknfactoid>

Sam Vaknin, Ph.D.

Editing and Design:

Lidija Rangelovska

Lidija Rangelovska
A Narcissus Publications Imprint, Skopje 2003

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Lidija Rangelovska - write to:

palma@unet.com.mk or to

vaknin@link.com.mk

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ISBN: 9989-929-40-8

Created by: LIDIJA RANGELOVSKA

REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

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A

Abdication Crisis

The love affair of Edward, Prince of Wales (Edward VIII) and Wallis Simpson in 1936 is the stuff of romantic dramas. Alas, reality was a lot less inspiring. Even as she was being wooed by her regal paramour - and while still being married to Ernest Aldrich Simpson, who knew of the Prince's attentions and even discussed the adulterous relationship with him - Wallis had an affair with Guy Marcus Trundle, a car salesman.

So reveal documents released in January 2003 by the Public Record Office in the United Kingdom. Trundle is described as a "very charming adventurer, very good looking, well bred and an excellent dancer". He lived at 18 Bruton Street in Mayfair, London (a prestigious address).

Simpson's first husband was Earl Winfield Spencer. The King met her on January 10, 1931 but was not impressed. Even in the months after May 1934, when he met her for the second time, dined with her and her

husband in their London flat and invited them to his country retreat - she did not captivate him. He did take her on a cruise, two years later, unaccompanied by her husband. He tried to introduce her in court, but George V was outraged. Upon his death, the Prince of Wales became King on January 20, 1936. Ernest Simpson - who was having a long-term affair of his own - moved out of the Simpson household in July 1936.

Nor was Wallis the Prince's first American liaison. He contemplated marrying one, Thelma Furness, but then dumped her for Simpson. The British media - though perfectly aware of all the goings-on, reported noting almost until the King's abdication. The European and American press, in contrast, provided extensive coverage of the developing

romance.

At first, the King did not wish to marry Simpson, merely to make her his consort by changing the law to allow for a morganatic marriage (of people from different classes, with no rights of inheritance). Simpson herself thought of giving up the marriage. Yet, finally, they got married after the abdication, in France. Though Simpson became the Duchess of Windsor, she could not be addressed as "Her Royal Highness".

Additionally, the King was not allowed by the British government to address the British people and the Empire through the BBC.

The government's constitutional experts wrote:

"If the King disregarded it, constitutional monarchy would cease to exist. The King is bound to accept and act upon the advice of his ministers ... for the King to broadcast in disregard of that advice would be appealing over the heads of his constitutional advisers. "The last time when this happened in English history was when Charles I raised His Standard at the beginning of the Civil War on 22 August 1642."

Edward abdicated from the throne on 11 December 1936, making a different speech.

After having abdicated the throne, in exile, not allowed to return on pain of losing their allowance, the couple visited Adolf Hitler in 1937. Simpson was thrilled to be "entertained by Herr Hitler" but there is no proof of further contacts with the Nazi regime with the exception of a telegram from Edward to Hitler, urging peace. Edward was later appointed Governor of the Bahamas. Recently released FBI files identify Simpson as a Nazi sympathizer, though. The FBI suspected her of having an affair with a leading Nazi and spied on her.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/em/-/1/hi/uk/2706889.stm>

Abraham

Abraham, the son of Terah, Noah's descendent, and brother of Nahor and Haran, first appears in the Bible in Genesis 11:27. He may have been born in Ur, in today's Iraq, near Nasiryah, around 4000 years ago. His brother, Nahor, definitely was born in Ur and, having fathered Lot, also died in Ur Kasdim (Ur of the Chaldeans). Ur was the capital of S(h)umer but the Kasdim - Khaldeans - did not make it to Ur until 1300 years after the birth of Abraham. Why do the Bible call it Ur Kasdim? Abraham's family are described as pastoral nomads. Wandering shepherds rarely pitch their tents, proverbial or not, next to metropolises. Terah left Ur only to settle near yet another city, Harran, on the current border between Turkey and Syria. He spent the next 60 years of his life there. Harran is 1200 kilometers off the beaten path to Canaan (today's Israel and Palestine). Why such a diversion?

Scholars suggest that Ur is actually Urfa in Turkey - about 30 kilometers away from Harran. It boasts a cave where Abraham is said to have been born.

SOURCE: Bruce Feiler, *Abraham: A Journey to the Heart of Three Faiths* and *Walking the Bible: A Journey By Land Through the Five Books of Moses*.

<http://www.ot-studies.com/Documents/Ur.htm>

<http://members.aol.com/mfuprojects/abrahambirth.html>

Ants

There are 11,000 species of ants. The oldest ant fossil is more than 90 million years old. Ants are closely related to bees and wasps. They are so numerous that in some habitats - the Amazon forest, for instance - their combined weight is four times the combined weight of all other animals in the area. Ants have brains. The main nerve - similar to our spine - runs along the bottom of the ant's body. Ants smell, taste and touch with their antennae. Their cylinder-like heart pumps colorless blood throughout their body.

Ants digest only liquid food or food rendered liquid with their digestive juices. Ants share digested food with each other. They can carry 15-20 times their body weight.

Only the colony's queen breeds. Unfertilized eggs develop into males. The queen also lives much longer - up to 10 years, compared to worker ants which survive on average 50-150 days and up to 2 years in the tropics.

Some ant varieties create no nests. Instead, worker ants link their legs to form a living fabric on which the queen resides and performs her functions.

<http://www.lingolex.com/ants.htm>

http://ant.edb.miyakyo-u.ac.jp/INTRODUCTION/Gakken79E/Page_02.html

Appendix

The appendix is located at the beginning of the large intestine. Many types of animals have it, including rabbits and rodents. It contains gut associated lymphoid tissue (GALT) involved in recognizing foreign antigens in ingested food. The appendix is also helpful in the maturation of certain white blood cells (B lymphocytes) and antibodies (Immunoglobulin, or IgA). Molecules manufactured in the appendix serve as "traffic guides" and direct lymphocytes to other parts of the body. The appendix is not, therefore, useless, as most people think. It is part of the immune system. The GALT disappears after age 60, though.

The appendix has additional functions. Endocrine cells appear in the appendix of the human fetus and produce biogenic amines and peptide hormones, both instrumental in maintaining bodily homeostasis.

Finally, the appendix is used to replace the "sphincter muscle" in urinary a bladder surgically reconstructed from intestinal tissue (after removal of the original bladder). It also replaces removed ureters, leading urine from the kidney to the bladder.

<http://www.niddk.nih.gov/health/digest/summary/append/>

<http://kidshealth.org/parent/infections/stomach/appendicitis.html>

<http://www.merck.com/pubs/mmanual/section3/chapter25/25e.htm>

Armenian Genocide

The Armenian massacres in Turkey started in the 19th century and continued well after the Armenian genocide of 1915 in which some 600,000 Armenians perished. The Armenians were also raided by Kurdish tribesmen on a regular basis. An Ottoman military tribunal, convened between 1919-21, even convicted for the crimes members of the administration of the Young Turks, including cabinet ministers.

Many of the perpetrators fled the country only to return, triumphant, after the establishment of modern Turkey in 1923. The Turkish government today denies that an organized, premeditated genocide ever took place and pegs the number of Armenian fatalities at 200-300,000 at the most.

Towards the end of the 19th century, the Armenians formed guerrilla movements in eastern Van (the Armenakans, in 1885) and in Russia. Radical nationalist parties were established by Russian-Armenian emigrants in 1887 (Hunchak or Henschak, "The Bell") and in 1890 in Georgia (Dashnak or Dashnaktsutyun, "Union"). Mass demonstrations in the Turkish capital (in 1890 and 1895) and armed uprisings followed (in 1894-5). The Dashnaks even invaded Turkey from Russia in 1896 - a demonstrative act which resulted in the slaughter of 50,000 Armenians.

The suppression of these revolts claimed 200,000 Armenian lives. In 1909, in Adana, more than 23,000 Armenians were massacred as the warships of the Great Powers stood idly by. In 1912-3 the Great Powers, led by Russia, pressured Turkey to cease its mistreatment of the Armenians. This intervention was resented by the Ottoman authorities. By 1915, Armenian calls for autonomy were deemed a danger to the disintegrating realm, now at war with Russia.

When the first world war broke, Turkey allied itself with the Germans. All Armenian men aged 20-45 were conscripted to the army as soldiers, soon to be disarmed and serve as pack animals or in menial jobs. When Russian Armenians recruited Turkish Armenians for the anti-Turkish Russian Army of the Caucasus, in April 1915, the elite of the Armenian community was arrested and executed. Between May and June 1915 the

Armenian population was deported to Mesopotamia. The deportation followed mass executions.

Many more died from starvation, exposure, dehydration, abuse and outright torture. The survivors - less than 300,000 - were subjected to additional slaughter in Syria. People were beaten with blunt instruments, burnt alive or drowned forcibly. The massacres were carried out by military officers with dictatorial powers, aided by criminals especially released from jails and assigned to their gruesome duties.

Armed resistance in Van province, Mussa Dagh, Shabin Karahisar and Urfa - as well as setbacks in the war - prevented the Turks from deporting the urban Armenian population in the Ottoman Empire's major cities. Today there are less than 60,000 Armenians in Turkey compared to at least 1.8 million in 1910.

<http://www.armenian-genocide.org/>

<http://www.cilicia.com/armo10.html>

Art, Modern

We are all acquainted with the tales - many apocryphal, some real - of how art critiques, curators, collectors and buyers were fooled into purchasing "works of art" created by monkeys. The animals "painted" by dipping their paws in pigments and running to and fro over empty canvasses.

There are numerous such striking examples of the fluidity of what constitutes art and the dubious expertise of art "professionals".

There is no other masterpiece so studied, analyzed and scrutinized as Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa. Yet, when it was stolen from the Louvre in Paris in 1912, forgers passed 6 replicas as the original, selling them for a fortune. The painting was rediscovered in 1915.

Henri Matisse is revered as the father of Fauvism and of modern painting in general. Yet, one of his more famous tableaux, *Le Bateau* (The Boat), hung upside down for 2 months in 1961 in the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Not one of the art critics, journalists, 116,000 visitors, or curators has noticed it.

Perhaps the most famous case of artistic misjudgment involves Vincent van Gogh whose work has hitherto fetched the highest prices ever paid in auctions. Despite his connections with leading painters, gallery owners, art professors and critics - his brother owned a successful art dealership in Paris - van Gogh sold only one piece while alive: "Red Vineyard at Arles." His brother bought it from him. By the time he died he had painted 750 canvasses and 1600 drawings.

<http://www.geocities.com/illonaz/ArtHistory.htm>

Atlantis

Atlantis (or Atlantica) was described in antiquity as a large island in the sea to the west of the known world (the Western Ocean), near the Pillars of Hercules (the Gibraltar Straits?). It was not, therefore, a part of the known geography of the period. An earthquake was said to have submerged it in the ocean.

It is first mentioned in the dialogues *Timaeus* and *Critias* written by the Greek philosopher Plato (428-347 BC). An Egyptian priest was supposed to have described it to the Greek statesman Solon (638-559 BC).

The priest insisted that Atlantis was enormous - bigger than Asia Minor (today, a part of Turkey) and Libya combined. It harbored a technologically advanced civilization, recounted the priest, in the 10th millennium BC (c. 12,000 years ago).

Curiously, he also said that the Atlantians conquered all the lands of antiquity, bar Athens (which only came into existence in the Neolithic period, about 3000 years later).

Arab geographers propagated the story of Atlantis and medieval European authors referred to it as fact.

Current oceanographers, scholars and conspiracy theorists place Atlantis all over the map - from an island in the Aegean Sea (Thera, or Santorini it suffered an earthquake in 1640 BC and housed the flourishing Cycladic civilization), through the Canary Islands to Scandinavia. Considering that many ancient civilizations - such as Troy, long considered a mere fable - were unearthed by archeologists, it is not futile to continue to look for Atlantis.

http://dmoz.org/Science/Social_Sciences/Archaeology/Alternative/Lost_Civilizations/Atlantis/

Automatic Switchboard (Phone Exchange)

Almon B. Strowger, an undertaker in Kansas City, faced unfair competition. The wife of a competing undertaker was an operator at the local (manual) telephone exchange. She re-routed calls to her husband, even when the caller asked for Strowger.

In an effort to get rid of her, Strowger invented the first automatic, electromechanical switchboard and, together with his cousin, produced the first model in 1888. He was granted a patent in 1891.

Strowger joined forces with Joseph B. Harris and Moses A. Meyer to form "Strowger Automatic Telephone Exchange" in October 1891. A year

later, the first Strowger exchange was installed with great fanfare at La Porte, Indiana. It had less than 80 subscribers.

Strowger died in 1902 but his company still survives as AG Communications Systems.

<http://www.roserpark.net/greenwood/strowger.html>

<http://www.strowger.com/history.html>

<http://www.agcs.com>

B

Barbie

Barbie was invented by Ruth Handler in 1959. It was modelled on a minuscule German sex doll called "Lilli". Barbie was the nickname of Ruth's daughter, Barbara. Ruth proceeded to found Mattel with her husband, Elliott. It is now one of the world's largest toy manufacturers (revenues - c. \$5 billion annually, a third of which in Barbie sales). More than 1 billion Barbies were sold by 1996. Mattel commemorated this event by manufacturing a "Dream Barbie".

<http://www.people.virginia.edu/~tsawyer/barbie/barb.html>

<http://www.barbiecollectibles.com/whatshot/barbiehistory/index.asp>

http://www.mattel.com/our_toys/ot_barb.asp

Bathory, Erszebet

If you think that today's serial killers are unsurpassed, try this for size:

In 1611, Countess Erszebet Bathory was tried - though, being a noblewoman, not convicted - in Hungary for slaughtering 612 young girls. The true figure may have been 40-100, though the Countess recorded in her diary more than 610 girls and 50 bodies were found in her estate when it was raided.

The girls were not killed outright. They were kept in a dungeon and repeatedly pierced, prodded, pricked, and cut. The Countess may have bitten chunks of flesh off their bodies while alive. She is said to have bathed and showered in their blood in the mistaken belief that she could thus slow down the aging process.

Her servants were executed, their bodies burnt and their ashes scattered. Being royalty, she was merely confined to her bedroom until she died in 1614.

She was married to a descendant of Vlad Dracula of Bram Stoker fame.

She was notorious as an inhuman sadist long before her hygienic fixation. She once ordered the mouth of a talkative servant sewn. It is rumoured that in her childhood she witnessed a gypsy being sewn into a horse's stomach and left to die.

For a hundred years after her death, by royal decree, mentioning her name in Hungary was a crime.

<http://www.angelfire.com/realm/shades/demons/vampires/booksandmoviesebathory.htm>

<http://www.alienplayground.net/disgusting/idols.html>

<http://bathory.freehosting.net/ebathori.html>

<http://samvak.tripod.com/objectrelations.html>

Berliner

When President John F. Kennedy sought to impress the Germans in 1961 - then besieged by the Russians - he visited Germany and famously said, in a public speech: "Ich bin ein Berliner". Alas, "Berliner" in German is also a kind of yummy doughnut with jam filling and vanilla icing. This gave rise to the fallacy - adopted even by "The Economist" - that "Berliner" is wrong usage or gaffe.

It is not. "Berliner" in German means "that which belongs to Berlin or of Berlin". The Berlin Wall is the "Berliner Mauer", for instance. Berliner is the female form of Berliner. Kennedy was grammatically correct to have said "Ich bin ein Berliner".

<http://urbanlegends.about.com/library/weekly/aa021700a.htm>

<http://www.historyplace.com/speeches/berliner.htm>

Bible

The Jews do not include the 27 books of New Testament in their Bible. The factoids below relate to the version of the Bible used by Christians everywhere: Old (39 books) and New Testament. Altogether 1189 chapters (929 of which are in the Old Testament), 31173 verses. The Old Testament contains 592439 words (2728100 letters), the New Testament contains 181253 words (838380 letters). Of the 27 books of the New Testament, 14 were written by St. Paul.

The Bible contains words in Hebrew, Aramaic and Koine Greek.

The Bible is the bestseller of all times. More than 50 copies are still being sold every minute. The Bible is also the most shoplifted book in the world.

According to the Concordance - a compilation of the words and names in the Bible - cats are not mentioned at all. Christians appear only 3 times (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16). The words "grandmother" and "eternity" only once each. The Bible records seven suicides and seven different Jeremiahs - but not a single "trinity".

The books of Esther and the Song of Solomon do not contain the word "God". The Jewish codifiers of the Bible almost left them out (i.e., almost declared them apocryphal).

Amen is the word that seals the Bible.

<http://www.gospelcom.net/bible>

<http://bible.crosswalk.com/>

<http://unbound.biola.edu/>

<http://www.concordance.com/>

Bioluminescence

The bobtail squid lives in the shallow waters of the coast of Hawaii. During the day, it is buried deep in the sand. It emerges to hunt at nightfall. Moonlight is its mortal enemy: conveniently for its predators, the squid casts a black and moving shadow. To fend off these risks, the squid emits a blue glow from a "light organ". The luminosity perfectly matches the amount of moonlight filtering through the water, rendering the squid indistinguishable from its light-flooded environs.

To generate the fine tuned radiance, the squid hosts a community of luminescent bacteria called *Vibrio fischeri*. From the first moments of its life, the squid circulates bacteria-infested seawater through a hollow chamber in its body. Only the *Vibrio fischeri* cells are caught by the squid's tiny cilia. Henceforth, the squid provides his microscopic "prisoners" with oxygen and amino acids - and they reciprocate with emitted light.

The squid constantly monitors to what extent the night sky is illuminated, using dedicated sensors on the surface of its body. It then adjusts an iris-like "shutter" to release the correct amount of light from his bacterial colony. The squid replaces the hosted vibrios

daily.

Still, bacteria multiply ceaselessly. How is a constant level of luminescence maintained as time passes?

Woody Hastings, a microbiologist at the University of Illinois, noticed in the early 1960s that though the bacterial population doubles every 20 minutes - the quantity of luciferase (the light producing enzyme) remains constant for up to five hours. luciferase production resumes only when a certain "critical mass" (quantitative threshold) is attained. This is called "quorum sensing".

<http://www.lifesci.ucsb.edu/~biolum/>

<http://www.biolum.org/>

Black Death

AIDS has infected hitherto 42 million people, of which perhaps 22 million have died.

The "Black Death" - an epidemic of bubonic plague which ravaged both Europe and the Mediterranean in 1347-1351- killed one quarter to one third of the population - c. 25 million people. This is the equivalent of 250 million today. It took 150 years for the population to recover its pre-epidemic levels.

Scholars believe that the plague emanated from the Middle East through southern Russia, between the Black and the Caspian seas.

Contemporaries did not use the term "Black Death". They called it the "Pestilence" or the "Great Mortality". They regarded it as divine punishment of humanity's sins.

<http://www.ento.vt.edu/IHS/plague.html>

Black Holes

Black holes are extremely dense bodies. Their density and gravitation are so enormous that it was thought nothing - not even electromagnetic radiation such as light - can escape them once caught by their gravitational pull. Hence the "black" in "black holes". This is what laymen and the media know about them.

Yet, the truth is different.

The English physicist Stephen William Hawking proved that in the vicinity of tiny black holes, it is possible for one member of an electron-positron or proton-antiproton pair of particles to escape

while the other is hurled towards the singularity (i.e., the center of the black hole). The escaping particle draws energy from the black hole itself and thus "evaporates" it. It is as if the black hole gives off heat, thermal radiation.

http://antwrp.gsfc.nasa.gov/htmltest/rjn_bht.html

<http://archive.ncsa.uiuc.edu/Cyberia/NumRel/BlackHoles.html>

<http://cfpa.berkeley.edu/BHfaq.html>

http://www.damtp.cam.ac.uk/user/gr/public/bh_home.html

Bolivar, Simon

Simon Bolivar (1783-1830) is a Latin American folk hero, revered for having been a revolutionary freedom fighter, a compassionate egalitarian and a successful politician. He is credited with the liberation from Spanish colonial yoke of Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia, a country named after him. Venezuela's new strongman, Hugo Chavez, renamed his country The Bolivarian republic of Venezuela to reflect the role of his "Bolivarian revolution".

Yet, while alive, Bolivar was a much hated dictator and - at the beginning of his career - a military failure.

His aide and friend, Gen. Daniel O'Leary, an Irish soldier described him so:

"His chest was narrow, his figure slender, his legs particularly thin. His skin was swarthy and rather coarse. His hands and feet were small ...a woman might have envied them. His expression, when he was in good humor, was pleasant, but it became terrible when he was aroused. The change was unbelievable."

Bolivar explained his motives:

"I confess this (the coronation of Napoleon in 1804) made me think of my unhappy country and the glory which he would win who should liberate it"

And, later, after a victory against the Spaniards in 1819:

"The triumphal arches, the flowers, the hymns, the acclamations, the wreaths offered and placed upon my head by the hands of lovely

maidens, the fiestas, the thousand demonstrations of joy are the least of the gifts that I have received," he wrote. "The greatest and dearest to my heart are the tears, mingled with the rapture of happiness, in which I have been bathed and the embraces with which the multitude have all but crushed me."

Venezuela became independent in 1811 and Bolivar, being a minor - though self-aggrandizing - political figure, had little to do with it. After his first major military defeat, in defending the coastal town of Puerto Cabello against royalist insurgents out to oust the newly independent Venezuela, he advocated the creation of a professional army (in the Cartagena Manifesto). Far from being a revolutionary he, justly, opposed the reliance on guerrilleros and militiamen.

He then reconquered Caracas, Venezuela's capital, at the head of a small army and declared himself a dictator. He made Congress award him the title of El Libertador (the Liberator). The seeds of his personality cult were sown. When he lost Caracas to the royalists in yet another botched campaign, he retreated and captured Bogotá, the capital city of Colombia in December 1814.

After a series of uninterrupted military defeats, Bolivar exiled himself to Jamaica. In a sudden conversion, he published the Jamaica Letter (1815) in which he supported a model of government akin to the British parliamentary system - yet, only following a phase of "guided leadership" (identical to Hitler's "Führerprinzip").

But the self-anointed leader did not hesitate to desert his soldiers and leave them stranded after yet another of his military exploits - an attempt to capture Caracas - unravelled in 1816. He simply defected to Haiti, letting his loyal troops fend for themselves as best they could.

There followed a string of successful - even brilliant - battles and coalitions with local warlords and politicians which culminated in the liberation of Peru. In 1824, Bolivar was declared dictator - or, to be precise, "Emperor" - of Peru and commander in chief of its army. Bolivar liked power and its trappings. In the constitution he composed in 1826, he suggested that the president of Bolivia - the name given to the entire region, except Peru - should be appointed for life and should have the right to choose his successor.

This president - presumably, Bolivar - was described unabashedly by Bolivar himself as:

"The sun which, fixed in its orbit, imparts life to the universe. ...Upon him rests our entire order, notwithstanding his lack of powers ...a life term president, with the power to choose his successor, is the most sublime inspiration amongst republican regimes."

In a letter to Santander, the Liberator expounded:

"I am convinced, to the very marrow of my bones, that our America can only be ruled through a well-managed, shrewd despotism."

The National Geographic describes how:

"William Tudor, the American consul at Lima, wrote in 1826 of the 'deep hypocrisy' of Bolívar, who allowed himself to be deceived by the 'crawling, despicable flattery of those about him.' Later, John Quincy Adams would define Bolívar's military career as 'despotic and sanguinary' and state baldly that 'he cannot disguise his hankering after a crown.' In Bogotá the U. S. minister and future president, Gen. William Henry Harrison, accused Bolívar of planning to turn Gran Colombia into a monarchy: 'Under the mask of patriotism and attachment to liberty, he has really been preparing the means of investing himself with arbitrary power.' "

When, in 1828, a constitutional convention in Colombia rejected amendments to the constitution that he proposed, Bolivar assumed dictatorial powers in a coup d'etat.

Now, Bolivar was the oppressor. He has murdered, or exiled his political rivals throughout his career. He confiscated church funds and imposed onerous taxes on the populace. Consequently, the "Liberator" faced numerous uprisings and narrowly escaped an assassination attempt. By the time he died he was so despised that the government of Venezuela refused to allow his body onto its soil. It took 12 years of constant petitioning by the family to let his remains be interred in the country that he helped found.

<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Acropolis/7609/eng/bio.html>

http://wekker.seagull.net/bolivar/biograf_menu.html

Bra

Mary Phelps Jacob - a rich socialite - received the first patent for a bra in 1914. Her corset - replete with whaleback bones was visible under a brand new evening gown she purchased. She used handkerchiefs and ribbon to replace the bones. The bra was born. she sold the patent to Warner Brothers Corset Company in Bridgeport, Connecticut, for \$1,500. They made \$15 million over the next 30 years. Bras were one size fits all until 1928.

An interesting coincidence: one of the forerunners of the bra was patented by a George Phelps in 1875. Other bra-like devices were patented in 1893 and 1889.

During the first world war, in 1917, the US War Industries Board called on women to stop buying metal-rich corsets. Some 28,000 tons of metals were thus made available to the war effort.

<http://inventors.about.com/library/weekly/aa042597.htm>

<http://www.patentmuseum.com/ebayhtmls/111mj.html>

Burma (Aung San)

Aung San Suu Kyi is a much revered opposition leader in Myanmar (Burma) (born 1945). She has bravely resisted - and still does - the murderous military regime in her homeland and has won the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize.

Her mother was ambassador to India in the 1960s. She is cherished by all her countrymen.

Moreover, Aung San Suu Kyi is the daughter of an illustrious figure in Burmese history, a national hero - Aung San, who was murdered in 1947.

Aung San may be a hero to the Burmese but he has collaborated with the Japanese war-crime tainted military machine throughout the second world war - though he conveniently switch allegiances to the winning side five months before the Japanese capitulated.

Aung San raised a Burmese contingent - the "Burma Independence Army" - to assist the Japanese in their invasion of Burma in 1942. He was rewarded with the post of minister of defense in Ba Maw's puppet government (1943-5).

In March 1945, in what amounted to a coup, he opportunistically defected, together with the Burma National Army, to the Allies, and worked closely with the British, whom he hitherto claimed to have been fighting for independence.

When the war was over, he established a private militia, under his command - the People's Volunteer Organization. He proceeded to negotiate Burma's independence from Britain and its first elections. He was murdered - with his brother and four others - probably by a political opponent, U Saw, in 1947.

<http://www.geocities.com/toekyi/aungsan.html>

<http://aungsan.com/>

C

Caesarean Section

Legend has it that Julius Caesar was cut out of his mother's womb through the abdomen. In Latin, "caedere" means "to cut".

Caesarean section was mandated in case of the mother's death in the "Roman Law" wrongly attributed to Numa Pompilius, the second of Rome's seven kings (said to have ruled 715-673 BC). Stories during the Renaissance describe "do it yourself" sections by anxious husbands. But the procedure was unknown to midwives and lithotomists (specialist removers of bladder stones). Scipione Mercurio (1540-1615) described the operation in his first text, published in 1596. Four strong assistants had to hold down the writhing mother while the incision was done. Another documented case - a failure - dates back to 1610.

Survival rates were, probably, abysmal. The next mention of the dreaded surgery was in 1793 in Manchester, England. Jane Foster's pelvis was crushed in an accident and then she survived a Caesarean section by one, Dr. James Barlow. The baby was less fortunate.

In the meantime, the French obstetrician Baudeloque published a book describing dozens of cases of successful caesarean section in the previous 50 years. The book was translated to English.

An Edom, Virginia doctor, Jessee Bennet, recorded in the margin of his copy that he performed a section on his wife thus:

"14 Jany 1794 JB on EB up 9 Feby walked 15 Feby Cured on 1 March." The mother was sedated with laudanum and placed on two planks set across two barrels. While at it, the good doctor removed his wife's ovaries to prevent a recurrence of the ordeal. She lived another 25 years and the baby died at the ripe old age of 77.

http://www.umanitoba.ca/outreach/manitoba_womens_health/hist1b.htm

<http://www.obgyn.net/displayarticle.asp?page=/urogyn/murphy-book/cover>

Calendars

Orthodox Christians celebrate Christmas on January 7. Their "old new year" is a week later, on January 14. It is all Julius Caesar's fault

...

The Romans sometimes neglected to introduce an extra month every two years to amortize the difference between their lunar calendar and the natural solar year. Julius Caesar decreed that the year 46 BC should have 445 days (some historians implausibly say: 443 days) in order to bridge the yawning discrepancy that accumulated over the preceding seven centuries. It was aptly titled the "Year of Confusion".

To "reset" the calendar, Julius Caesar affixed the New Year on January 1 (the day the Senate traditionally convened) and added a day or two to a few months.

He thus gave rise to the Julian Calendar, a latter day rendition of

the Aristarchus calendar from 239 BC. After his assassination, the month of Quintilis was renamed Julius (July) in his honor.

The Julian calendar estimated the length of the natural solar year (the time it takes for the earth to make one orbit of the sun) to be 365 days and 6 hours. Every fourth year the extra six hours were collected and added as an extra day to the year, creating a leap year of 366 days.

But the calendar's underlying estimate was off by 11 minutes and 14 seconds. It was longer than the natural solar year. The extra minutes accumulated to one whole day. By 325 AD, the Spring Equinox was arriving on March 21st on the Julian Calendar - instead of March 25.

The First Ecumenical Council met in Nicea in 325 and determined that the date to celebrate Pascha was on the first Sunday, after the first full moon, after the Spring Equinox on March 21st. In other words, it enshrined the Julian calendar's aberration.

Thus, by 1582, the Spring Equinox was arriving on March 11. Half-hearted measures by Popes Paul III and Pius V failed to restore the essential correspondence between the calendar and the seasons.

Pope Gregory XIII decided - in his tenth year in office - to drop 3 leap years every 400 years by specifying that any year whose number ended with 00 must also be evenly divisible by 400 in order to have a 29-day February.

This would have the effect of bringing the Julian calendar closer to the natural length of the solar year - though an error of 26 seconds per year would still remain.

To calibrate the Julian calendar with the Gregorian one and to move the Spring Equinox back to March 21, 10 days were dropped from the civil calendar in October 1582. Thursday, October 4 was followed by Friday, October 15. People rioted in the streets throughout Europe, convinced that they have been robbed of 10 days.

But this was merely a convenient fiction. The Spring Equinox in the Gregorian calendar was, indeed, celebrated on March 21 in perpetuity. But, according to the Julian calendar, in the 17th century it arrived on March 11th, in the 18th century on March 10th, in the 19th century on March 9th, and in the 20th century on March 8th - 13 days earlier than even the erroneous date adopted by the Nicea Council.

The Gregorian calendar was controversial in Protestant countries. Britain and its colonies adopted it only in 1752. They had to drop 11 days from the civil calendar and move the official new year from March 25 to January 1. For centuries, dates followed by OS ("Old Style") were according to the Julian calendar and dates followed by NS ("New

Style") according to the Gregorian one. Sweden adopted the Gregorian Calendar in 1753, Japan in 1873, Egypt in 1875, Eastern Europe between 1912 to 1919 and Turkey in 1927. In Russia it was decreed by the (bourgeois) revolutionaries that thirteen days would be omitted from the calendar, the day following January 31, 1918 becoming February 14, 1918.

It was Pope Pius X who, in 1910, changed the beginning of the ecclesiastical year from Christmas Day to January 1, effective from 1911 onwards.

All that time, the Christian Orthodox continued to observe the Julian calendar. In 1923, a Conference of Orthodox Churches in Constantinople reduced the number of leap years every 900 years and attained a discrepancy between the calendar and the natural solar year of merely 2.2 seconds per year.

According to this calendar, the Spring Equinox will regress by one day every 40,000 years.

They, too, had to drop 13 days to bring the Spring Equinox back to March 21st. Hence the gap between December 25 (Gregorian calendar) and January 7 (revised Julian-Orthodox calendar).

http://serendipity.magnet.ch/hermetic/cal_stud/cal_art.htm

<http://www.greenheart.com/billh/julian.html>

Canada

Following a series of rebellions, the British North American colonies achieved self-government in 1848. But the economic situation was dire. The colonies, immersed as they were in the 1847 global depression, could no longer rely on protective tariffs once the British repealed the Corn Laws. Famished and disease-stricken Irish immigrants flooded the new state. Young men in Canada West left in droves for the United States due to a shortage of agricultural land.

The 1849 Gold Rush brought tens of thousands of gold diggers from the USA to Canada. Riots erupted in Montreal. A Rebellion Losses Bill, intended to compensate some of the victims of the 1837-38 rebellion, further drained the country's dilapidated resources.

By 1849, many Canadians were clamoring to join the United States. An Annexation Association was founded to promote unification with the prospering southern neighbor. The two versions of an Annexation Manifesto were signed by the entire business community in Montreal and Quebec and by the nationalists, who, contrary to their name, were republicans who preferred the USA to the British crown.

<http://www.nlc-bnc.ca/2/18/h18-2005-e.html>

<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&ArticleId=A000230>

Canada, Invasion of

The U.S. military developed a "Joint Army and Navy Basic War Plan--Red" in the 1920s. The detailed Plan was augmented and amended in the 1930s. It envisioned the invasion of Canada by the United States to hurt the interests of the United Kingdom. Later, the Plan called for the US military to invade Bermuda and Britain's Caribbean assets. Australia and New Zealand were singled out as British allies and enemy powers.

The document was declassified in 1974. It was only the last of many such color-coded contingency plans.

<http://www.straightdope.com/mailbag/mcanadawar.html>

Candidate

White in Latin is "candicans". Pure white, bright, shining - is "candidus". Hence the English words "candid" and "candidate". The word "candidus" is derived from "candere" - glow, shine, be white, or guileless. Hence the

words candle, incandescent.

Political candidates in Rome wore a chalk-powdered white toga.

<http://www.hyperdictionary.com/dictionary/candidate>

<http://faculty.whatcom.ctc.edu/lthomp/personal/wordfor.htm>

Capone, Alphonse ("Al")

The "fact" that Alphonse ("Al") Capone (1899-1947) evaded justice numerous times and was finally indicted for income tax evasion in 1931 - is untrue. It is a partial myth.

As his FBI file (see link below) makes clear, Capone was apprehended and did time in prison prior to his conviction for tax fraud.

In the 1920s, the FBI was not authorized to investigate gangsters and organized crime.

Capone's first arrest - by the FBI - was for contempt of court. He posted bond and was released.

Then, in May 1929, as the FBI recounts: "Al Capone and his bodyguard were arrested in Philadelphia for carrying concealed deadly weapons. Within 16 hours they had been sentenced to terms of one year each. Capone served his time and was released in nine months for good behavior on March 17, 1930.

On February 28, 1936, Capone was found guilty in Federal Court on the Contempt of Court charge and was sentenced to six months in Cook County Jail. His appeal on that charge was subsequently dismissed."

At first, Capone pleaded guilty to tax evasion charges - but he later changed his plea when the judge informed him that he is not bound by any deals he may have made with the prosecution. In 1931, he was ultimately sentenced to 11 years in prison of which he served more than 7.

He contracted syphilis which affected his brain and in his last years in seclusion he has mentally regressed to the age of 12.

<http://www.fbi.gov/libref/historic/famcases/capone/capone.htm>

http://www.archives.gov/exhibit_hall/american_originals/capone.html

Car Race

The first car race in the United States, sponsored by the Chicago Times-Herald was held in 1895. The contestants drove from Chicago to Waukegan. It was won by James Frank Duryea (1869-1967).

His average speed was a whopping 10 kilometers per hour (7 1/2 MPH). His brother, Charles, lost the race, driving a German Benz.

The Duryea brothers - Charles Edgar and James Frank - were technological pioneers. They invented the first commercial American automobile to run on gasoline in 1893-4 in their bicycle workshop and a loft they rented. In 1895 they established the Duryea Motor Wagon Company. It produced a total of 13 cars and went belly up in 1898.

Frank proceeded to design the prestigious and high standard Stevens-Duryea limousine car. It was very successful. It continued to

be manufactured well into the 1920's. Charles competed with his own self-designed three cylinder car manufactured by the Duryea Power Company. In 1914 he gave up business and became an engineering consultant.

<http://duryea.ssi.net/links.htm>

Census

The first complete world census was carried out in 1801. The results - China (295 million people), India (131 million), Russia (33 million), France (27 million), Ottoman Empire (21 million), Germany (14 million), Spain (11 million), Britain (10 million), Ireland and the USA (c. 5 million each).

Data for these countries today:

China (1,302,505,000), India (1,047,074,000), Russia (142,881,000), France (59,107,500), Turkey (71,374,700), Germany (81,947,100), Spain (41,197,900), Britain (59,751,900), Ireland (3,917,300), USA (288,212,300).

<http://www.infotoday.com/searcher/jun02/mattison.htm>

<http://www.gazetteer.de/home.htm>

<http://www.ipums.umn.edu/international/>

Chauvinism

Chauvinism - excessive and self-aggrandizing promotion of one's group - is named after the hapless Nicolas Chauvin. He served as a soldier under Napoleon. though he witnessed, first hand, the bloody crumbling of the Grande Armee in Waterloo, he continued to praise the invincibility and foresight of his leader. Napoleon himself, touched by such devotion, decorated him and awarded him a pension of 200 francs.

Chauvin was born in Rochefort, France around 1780 or 1790. His 17 battle wounds resulted in disfigurement and mental instability. After the war, he became a laughing stock and was ridiculed in several Vaudeville plays, especially 'La Cocarde Tricolore' (1831). The terms "Chauvinism" first appeared in Arrago's Dictionnaire de la Conversation in 1834.

<http://humanityquest.com/topic/Index.asp?theme1=chauvinism>

Chicago (musical)

The musical "Chicago" won 6 Academy awards (Oscars) in March 2003. It is based on the true story of Belva Gaertner and Beulah Annan, two ravishing and witty women murderers who became celebrities in the 1920s.

When asked what kind of jury she needed, Gaertner responded: "I want

worldly men, broad-minded men, men who know what it is to get a bit."
She had a gig in a cabaret when she married William Gaertner, her second husband, in 1917. William was convinced from the start that Belva was being unfaithful to him. They both hired gumshoes, who spent their time mostly spying on each other.

In 1923, Walter Law was found dead in his Nash sedan. Belva was involved with him. Her statement to the police read thus: "gin and guns-either one is bad enough but together they get you in a dickens of a mess, don't they?" She promised to reunite with William if exonerated and the jury rendered a verdict of "not guilty". Later, William divorced her, accusing her of homicidal tendencies.

In 1924, Annan was asked out on a date by Harry Kolstedt, a co-worker. They had a fight and he was killed. In her latest version of the events - she proferred a few - Annan insisted that Harry tried to rape her and that she took his life in self-defense. She was found not guilty and promptly divorced her husband. She died of tuberculosis, in a hospital bed.

<http://www.chicagothemusical.com/indexl.html>

Cigarettes

Smokers inhale the same amounts of nicotine from regular, light and ultralight cigarettes - 1-2 milligrams per cigarette. They also absorb the same amounts of tar (a group of compounds), regardless of the type of cigarette.

"Light" and "low tar" designate tar and nicotine yields in cigarette smoke as measured by a machine.

The number on the cigarette pack merely reflects the milligrams of nicotine or tar found in cigarette smoke as measured by the machine. It does not relate to the real amount of nicotine per cigarette (between 6-17 milligram). Nor is it the total amount of nicotine in the whole pack.

SOURCE: Preventive Medicine 2003;36:92-98.

http://dmoz.org/Health/Addictions/Substance_Abuse/Tobacco/Research/

http://story.news.yahoo.com/news?tmpl=story2&cid=571&ncid=751&e=3&u=/nm/20030103/hl_nm/smoking_cancer_dc

Civil War

The Civil War (1861-5) has spawned numerous myths and falsities.

The Republicans did not intend to abolish slavery - just to "contain"

it, i.e., limit it to the 15 states where it had already existed. Most of the Democrats accepted this solution.

This led to a schism in the Democratic party. The "fire eaters" left it and established their own pro-secession political organization. Growing constituencies in the south - such as urban immigrants and mountain farmers - opposed slavery as a form of unfair competition. Less than one quarter of southern families owned slaves in 1861. Slave-based, mainly cotton raising, enterprises, were so profitable that slave prices almost doubled in the 1850s. This rendered slaves - as well as land - out of the reach of everyone but the wealthiest citizens.

Cotton represented three fifths of all United States exports in 1860. Southerners, dependent on industrial imports as they were, supported free trade. Northerners were vehement trade protectionists. The federal government derived most of its income from custom duties. Income tax and corporate profit tax were yet to be invented.

The states seceded one by one, following secession conventions and state-wide votes. The Confederacy (Confederate States of America) was born only later. Not all the constituents of the Confederacy seceded at once. Seven - the "core" - seceded between December 20, 1860 and February 1, 1861. They were: South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas.

Another four - Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Arkansas - joined them only after the attack on Fort Sumter in April 1861. Two - Kentucky and Missouri - seceded but were controlled by the Union's army throughout the war. Maryland and Delaware were slave states but did not secede.

President James Buchanan who preceded Abraham Lincoln, made clear that the federal government would not use force to prevent secession. Secession was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court only in 1869 (in Texas vs. White) - four years after the Civil War ended. New England almost seceded in 1812, during the Anglo-American conflict, in order to protect its trade with Britain.

The constitution of the Confederacy prohibited African slave trade (buying slaves from Africa), though it allowed interstate trade in slaves. The first Confederate capital was in Montgomery, Alabama - not in Richmond, Virginia. The term of office of the Confederate president - Jefferson Davis was the first elected - was six years, not four as was the case in the Union.

Fort Sumter was not the first attack of the Confederacy on the Union. It was preceded by attacks on 11 forts and military installations on Confederate territory.

Lincoln won only 40 percent of the popular vote in 1860. Hence the South's fierce resistance to his abolitionist agenda. In 1864, the Republicans became so unpopular, they had to change their name to the

Union Party. Lincoln's vice-president, Johnson, actually was a Democrat and hailed from Tennessee, a seceding state.

He was the only senator from a seceded state to remain in the Senate.

Reconstruction started long before the war ended, in Union-occupied Louisiana, Arkansas, and Tennessee. Slave tax was an important source of state revenue in the South (up to 60 percent in South Carolina). Emancipation led to near bankruptcy.

The Union states of Connecticut, Minnesota, and Wisconsin refused to pass constitutional amendments to confer suffrage on black males. The Union army consigned black labor gangs to work on the plantations of loyal Southerners and forcibly separated the black workers from their families.

Contrary to myth, nearly two thirds of black families were headed by both parents. Slave marriages were legally meaningless in the antebellum South, though. But nearly 90 percent of slave households remained intact till death or forced separation. The average age of childbirth for women was 20.

Segregation was initiated by blacks. The freedmen lobbied hard and long for separate black churches and educational facilities. Nor was lynching confined to blacks. For instance, a white mob lynched, in September 1862, forty four Union supporters in Gainesville, Texas. Similar events took place in Shelton Laurel, North Carolina. The Ku Klux Klan was the paramilitary arm of the Democratic party in the South, though never officially endorsed by it. It was used to "discipline" the workforce in the plantations - but also targeted Republicans.

The Democrats changed their name after the war to the Conservative Party. By 1877 they have regained power in all formerly Confederate states.

http://dmoz.org/Society/History/By_Region/North_America/United_States/Wars/Civil_War/

http://dmoz.org/Society/Military/People/Personal_Experiences/American_Civil_War/

Cocaine

Cocaine, discovered in 1855, was considered by Sigmund Freud to be both a powerful anti-depressant and an aphrodisiac. He recommended it to treat morphine addiction in his tome, "On Coca", published in 1884. He himself used it for a few years and convinced at least one of his friends to become an addict.

But cocaine was popularly used long before Freud. Spanish discoverers of the New World, such as Amerigo Vespucci, tried it in Peru and reported enthusiastically back home in 1505. Both the Spanish crown and the church taxed coca production and accepted payment in coca leaves.

Cocaine was extensively used in the 19th century in throat and eye

surgeries. It was so commonplace, cheap, and popular that it was not banned either by the strict Prussians or by the British in the 1868 Pharmacy Act.

People drank cocaine in wine, in Coca-Cola (hence the name), in patent medicines. Merck was a huge producer of the substance. By the beginning of last century, everyone was snorting cocaine. Celebrities from Thomas Edison to Sarah Bernhart - not to mention Hollywood - extolled the drug's virtues. Cocaine was banned in the USA only in 1914.

<http://www.druglibrary.org/schaffer/History/ophs.htm>

<http://www.stopcocaineaddiction.com/history-of-cocaine.htm>

Columbus, Christopher

Columbus was an Italian and lived most of his early life in Portugal, not in Spain. He was born in Genoa, Italy, no one knows when. He did "discover" America, the continent - or, at least, is the first documented European to have done so. His first and second voyages ended in in today's Haiti (the Caribbean) - but on two subsequent trips he visited today's Venezuela, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama. He is buried - maybe - in the Dominican Republic.

Though he knew the earth was spherical and not flat, how good a navigator he was is debatable. He was actually looking for a path to India and China when he stumbled across America (named after a later discoverer, Amerigo Vespucci).

Columbus denied to his dying day that he detected a new continent. Indeed, the Spanish royal couple, Ferdinand and Isabella, twice rejected his entreaties for regal finance of his trips before they succumbed to lobbying and the euphoria of the eradication of the Moslem Moors from Granda in January 1492.

He is a deeply controversial figure. He had a son out of wedlock with his mistress. His second, third, and, possibly, fourth trips were financed by property expropriated from Jews exiled from Spain in 1492. He introduced the slave trade - and a host of incurable epidemics - to the Americas.

He gave his approval to the massacring of natives in abandon. Even his own sponsors found his dangerously self-delusional and overweening.

He was arrested in 1500 and sent back to Spain, in chains throughout the voyage (at his insistence). He was forbidden to ever re-enter Hispaniola. He died a well-off but embittered man.

<http://www1.minn.net/~keithp/>

<http://www.ibiblio.org/expo/1492.exhibit/c-Columbus/columbus.html>

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/columbus1.html>

Corset

Catherine de Médicis, wife of King Henri II of France, hated the thick waists of women attending court receptions.

So, in the 1550s, she introduced the corset (sleeveless "payre of bodies") - an undergarment designed to artificially narrow a woman's waist by up to 30 centimeters and to yield a cylindrical shape with a flat, breastless, torso.

The Elizabethan corset - as opposed to the Victorian one - was comfortable and supported the back. It evolved in Tudor times from the kirtle, stiffened by glue and worn under the gown. Mary Tudor's wardrobe contained these:

"Item for making of one peire of bodies of crymsen satin, Item for making two pairs of bodies for petticoats of crymsen satin, Item for making a pair of bodies for a Verthingall of crymsen Grosgrain."

Queen Elizabeth had these listed in her garderobe:

"A payre of bodies of black cloth of silver with little skirts (1571), a pair of bodies of sweete lether (1579), a pair of bodies of black velvet lined with canvas stiffened with buckeram (1583), for altering a pair of bodies...the bodies lined with sackcloth and buckram about the skirts with bents covered with fustian, a pair of french bodies of damaske lined with sackcloth, with whales bone to them (1597)"

Victorian women were described by contemporaries as maintaining a 43 centimeters waistline with the aid of whalebone corsets. But period advertisements for corsets cater to waistlines of up to 107 centimeters with an average of 76 centimeters. Wearing a tight corset did constrain blood flow and cause fainting - but there was no shortage of corsets of all sizes.

Corsets dominated fashion between 1555 and 1908 when the first flowing gowns to be worn without a the constraining undergarment were designed. Another twenty years passed before the corset was relegated to history.

<http://www.corset.dk/>

<http://costume.dm.net/>

Crossword Puzzle

The image of the quintessential British gentleman, stoically solving a crossword puzzle while on a train voyage - is etched in our minds. The crossword puzzle appears to be a British institution, as ancient as the monarchy and a lot more rewarding.

The surprising fact is that it was invented only in December 1913.

It was first published as a "word-cross" puzzle in New York of all places - in a Sunday weekly called the "World".

Following a crossword craze launched by a nascent publishing company called "Simon and Schuster" in 1924, the Sunday Express in Britain picked up the American habit. The "New York Times" succumbed and published the first of its renowned crossword puzzles only in 1942.

<http://www.factmonster.com/spot/crossword1.html>

D

Dance, St. Vitus

Dancing manias - a form of mass hysteria - were most common between the 13th and 17th centuries in Italy, notably in Taranto. Hence "tarantism". But occurrences were recorded in other locations (e.g., Lizzano, southern Apulia, Sardinia) as late as 50 years ago, during and after the second world war.

The Italian folk dance, "Tarantella" is related to tarantism. It was played for days on end to manic patients by groups of travelling musicians as a kind of music therapy. The patient also had to select among colored ribbons and concentrate on a band bearing the color of the biting spider. Oftentimes, such treatment was administered in the field where the mania first manifested.

The bite of the tarantula, called in many parts of Italy "Taranta" (also named after the town of Taranto) was long - and wrongly - thought to be the cause of the irresistible impulse to dance. The victims, it was claimed, were trying to prance the venom out of their bloodstream.

Other manic raves - such as "St. Vitus' or St. John's Dance", the names given to episodes of rheumatoid chorea - were common in large swathes of Europe between the 11th and 17th century. One legend has it that in 1278, hundreds of people were successfully treated in a chapel named after St. Vitus in Utrecht, Germany, close to the place where a bridge plunged into the Maas river following some frantic dancing. Hence "St. Vitus' dance". Other sources say that the blasphemous frolickers drowned.

Manic dances - sometimes in the form of ecstatic but structured rituals - often resulted in death. The dancers - many of them hailing from foreign lands - were not clinically insane. Men and women were equally represented.

<http://www.csicop.org/si/2000-07/dancing-mania.html>

<http://atshq.org/>

Dead Horse Arum

The Dead Horse Arum smells like rotting meat and, thus, attracts female flies eager to lay their eggs. Researchers from the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences and Italy's University of Cagliari discovered that the chemicals emitted by the flower - three types of oligosulphides - are identical to those given out by disintegrating protein in decaying flesh.

The flower is found on islands off the coasts of Sardinia, Corsica and Spain's Balearic islands in the western Mediterranean. It traps dozens of blowflies at a time in a chamber for a few hours. Then - when they have immersed themselves in its pollen - it lets them fly away and pollinate other specimen. The inside of the chamber is 15 degrees warmer than the outside - another fly luring feature. The flower is the color of decomposing flesh and has is covered with hair-like pelt, the better to simulate a dead animal.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/nature/weird/az/pr.shtml>

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/2566023.stm>

Decapitation

The brain of a decapitated person continues to produce brain waves recordable by EEG 3-8 seconds after the head is severed. Is the person conscious?

A study (Mikeska and Klemm, 1975) reported an EEG trace in the decapitated heads of rats of up 30 seconds (on average - 14 seconds). Allred and Berntson (1986) and Vanderwolf et al. (1988) dismissed that as LVFA (low voltage fast activity), not necessarily indicative of consciousness or distress. Holson (1992) reviewed the literature and found that decapitation triggers 2-4 seconds of slow direct current EEG trace followed by 10-13 seconds of an LVFA trace. When the rats were anesthetized the LVFA trace lasted longer - proving that it had nothing to do with consciousness.

Still, numerous anecdotes recounted by eyewitnesses support the theory that consciousness survives in the first 2-6 seconds and that some decapitated persons even realize their predicament to their utter horror.

http://www.straightdope.com/classics/a1_221a.html

http://www.straightdope.com/classics/a5_262.html<http://www.straightdope.com/columns/980612.html>

http://www.hsus.org/ace/Article_Printer_Friendly?Content_ID=12644

DNA - Deoxyribonucleic Acid

Kilo is one thousand. Mega is one million. Giga is one billion. Tera is one trillion. Peta is a thousand trillion (one quadrillion). Exa is a thousand peta (quintillion). Zetta is a thousand exa (one sextillion). Yotta is a thousand zetta (one septillion).

Juan Enriquez quotes a study by the University of California at Berkeley in his tome, "As the Future Catches You - How Genomics and Other Forces Are Changing Your Life, Your Work, Your Investments, Your World":

All the words ever spoken by humans amount to 5 exabytes. By comparison, we now produce 1.5 exabytes of data per year, including phone conversations, e-mail messages and photocopies.

The genetic code consists of three billion letters, repeated twice within each of our 50 trillion cells. This amounts to 15 with 22 zeros after it, or 150 zettabits of data. Stretched in a line, the DNA is one cell would measure c. 2 meters long. Inside the cell, it is folded in a packet merely trillionths of a centimeter long.

<http://www.theharrowgroup.com/articles/20021216/20021216.htm>

Drive-in

Drive-ins were invented by Richard M. Hollingshead, a car salesman. At first, the film was projected from the hood of his car on to a bedsheet, securely fastened to tree trunks in his back yard in Camden, New Jersey. The sound was broadcast from a radio placed behind the screen and, later, from speakers he mounted on trees. Hollingshead was granted a patent in May 1933 (later invalidated by the courts) and the first drive-in opened on June 6, 1933 in Camden, New Jersey. The price of admission was 25 cents per car and another 25 cents per person. The sound was delivered by in-car speakers which hung on the driver's side window.

Drive-ins today have anywhere from one to 13 screens (in Florida) and a capacity of between 50 and 3000 cars. The soundtrack is now delivered through the car radio.

<http://www.driveintheater.com/history/>

<http://inventors.about.com/library/weekly/aa980121.htm>

E

Eating Disorders

The media would have us believe that the victims of eating disorders are adolescents with psychological problems.

The truth is different. Both Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia Nervosa are indeed more common among adolescents. But close to 80% of all deaths from anorexia nervosa are among people older than 45. Actually, the median age of death from eating disorders and related causes among women is 69 and among men - 80! One fifth of all adult sufferers are men.

http://dmoz.org/editors/editcat.cgi?cat=Health/Mental_Health/Disorders/Eating

Egg

A human female is born with 150,000 hollow balls of cells. Each "ball" - a follicle - contains an immature ovum (egg cell). By the age of 16-18, only 30-40,000 of these follicles survive. The destruction of follicles continues well into menopause when the few remaining follicles degenerate and die. Only 300-400 follicles mature during the woman's reproductive years 13-54. But the quality of the eggs deteriorates with time. In her early 30's, for instance, the rate of spontaneous abortions a woman endures reaches 28%. Menstruation occurs every 4 weeks.

A follicle from one of the two ovaries matures, the egg is extruded from the ovary and is made ready for fertilization in the reproductive tract. If not fertilized, it leaves the body together with the nutrients accumulated to feed a prospective embryo - and blood.

<http://www.babycenter.com/expert/pregnancy/pregcomplications/4754.html>

<http://www.bartleby.com/107/3.html>

Electric Chair

The electric chair was invented by a dentist, Alfred Southwick from Buffalo. But the modern implement was designed and tested by Harold Brown with the active support of Thomas Edison. Carlos McDonald and A. P. Rockwell contributed to the engineering of the chair. But the patent is registered to one, Edwin Davis, who used it to kill more than 300 prisoners.

Due to the body's high resistance, an alternating current of 2000-2400 volts is applied to electrocute the condemned. Only two electrodes, moistened with a salt solution, are attached to the scalp and to the calf of one leg. Death occurs two to five whole minutes after the jolt has been administered - but no one knows why or how. The electrical current may stop the heart before the victims are practically burnt or

cooked to death. There is no proof either way. Willie Francis, who survived his first execution, described it thus:

"My mouth tasted like cold peanut butter. I felt a burning in my head and my left leg, and I jumped against the straps."

The chair has its own circuit, separate from the prison's - but it does feed off the public grid. Prison officials pull the switches or push the buttons.

The axe murderer, William Kemmler, was the first to be electrocuted in Auburn State Prison, New York, on August 6, 1890. By 1972 the chair was adopted by 25 states and the District of Columbia. More than 4300 inmates, including dozens of women, were "grilled" by the device in the United States. Only 11 of the 38 states that currently allow the death penalty still use the chair, though - and only 3 of those as an exclusive method of execution, as do the Philippines and China.

<http://inventors.about.com/library/weekly/aa102497.htm>

<http://www.albany.edu/~brandon/sparky.html>

<http://www.geocities.com/trct111/chair.html>

Electronic Mail

Both Electronic Mail and Instant Messaging were available as early as 1965. Queen Elizabeth of Britain sent her first email in 1976.

Users were sharing files - by placing them into common directories - even earlier (in 1961). The system was known as CTSS (Compatible Time-Sharing System). It was modified by Louis Pouzin, Glenda Schroeder, and Pat Crisman, Tom van Vleck and Noel Morris at the beginning of 1965 to include a MAIL command. Van Vleck and Morris also wrote an instant messaging tool into the software. An unknown hack added a "You've got mail" alert facility. Other timesharing systems - such as SDC and BBN - also included e-mail by autumn 1965. The military deployed AUTODIN (commissioned in 1962) and SAGE with full e-mail capabilities by 1966.

But these were same-machine e-mail applications. They could not connect different computers. ARPANET, a unit of the Department of Defence in the United States, was the first to achieve inter-connectibility.

Ray Tomlinson of ARPANET sent the first recognizable e-mail message in 1971. It was addressed to himself and read: "Testing 1-2-3". He then followed with a message to all ARPANET users with instructions on

how to use the convention username@hostname.

At first, the use of the word "mail" was contentious as the Postal Office was thought to have a monopoly on sending personal notes and messages around. But the Postal Office, not realizing the importance of e-mail, did not object to the newly coined moniker e-mail.

<http://www.multicians.org/thvv/mail-history.html>

<http://www.let.leidenuniv.nl/history/ivh/chap3.htm>

F

Federations

Iraq and Jordan were once one country under a united Hashemite throne. The two monarchs - Hussein of Jordan and Faisal II of Iraq - created a federation in 1958. It lasted a few months - until Faisal II of Iraq was deposed and killed in a military coup.

Syria and Egypt proclaimed in a federation in February 1958. It lasted till September 1961. It was called the United Arab Republic (UAR) and had the hallmarks of a unitary state: single flag and anthem, shared armed services and common foreign policy. Egypt retained the name - UAR - until 1971.

Ukraine was nominally independent even during the heyday of the Soviet Union. It maintained its own delegation to the United Nations, for instance. The USSR was a federation between Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and the Transcaucasus with a formal right to secede granted to each of the constituents.

Lagos - today, a state within Nigeria incorporating the largest city in the country and, for a long time, its capital - was made a separate British colony in 1886. It was administered from Freetown, Sierra Leone. Nigeria is a federation of 36 states and a federal capital territory (similar to the United States).

Texas (originally, Tejas) was an independent republic between 1836 and 1845. It was recognized by the United States and by many countries in Europe - though not by Mexico, from which it seceded. Its annexation by the USA led to the Mexican War between Mexico and the United States.

For centuries, Hawaii was a monarchy. The last queen, Liliuokalani, was deposed in January 1893. An independent republic was declared and immediately sued for annexation. The republic survived 5 years as an independent entity and was annexed by the United States in 1898.

<http://www.ciff.on.ca/>

http://dmoz.org/Society/Politics/Federalism_and_Devolution/

Filibuster

Filibuster is a term common to all the procedural techniques employed by members of a legislature to delay legislation they oppose. Thus, filibuster includes the introduction of dilatory motions, intentional absence from the assembly to prevent a quorum, or lengthy speechmaking. Even speeches completely unrelated to the issue are allowed. Filibustering members hope to kill a legislative initiative or obtain concessions from the majority.

In the United States, members of the House of Representatives cannot filibuster as debate there is limited in time. At the behest of President Woodrow Wilson, cloture rules were adopted by the U.S. Senate in Rule 22 in 1917 (and amended in 1949, 1959, and 1975). Debate now can be limited to a further 30 hours with the vote of three-fifths (originally two thirds) of the full Senate membership. In the British House of Commons, cloture was introduced in 1822 and requires at least 100 affirmative votes.

In August 1957, Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina spoke for 24 hours and 18 minutes in opposition to a civil rights measure. This is the American filibuster record. In 1964, a group of southern senators led by Russell Long of Louisiana extended the debate on the Civil Rights Act for 74 days.

Filibuster is originally a Dutch word meaning "pirate, hijacker". In Spanish "filibustero" meant "freebooting" and applied to 16th century privateers. Irregular military adventurers, mercenaries and guerrilleros in the 19th century were also called "filibusters".

http://www.senate.gov/reference/glossary_term/filibuster.htm

http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/briefing/Filibuster_Clature.htm

Fingerprints

Fingerprints were first used to identify criminals in Bengal, India in the 1890s. The London Metropolitan Police introduced them in 1901. The Illinois Supreme Court was the first to rule that fingerprints are admissible as evidence. The FBI currently holds the fingerprints of more than 80 million people, close to 40 million of them in a computerized database.

In January 2002 a federal judge in Pennsylvania ruled that fingerprint examiners testifying in his courtroom will have to convince the jury that fingerprints discovered in the scene of a crime belong to specific defendants. In other words, fingerprints are no more reliable than other types of evidence. The claim that the error rate in matching prints is zero has never been proven scientifically.

Latent prints lifted off crime scenes with the application of special chemicals or ultraviolet light are often incomplete or indistinct. The matching of prints requires an overall "impression" of similarity (in other words, it is an art, not a science). The minimal number of points of similarity required in more demanding jurisdictions varies wildly and arbitrarily from one jurisdiction to another.

It was Francis Galton, a 19-century statistician, who pegged, in 1892, the probability that the prints of two individuals would match at 1:64 billion. This calculation was based on 35-50 "Galton details" - features related to ridges in the fingerprint.

In forensic practice, only 8-16 such points are used. No one knows to calculate the probability of matching fragments of two individual fingerprints - though most fingerprints recovered from crime scenes are partial.

In the case of Byron Mitchell, in 1998, two latent prints were said to substantiate his guilt. The FBI sent the latent prints and Mitchell's inked fingerprints to the laboratories of 53 state law enforcement agencies. Of the 35 that bothered to respond, fourteen failed to find a match for one of the two latent prints. America's National Institute of Justice (an arm of the Department of Justice) is conducting a study of the reliability of fingerprinting - finally.

<http://www.crimelibrary.com/forensics/fingerprints/>

<http://www.c3.lanl.gov/~brislawn/FBI/FBI.html>

<http://www.fbi.gov/hq/cjisd/iafis.htm>

Fleming, Ian

Ian Lancaster Fleming (1908-1964), the author of the James Bond 007 novels, was the grandson of a Scottish banker and the son of a Conservative MP (Member of Parliament). His father died in the first world war. In his will, he bequeathed his property to his widow on condition she never remarries.

Ian's youth was inauspicious. He was expelled from Eton following a sexual liaison with a girl. He left Sandhurst without obtaining an officer's rank, having been caught violating the curfew. He continued his education in Kitzbuhel, Austria, in Munich and in Geneva where he studied languages. But the chain of disappointments continued apace.

He failed in a Foreign Service exam and had to join Reuters as a journalist. There he successfully covered a spy trial in Russia (1929-32).

He then joined a British investment bank as a stockbroker and moved to live in a converted temple in Belgravia, a fashionable district of London, where he entertained the members of the Le Cercle Gastronomique et des Jeux de Hasard.

In 1939, Fleming took on an assignment for The Times in Moscow - in effect a cover. He was spying for the Foreign Office and later for Naval Intelligence where he attained the rank of Commander.

During the second world war, he worked from room number 39 in the Admiralty building in Whitehall as assistant to Admiral John Godfrey. He was involved in the evacuation of Dieppe in 1940, in the smuggling of King Zog out of Albania and in setting up the Office for Special Services, the precursor of the CIA.

As commander of the 30th Assault Unit, he sometimes operated behind the German lines, trying to secure important documents and files from destruction. But, mostly, he directed the Unit's operations from London.

When the war was over, he built a house - Goldeneye - in Jamaica. He worked for the Kemsley group of papers and vacationed every winter in the island.

While awaiting the divorce of one of his numerous paramours - the pregnant Lady Anne Rothermere - the 44 years old Fleming wrote "Casino Royale" published in 1953. It was the first of 12 James Bond thrillers, translated to 11 languages and with total sales of 18 million copies. James Bond novels are now being authored by a new generation of writers.

In 1961, John F. Kennedy, the newly elected president, listed a James Bond title as one of his favorite books. Many movie plots were loosely based on Fleming's novels and have grossed, in total, more than \$1 billion. The 007 trademark was merchandised and attached to everything, from toys and games to clothes and toiletries.

But Fleming was also renowned for his non-fiction: tomes like "The Diamond Smugglers" and his "Atticus" column in The Sunday Times where he served as foreign manager (1945-9). He successfully branched into children's literature with "Chitty Chitty Bang Bang" (1964), also made into a movie.

Ironically, his mother died and left him a fortune in 1964 - when Fleming was already wealthy and dying. The trip to her service may have done him in. His son committed suicide in 1975 and his wife died in 1981. He left behind one heir: James Bond.

<http://www.klast.net/bond/fleming.html>

<http://www.ianfleming.org/index.shtml>

Foreign Accent Syndrome

The brains of stroke victims play odd tricks on them. A small group of stroke survivors develops a speech impediment known as "Foreign Accent Syndrome". In the first known case, in 1941, a Norwegian woman spoke in a German accent. All the elements of pronunciation shift - pacing, rhythm, intonation, and stress. The New York Times cites the case of a BBC producer in London who spoke in a Scottish - or, at any rate, foreign - accent. The impediment is aided and often completely cured through speech therapy.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/10/15/health/15CHAN.html?8vd>
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/2300395.stm>

<http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/po/021003.shtml>

<http://www.cog.brown.edu/~seb/Kurowski.pdf>

http://casino.cchs.usyd.edu.au/csd/mig_site/1999_vol15_2/foreign_accen_t_syndrome.htm

French Revolution

The monarchy was far from absolute prior to the French Revolution. Laws had to be approved by the regional parlements - and, increasingly frequently, were not. King Louis XVI abolished the parlements in May 1788. This led to widespread attacks on royal officials and emissaries, civil disobedience, and a tsunami of pamphlets against the king's despotism. The revolution started, therefore, much before July 1789.

The disaffection cut across class lines. Many noblemen spoke for the commoners. French nobleman Honoré Gabriel Riqueti, Comte de Mirabeau, for instance, sought to be elected to the Estates-General, a consultative assembly not convened since 1614, as a delegate of the "third estate" (people who were neither aristocrats, nor clergy).

The revolution itself may have been set off by a misunderstanding.

The representatives of the third estate joined forces with dissenting delegates from the other two estates to form the National Assembly. One day, officials of the king locked the regular meeting place of the Assembly in order to prepare it for an address by the king. The members of the Assembly wrongly concluded that they are about to be crushed.

On June 20, they regrouped in an indoor tennis court and vowed not to disband until France had a constitution and the king's powers are drastically curtailed. This became known as the "Tennis Court Oath".

On July 14, 1789 crowds stormed the Bastille - a fortress prison in east Paris - in response to ominous movements of royal troops in and around the capital. Contrary to later myths, the Bastille was virtually decommissioned and housed, at the time, only seven aging inmates. They missed the Marquis de Sade by weeks. He was moved from the Bastille to the Charenton lunatic asylum in 1789, after having

incited the crowds outside his window in the impregnable fort.

<http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/>

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/modsbook13.html>

G

Gandhi, Mahatma

Many myths abound about Gandhi, Mohandas Karamchand known as Mahatma "Great Souled") Gandhi (1869-1948).

He was NOT born to a poor Indian family. His father was dewan (chief minister) of Porbandar, the capital of a small principality in Gujarat in western India under British suzerainty. He later became dewan of Rajkot.

He married at the age of 13 and was a mediocre student. In his adolescence he defied his repressive environment by petty thieving, meat eating, smoking, and professed atheism.

Until the age of 18 He spoke very little English. His main language was Gujarati.

He wanted to be a medical doctor - more precisely, a surgeon. His family forced his to study law.

His first political activity was as a member of the executive committee of the London Vegetarian Society.

He went to South Africa because he couldn't find work in India. He was a poor lawyer, in both senses of the word. He suffered from stage fright.

The "Encyclopedia Britannica" describes his first days there:

"Africa was to present to Gandhi challenges and opportunities that he could hardly have conceived. In a Durban court, he was asked by the European magistrate to take off his turban; he refused and left the courtroom.

A few days later, while traveling to Pretoria, he was unceremoniously thrown out of a first-class railway compartment and left shivering and brooding at Pietermaritzburg Station; in the further course of the journey he was beaten up by the white driver of a stagecoach because

he would not travel on the footboard to make room for a European passenger; and finally he was barred from hotels reserved "for Europeans only." These humiliations were the daily lot of Indian traders and labourers in Natal who had learned to pocket them with the same resignation with which they pocketed their meagre earnings."

He was about to sail to London when he read about a bill to deprive the Indians of their right to vote. He decided to stay. It is in Johannesburg, South Africa that his first civil disobedience ("Satyagraha") campaign was staged - not in India.

Gandhi's life was at peril many times. He was almost lynched in Durban as early as January 1897. He was assassinated in 1948.

He was not a pacifist. Nor was he anti-British. When the Boer war broke out, he organized a volunteer corps of 11,000 Indians to defend the British colony of Natal.

There is much more here:

http://dmoz.org/Society/History/By_Region/Asia/South_Asia/Personalities/Gandhi,_Mohandas_Karamchand,_Mahatma/

Glass

Is glass an inorganic solid material - or a highly viscous liquid?

At room temperatures, glass is an elastic solid. The source of the confusion is its unusual atomic structure. Glass indeed starts its life as a molten liquid. But when it cools, the atoms do not form crystals. Instead, they are arranged randomly, fully reflecting their distribution in the liquid. This property of homogeneous continuity is called viscosity.

So, why do some scholars insist that glass is really a liquid?

Solid glass "remembers" its previous state as a fluid. It, therefore, acts as though it were a solution - as though various materials, such as soda, lime, and silica - were added and diluted in a solvent. As opposed to most solids, pure, non-commercial, glass has low density (i.e., large interstitial spaces between its atoms). Such "holes" are typical of liquids.

Why is glass transparent if it is, indeed, a solid?

According to the Encyclopedia Britannica (2003 edition), electrons in glass molecules are confined to specific energy levels and cannot absorb and reemit photons (i.e., light). This is why visible light travels through glass unhindered. It is not absorbed. Glass molecules are so tiny compared to ordinary lightwaves that they also do not absorb them when they traverse the glass sheet.

<http://www.cmog.org/>

Gorky, Maxim

Maxim Gorky (1868-1936) is widely considered a Bolshevik author, closely allied with the likes of Lenin and Stalin. But this is far from the truth.

Gorky's real name was Alexei Maximovich Peshkov. He chose the pseudonym "Gorky" - "bitter" in Russian - to describe his early experiences from the age of eight as a menial worker. In his late teens he attempted suicide. The bullet pierced his lung, rendering him susceptible to Tuberculosis for the rest of his life.

Between 1899 and 1906 Gorky lived in St. Petersburg and participated in the activities of the Social Democratic Party. When it split in 1903, he, indeed, supported the Bolsheviks financially - though he never joined them formally. He was a strong critic of Lenin. Partly to avoid his wrath, he exiled himself to Capri, Italy in 1906.

Moreover, though he upheld the Bolsheviks' anti-war stance, he opposed the 1917 October Revolution (the Bolshevik coup against the post-Tsarist Social Democratic government). So damaging was his criticism of Lenin's dictatorial ways and the illegitimacy of the Bolshevik regime that his work was censored from July 1918 onwards.

Gorky left Russia in 1921 and lived in Sorrento, Italy until 1928 when he was lured back by a lavish celebration of his 60th birthday. The year after, he relocated permanently to Russia. In 1938, certain senior Soviet figures - like Nikolai Bukharin and Genrikh Yagoda - were accused of murdering him in 1936, while under medical treatment.

<http://www.imagi-nation.com/moonstruck/clsc73.html>

<http://filine.centro.ru/Gorky/>

Greek Philosophers

There were so many ancient Greek thinkers that virtually every bit of modern knowledge, fact, pseudo-science and counterfact are represented.

Greek mathematician Pythagoras (582-500 BC) postulated that earth is round and that, together with the other planets, it is revolving around a central fire.

Aristarchus, a Greek Astronomer (310-250 BC), was more precise. He suggested that the earth revolves around the sun. He also suggested a

correct method to calculate the distance between the two.

Another Greek astronomer, Eratosthenes (276-196 BC), measured the earth's circumference accurately. He used astronomical observations to calculate the difference in latitude between the cities of Syene (now Aswan) and Alexandria, Egypt.

Democritus (460-370 BC) invented the concept of a-toms - minute, invisible, indivisible and indestructible particles, which populate an infinite empty void (kenon).

<http://www.tmath.edu.gr/en/aet.html>

Guillotine

The guillotine was first put to lethal use on April 25, 1792, at 3:30 PM, in Paris at the Place de Greve on the Right Bank of the Seine. It separated highwayman Nicolas Jacques Pelletier's head from the rest of his body.

The device was perfected - though not invented- by Doctor Joseph Ignace Guillotin (1738 - 1814). The 'e' at the end of the noun is a later, British, addition. Ironically, he belonged to a movement seeking to abolish capital punishment altogether.

Guillotine-like implements were used on delinquents from the nobility in Germany, Italy, Scotland and Persia long before the good doctor's era. Guillotin and German engineer and harpsichord maker, Tobias Schmidt, improved and industrialized it. It was Schmidt who transformed the blade, changing it from round to the familiar form and placing it at an oblique, 45 degree, angle. The process of severing the head - the blade falling, cutting through the tissues and severing the head - took less than half a second. More than 40,000 people were guillotined during the French Revolution and in its immediate aftermath (1789-1795).

Nor was the guillotine abandoned after the French Revolution. As late as 1870, one Leon Berger, an assistant executioner and carpenter, added a spring system, which stopped the mouton at the bottom of the grooves, a lock/blocking device at the lunette and a new release mechanism for the blade.

The murderer Hamida Djandoubi was beheaded on September 10, 1977, in Marseilles, France. The guillotine was never used since.

- * Total weight of a Guillotine is about 580 kg
- * The guillotine blade with weight is over 40 kg
- * The heights of the guillotine posts average about 4 meters
- * The guillotine blade drop is about 2.3 meters
- * The falling blades rate of speed is about 7 meters/second
- * The actual beheading was completed in 2/100 of a second
- * The power when the guillotine blade stops at the bottom is 400 kg/square inch

<http://www.napoleonguide.com/guillotine.htm>

<http://inventors.about.com/library/weekly/aa103197.htm>

H

Halloween

Centuries ago, October 31 was called in England "All Hallows' Eve". People prayed to prepare the souls of the departed for the Catholic All Saints' Day on November 1.

October 31 was also the Celtic New Years' Eve - the "Samhain". On that night, the spirits of the deceased were supposed to possess living bodies before departing to the afterlife.

Pumpkins were not part of Halloween celebrations until late in the 19th century. The Irish and other Europeans actually carved up turnips. Poor immigrants to the USA could not afford turnips and turned to pumpkins instead.

<http://www.americancatholic.org/Features/Halloween/>

Hamburgers

The Tatars were nomad Turkic tribes who conquered a large swathe off current day Russia in the 13th and 14th centuries. Constantly on the move, they placed meat under the saddles of their horses to soften it, the shredded and spiced it and ate the meat raw. Hence the celebrated - and expensive - "Beefsteak (or steak) Tatar".

The tenderized beef crossed over to northern Europe and was especially appreciated in Germany. Immigrants from the German port city of Hamburg brought the "Hamburg steak" (or "Hamburger" - "from Hamburg" in German) to the US in the 19th century.

The term "Hamburger steak" appeared in a menu of Delmonico's in New York dated to 1834. It is mentioned as part of a restaurant menu in the Walla Walla, Washington Union News in 1889 and in Mrs. Rorer's New Cookbook in 1902. Hamburgers cost 15 cents a piece in Ray Croc MacDonald's hamburger chain launched in 1955.

<http://www.nandotimes.com/ncd/week2/burger5.html>

<http://southernfood.about.com/library/weekly/aa052999.htm>

Head Shrinkers

A few tribes in Amazonian Ecuador used to shrink heads as part of their post war rituals. Visit the links below for additional ethnological and anthropological data.

But what is head shrinking? How is the procedure carried out?

The heads of both men and women were shrunk. The head was severed with a clean cut of the neck. The skin was carefully peeled from the back of the skull forward and preserved. The skull and brain were discarded. The skin was then turned inside out and all the fat was scraped.

A rope was inserted through an incision at the top of the skin. The head was dipped into a pot of boiling water and chinchipi plant juice. It was left to simmer for two hours until the hair is soft and the head shrinks by two thirds to three quarters of its previous size. All the cuts and incisions are sown and the lips are attached to each other with minute bamboo nails.

Next, the neck is shrunk repeatedly over a few days by inserting hot pebbles and hot sand into the cavity. Scalding stones are also used to massage the face in order to conserve the facial features. Facial hair is singed off and charcoal is applied to the eyes.

The head is smoked, dried, and cured. It is then washed and polished.

<http://www.guidebookwriters.com/authors/dominic/article130.htm>

<http://www.geocities.com/Pentagon/2666/headshrinker.html>

<http://www.ratical.org/LifeWeb/Articles/shuar.html>

<http://www.saraguro.org/shuar.htm>

Hermaphrodites

A hermaphrodite is someone with both ovaries and testicles (both, in most cases, rather undeveloped). Sometimes the ovaries and testicles are combined into a chimera called ovotestis. Most of these individuals have the chromosomal composition of a woman together with traces of the Y, male, chromosome. All hermaphrodites have a sizable penis, though rarely generate sperm. Hermaphrodites develop breasts during puberty and menstruate. Some hermaphrodites even got pregnant and gave birth.

<http://newton.dep.anl.gov/askasci/bio99/bio99350.htm>

<http://www.world-sex-records.com/sex-025.htm>

<http://samvak.tripod.com/sexgender.html>

Hitler, Adolf

According to British intelligence documents declassified in 1998, Winston Churchill (1874-1965), acting without informing the cabinet, sent agents to Germany to try to assassinate Adolf Hitler (1889-1945). These attempts were codenamed Operation Foxley. The agents almost poisoned Hitler's tea, dipped his uniform in lethal bacteria, blown up his train and shot him during his daily walk.

Hitler survived numerous other assassination attempts by his own people, too.

<http://learningcurve.pro.gov.uk/snapshots/snapshot17/snapshot17.htm>

http://www.time.com/time/magazine/1998/int/980803/europe.wanted_dead_or_al24.html

Homosexuality

On December 13, 2002, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) - which represents 38,000 mental health professionals - joined other professional groups in supporting the right of homosexual (gay and lesbian) couples to adopt:

"Research over the past 30 years has consistently demonstrated that children raised by gay or lesbian parents exhibit the same level of emotional, cognitive, social and sexual functioning as children raised by heterosexual parents."

It was only in 1973 that the American Psychiatric Association reversed 100 year-old opinion that gays are mentally ill. In 2000 it came out in favor of same sex unions.

<http://www.apa.org/pubinfo/answers.html>

<http://www.apa.org/pi/statemen.html>

<http://helping.apa.org/daily/answers.html>

<http://samvak.tripod.com/sexgender.html>

Honey

Bees visit 4 million flowers to make one kilo (2 pounds) of honey. The typical bee visits 50-100 flowers in every single trip. Thus, to produce 1 kilo of honey, bees travels a distance equal to 4 times the circumference of the earth. Each American consumes 1 pound (a half kilo) of honey a year.

It takes the lifetime of 12 bees to produce one teaspoon of honey. Bees have been producing honey for 10-12 million years.

<http://www.honey.com/>

Hygiene, Personal

Personal hygiene was rediscovered only in the late 19th century, having been popular in ancient Greece and Rome almost two thousand years before.

Water was considered by the sophisticates - perhaps justly - to be the carrier of disease. Bathing in water was a hazardous exercise. Royalty used milk instead. Others were confined to wet towels or to splashing water from basins on one's face and armpits. The great unwashed utilized public baths, built throughout Europe between the 12th and 17th centuries.

Consider the Spanish Queen Isabella of Castile, of Christopher Columbus fame. She boasted that she had only two baths in her life - at birth and prior to her wedding. But not all royals were so unhygienic. The flushing toilet was the preserve of Queen Elizabeth I. It was invented for her in 1596 by Sir John Harrington, her godson.

New York entrepreneur Joseph C. Gayetty manufactured in 1857 the first pre-moistened bathroom tissues, each embossed with his name. Aptly named British plumber Thomas Crapper redesigned the modern toilet and received a series of related patents between 1861-1904. The Kleenex tissue was not introduced until 1920 and the pop-up box only nine years later.

Prior to the invention of the toilet paper in 1890 by the Scott Paper Company, people used an assortment of objects to wipe clean - most often leaves and corncobs. French royals employed lace, hardy Vikings - wool, Romans resorted to the sponge. The Chinese, ahead of the times in 1391, were the first to use paper sheets.

<http://abcnews.go.com/sections/us/WolfFiles/wolffiles156.html>

Hysteria

The word means "of the womb" in Greek. Hysteria was thought to be

confined to women who were suffering from some problems with the womb. Hysteria is, indeed, more common among women - probably due to social and cultural expectations and conventions as to how a woman should and does behave.

<http://www.uaf.edu/english/faculty/reilly/NCHCproject/Psychology.htm>

<http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Rivers/chap16.htm>

I-J

Indians (Native Americans, Amerindians)

Native Americans are often cast in the role of victims of White aggression and unbridled avarice-driven or gratuitous violence, especially in the territories known collectively today as the United States. But the first massacre was perpetrated by Indians in the British colony Jamestown, in Virginia in 1622. They slaughtered 347 white men, women and children on that occasion.

Europeans are also accused of importing pathogens, disease causing agents, such as smallpox and measles, malaria and yellow fever. Indigenous people had no immunological resistance to these illnesses as they were never exposed to them.

But recent findings by a team of anthropologists, economists and paleopathologists who have completed a massive study of the health of people living in the Western Hemisphere in the last 7,000 years - suggest that Native American's health was severely run down long before the Europeans delivered the coup de grace.

The researchers analyzed more than 12,500 skeletons - half of them pre-Columbian - from 65 sites in North and South America for evidence of infections, malnutrition and other health problems.

The study - "The Backbone of History: Health and Nutrition in the Western Hemisphere", edited by Dr. Richard H. Steckel and Dr. Jerome C. Rose - discovered that the haleness of Native-Americans declined markedly in the 1000 years before Columbus "discovered" them.

The vast majority of the skeletons showed telltale signs of advanced degenerative joint disease, deteriorating dental health, stature, anemia, arrested tissue development, infections and trauma from injuries. These were attributed by the participants to limited diets and urban congestion. People became shorter and died earlier - on average at age 35 - as the centuries passed.

"Pre-Columbian populations were among the healthiest and the least healthy in our sample," Dr. Steckel and Dr. Rose said. "While pre-Columbian natives may have lived in a disease environment substantially different from that in other parts of the globe, the original inhabitants also brought with them, or evolved with, enough pathogens to create chronic conditions of ill health under conditions of systematic agriculture and urban living."

Moreover, there are signs that diseases hitherto thought to have been introduced by the white explorers were actually indigenous. 1,000-year-old Peruvian mummies, for instance, were found to have been infected with tuberculosis in their lungs.

http://www.publicbookshelf.com/public_html/Our_Country_Vol_1/opechanca_gb.html

<http://www.textbookleague.org/44smlpx.htm>

<http://www.csulb.edu/projects/ais/>

Isolationism

Throughout its history, it was Britain which prided itself for its splendid isolation - ostensibly aloof and detached from the petty squabbles of continental countries across the channel. Yet, the record is held not by the United Kingdom but by the United States. It was established in 1776 - yet the first time an American president ever visited Europe while in office was in 1918. In the wake of the first world war, Woodrow Wilson left Washington to participate in the peace negotiations. He stayed in Europe for 6 months to the great chagrin and consternation of his countrymen.

<http://history.acusd.edu/gen/WW2Timeline/07/isolationism.html>

<http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/foreign/asiso.htm>

<http://www.cato.org/pubs/fpbriefs/fpb-057es.html>

Israel, economy of

At \$105 billion annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Israel's economy is larger than Bulgaria's (\$19 billion gross domestic product per year), the Czech Republic (91), Hungary (77), Romania (53), Slovakia (27), Ukraine (47), Kazakhstan (28), Pakistan (72), Singapore (97), Vietnam (35), Argentina (99), Chile (69), Colombia (77), Kenya (10), Nigeria (45), South Africa (101), Algeria (59), Egypt (78), Iraq (26), Jordan (10), Lebanon (19) and dozens of other countries.

Israel's GDP per capita exceeds \$15,600 a year. The USA spends \$10 billion on foreign aid - \$3 billion of which go to Israel. The USA pledged to increase its foreign aid by \$5 billion as of next year.

(Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2003)

http://www.mof.gov.il/beinle/ie/israe_1.htm

http://dmoz.org/Regional/Middle_East/Israel/Business_and_Economy

Jack the Ripper

Jack the Ripper, who committed his atrocities in September-October 1888, was not the tall, gaunt, gothic, dark figure we all "know" from countless movies.

Actually, he was probably seen more than once shortly before he committed his crimes.

He was described as short, stocky (stout), shabbily dressed (though a gentleman), foreign-looking euphemism for Jewish-looking), and with a moustache. He wore a deerstalker hat (similar to Sherlock Holmes'), wore no cape and carried no cane.

Read more about this elusive figure here

<http://www.casebook.org/>

Jesus, Year of Birth

Was Jesus born 2002 years ago? Was he born in year zero?

The first year AD was 1 - so, Jesus could not have been born in year zero. The very concept of zero was invented much later.

Numerous historical minutia in the gospels indicate that Jesus must have been born before 4 BC.

For example, He was said to have been born during the reign of King Herod, who died in 4 BC.

Much more here:

<http://webexhibits.org/calendars/year-history.html>

<http://www.new-life.net/chrtms10.htm>

http://www.isleofavalon.co.uk/GlastonburyArchive/2000/texts-p3/m22_jeez.html

<http://www.biblequestions.org/Archives/BQAR373.htm>

L

Library of Congress

The library of Alexandria was many centuries old when it was devastated by fire in the civil war under the Roman emperor Aurelian in the late 3rd century AD. Its branch was destroyed by Christians in AD 391. This was a traumatic event.

It is little known that the Library of Congress had a similar fate 1500 years later.

On Christmas Eve 1851, the Library of Congress burnt down entirely. More than 35,000 volumes - out of 55,000 - went up in smoke, including two thirds of Thomas Jefferson's invaluable library. It was reconstructed, but nearly 900 volumes (out of 6487 books) are still missing. The fire was caused by faulty chimney flues.

Librarian Meehan wrote to Senator Pearce of Maryland, Chairman of the Joint Committee on the Library:

"It is my melancholy duty to inform you that a fire originated in the principal room of the Library of Congress this morning, about half past seven o'clock, and that nearly everything in the room was destroyed before the flames were subdued."

This was the second fire to have devastated this cultural depository.

On August 24, 1814, the Library's core collection of 3,000 volumes was destroyed when the British burned the Capitol, where the Library was housed.

<http://www.loc.gov/preserv/history/growing.html>

<http://www.loc.gov/today/fascinate.html>

<http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/EART/sanborn.html>

Lili Marlene

"Lili Marlene" was authored by Hans Leip, a 19-year old German soldier in the first world war. It was put to music by Norbert Schultze (1911-2002), a collaborator with the Hitler regime. But contrary to what Hollywood would have us believe, it was not an exclusively Nazi song, crooned in smoke-filled bars in occupied Europe by drunk SS officers.

"Lili Marlene" was played, sung, and broadcast by all the armies in the second world war - the British, the German, in occupied France, and the Americans (Marlene Dietrich). It was translated to 48 languages, including Hebrew, the language of most holocaust survivors. It made it into the Japanese music charts in 1986.

<http://ingeb.org/garb/lmarleen.html>

http://home.istar.ca/~townsend/early_years/lili_marlene.htm

Lindbergh, Charles Augustus

Charles Augustus Lindbergh was the first person to cross the Atlantic in a nonstop flight. This made him an instant celebrity. When, in 1932, his 19-months old son was kidnapped and murdered, the nation was appalled.

Finally, a German carpenter, Bruno Richard Hauptmann, was apprehended and, following a much-publicized trial, executed.

The police chief who arrested Bruno Richard Hauptmann was the father of Norman Schwarzkopf, commander of the American forces in the Gulf War in 1991.

The affair had many repercussions, both personal and national.

The Lindberghs, revolted by the media's unrelenting prying, moved to live in Europe in 1935. Lindbergh became a fan of Adolf Hitler and in 1938 received from him a decoration for having praised the German Luftwaffe as superior to all other air forces. In 1939, upon his return to the USA, Lindbergh embarked on a cross-country tour of antiwar and pro-Nazi speeches. Consequently, he was ousted from the air corps reserve and the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics.

Still, when war broke out, Lindbergh served as a civilian consultant to aircraft manufacturers. Later, the US Army sent him on clandestine missions to the Pacific and Europe. But he never regained his stature in the eyes of the American public.

He won the Pulitzer prize in 1953 for his tome, *The Spirit of Saint Louis* and died in 1974 in Hawaii.

The kidnapping and gruesome murder of his son prompted lawmakers to pass the Lindbergh Act in 1932. The Encarta: "The statute made it a federal crime, punishable by life imprisonment, to kidnap a person and transport that person to another state. This law was amended in 1934 making conspiracy to commit a kidnapping also a federal crime. In 1968 the U.S. Supreme Court invalidated that section of the Lindbergh Act that gave the jury the power to recommend the death penalty for kidnapping."

<http://www.lindberghtrial.com/>

<http://www.charleslindbergh.com/>

<http://www.lindberghfoundation.org/>

Lloyd's of London

The world's most famous insurance market, Lloyd's of London, started in a coffee house owned by one, Edward Lloyd. The coffee house was situated on the Thames bank in Tower Street, close to all the maritime and shipping activities. It was a well known establishment and is mentioned in contemporary documents as early as 1688.

Lloyd himself had nothing to do with insurance.

http://www.lloydsolondon.co.uk/entrypoints/her_index_gi.htm

Lysenko, Trofim Denisovich

Trofim Denisovich Lysenko (1898-1976) was an agronomist. During the reign of Lenin and Stalin years in the Soviet Union, he became the chief proponent of the work of the self-taught plant breeder Ivan Vladimirovich Michurin (1855-1935) and his brand of Lamarckism - a pre-Darwinian theory of evolution of the species proposed in the French scientist Jean-Baptiste Lamarck (1744-1829). He was appointed as the president (1938-56) of the Lenin All-Union Academy of Agricultural Sciences and the director (1940-65) of the Institute of Genetics, USSR Academy of Sciences. The leadership of the USSR believed his promises to deliver rapid increases in crop yields.

Lamarck proposed that organisms can inherit traits acquired by their ancestors. The first giraffes stretched their necks to eat leaves on tall trees. Their offspring acquired this elongated neck and the desire to further stretch it. A species with long necks was born.

The Soviet leadership sought an indigenous theory to counter the "capitalistic" works of Mendel and Charles Darwin and to separate evolution from genetics.

Following a speech he gave at a conference in 1948 denouncing Mendelian genetics as "reactionary and decadent", Lysenko rose to prominence. Geneticists who opposed Lysenkoism were dispatched to the gulag as "enemies of the Soviet people". Most confessed to their "errors" in propounding Mendel's and Darwin's teachings - and, consequently, kept their jobs.

No one dared challenge Lysenko until 1964 - 9 years after Stalin died - even when he claimed, between 1948 and 1953, that wheat plants can produce seeds of rye. But, as the Encyclopedia Britannica observes, "he and his followers, however, long retained their degrees, their titles, and their academic positions and remained free to support their aberrant trend in biology."

<http://skepdic.com/lysenko.html>

<http://www.softpanorama.org/Skeptics/lysenkoism.shtml>

M

May Day

Long before the first congress (1889) of the Second International, a socialist gathering, appropriated May 1, it was being celebrated by the Celts. They considered it the day when the supernatural invaded the earthly and placed living things in great jeopardy. To protect their precious livestock, they used to herd it between two bonfires in what became known as the Beltane (or Belltane) festival. The Romans honored the spring goddess Flora on May Day.

May 1 is still celebrated throughout the countries of the former

communist bloc and in many other places in Europe and Asia as a kind of Labor Day while in North America, Labor Day is celebrated in September.

<http://www.mayweek.ab.ca/>

<http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/26/016.html>

Mayonnaise

Mayonnaise was invented by the chef of the Duc de Richelieu in 1756. The Duc was in the habit of holding nude dinner parties. Having beaten the British at Port Mahon, he instructed his chef to prepare a culinary feast, replete with a "sauce made of cream and eggs". The terrified chef discovered, at the last moment, that there was no cream in the kitchen. He hurriedly poured olive oil and scrambled it with the eggs. Thus emerged the "Mahonnaise".

<http://www.angelfire.com/punk/mayonnaise/Mayonnaise.htm>

<http://www.mayo.com/>

<http://inventors.about.com/library/inventors/blpotatochip.htm>

Microchips

The Journal of Environmental Science and Technology published study according to which 1.6 kilograms of fuel, 72 grams of chemicals and 32 kilograms of water are consumed in the manufacturing of a typical two-gram chip.

A 32-MB RAM microchip requires 630 times its mass to manufacture. Microchip production utilizes 160 times the amount of energy needed to make mere silicon. Thousands of chemicals are used in the process, some of them highly toxic.

<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?articleID=000BD05C-D352-1C6A-84A9809EC588EF21>

Mirages

Debunkers of UFO sightings often propose to explain the persistent and recurrent reports as atmospheric phenomena, such as mirages.

UFO enthusiasts counter that "mirages cannot be seen more than 1° above or below the observer's horizon." UFO's are almost always observed high in the sky or even directly above the observer's head (zenith).

Mirages are generated by the bending of light rays when they move across layers in the atmosphere with different temperatures and, thus, densities. Mirages are real and can be photographed.

All mirages contain one regular ("erect") image and one or more mirror ("inverted") images. "Fata Morgana" is a mirage with many interlaced inverted and erect images. It is named after King Arthur's sister, the enchantress (magician-witch) Morgan le Fay.

Other refractive phenomena include looming, towering, sinking, stooping, etc. In looming an object below the horizon is projected into the sky. Objects under the horizon can thus appear to be above it.

And who is right in the UFO debate?

Due to refraction, even under normal atmospheric conditions, we all see objects that are under the astronomical horizon.

How much we see depends on our elevation, the width of the sky between the two horizons, and the distance to the objects, among other variables. Our APPARENT horizon (what we can actually see) and the "real", astronomical horizon (what we would have seen in the absence of refracting atmosphere) are not the same. The difference between them is the "dip". Optics tells us that multiple or inverted images must occur under the astronomical horizon and above the apparent horizon - i.e. within the dip. Theoretically, the dip can be larger than 1 degree. But, practically, on our small planet, with the highest point at 9 kilometers (Mount Everest), and our eyes constructed as they are, and our atmosphere composed as it is - it is impossible to see mirages displaced by more than 1 degree. UFO fans are right after all.

<http://mintaka.sdsu.edu/GF/mirages/mirintro.html>

<http://www.islandnet.com/~see/weather/elements/mirage1.htm>

Miss America

Mary Katherine Campbell, the only woman to win the Miss America title twice (1922 and 1923), who was 5-foot-7 and weighed 140 pounds (c. 65 kg.). Norman Rockwell, the painter, was on the panel of judges in 1923.

Campbell died in 1990. She declined offers from Hollywood and Broadway, married, and led a staid life to her death.

http://www.pressplus.com/missam/pastwinners/pw_1923.html

<http://www.missamerica.org/meet/history/1920/1923.asp>

Money

The "paper" notes we use to pay for goods and services (which,

together with coins, constitute "money" or "tender") are made of a blend of cotton and linen.

Throughout history, numerous objects served as money: seashells, stones, whales' teeth, cattle and manillas (ornamental jewelry). The word "salary" reflects the fact that Roman soldiers were paid in salt. As recently as 1932, in Tenino, Washington, USA, notes of \$1, \$5 and \$10 denominations were printed on wood.

Money comes in all sizes, shapes and forms. One meter long and half a meter wide copper plates were used in Alaska in the 1850s. They weighed 40 kilograms.

<http://www.banktech.com/>

<http://www.ex.ac.uk/~RDavies/arian/llyfr.html>

Monsters, Human

Humans made monsters by inhuman treatment abound in literature. In "The Man Who Laughs", published in 1869, the French author, Victor Hugo (1802-1885), described the comprachicos thus:

"The comprachicos (child buyers) were strange and hideous nomads in the 17th century. They made children into sideshow freaks. To succeed in producing a freak one must get hold of him early; a dwarf must be started when he is small. They stunted growth, they mangled features. It was an art/science of inverted orthopedics. Where nature had put a straight glance, this art put a squint. Where nature had put harmony, they put deformity and imperfection. The child was not aware of the mutilation he had suffered. This horrible surgery left traces on his face, not in his mind. During the operation the little patient was unconscious by means of a stupefying magic powder.

In China since time immemorial, they have achieved refinement in a special art and industry: the molding of living man. One takes a child two or three years old and puts them into a grotesquely shaped porcelain vase. It is without cover or bottom, so the head and feet protrude. In the daytime the vase is upright, at night it is laid down so the child can sleep. Thus the child slowly fills the contours of the vase with compressed flesh and twisted bones. This bottled development continues for several years. At a certain point, it becomes an irreparable monster. Then the vase is broken and one has a man in the shape of a pot."

The Kyrgyz writer, Chingiz Aitmatov (or Aytmatov) (1928 -) recounts in "The Day Lasts More than One Hundred Years" (1980) the legend of the Ana-Beit cemetery and the zombies known as "mankurts".

According to tradition, the nomad Zhuan'zhuan, shaved the heads of the younger and more fit prisoners of war and wrapped their skulls in raw camel hide. The prisoners were then left to shrivel in the desert's scorching sun, without food or water. As the caps shrank around their

heads, they perished in terrible agony. The survivors completely lost their memory. Their subsequent submissiveness and loyalty made them ten times more valuable than a regular slave and three times as precious as a free man (in terms of pecuniary damages when accidentally killed).

<http://www.stormy.org/edcompr.htm>

http://www.freeman.org/m_online/may99/shusteff1.htm

N

Napoleon Bonaparte

Napoleon did invade Britain. During the Irish rebellion of 1798, in September, a sizable French fleet got close to the shore of Ireland but was dispersed by a storm. A part of the flotilla went back to France but other French ships landed invading troops on the shores of Ireland and Wales.

These surrendered to superior British forces later on. The costs of the Irish war and Napoleon's impending threat across the channel forced the British government to introduce the first income tax in British history.

Another attempt by the French, in 1804, with 100,000 troops was aborted.

<http://home.inforamp.net/~radfordr/1800a.html>

<http://www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/history/taxhis1.htm>

Narcissism

Narcissism is a pattern of traits and behaviors which signify infatuation and obsession with one's self to the exclusion of all others and the egotistic and ruthless pursuit of one's gratification, dominance and ambition.

According to the legend of Narcissus, this Greek boy fell in love with his own reflection in a pond. Presumably, this amply sums up the nature of his namesakes: narcissists. The mythological Narcissus was rejected by the nymph Echo and was punished by Nemesis, Consigned to pine away as he fell in love with his own reflection.

Most narcissists (75%) are men.

NPD is one of a "family" of personality disorders (formerly known as "Cluster B").

Other members: Borderline PD, Antisocial PD and Histrionic PD.

NPD is often diagnosed with other mental health disorders ("co-morbidity") - or with substance abuse, or impulsive and reckless behaviors ("dual diagnosis").

NPD is new (1980) mental health category in the Diagnostic and Statistics Manual (DSM).

There is only scant research regarding narcissism. But what there is has not demonstrated any ethnic, social, cultural, economic, genetic, or professional predilection to NPD.

It is estimated that 0.7-1% of the general population suffer from NPD.

Pathological narcissism was first described in detail by Freud. Other major contributors are: Klein, Horney, Kohut, Kernberg, Millon, Roningstam, Gunderson, Hare.

The onset of narcissism is in infancy, childhood and early adolescence. It is commonly attributed to childhood abuse and trauma inflicted by parents, authority figures, or even peers.

There is a whole range of narcissistic reactions - from the mild, reactive and transient to the permanent personality disorder.

Narcissists are either "Cerebral" (derive their narcissistic supply from their intelligence or academic achievements) - or "Somatic" (derive their narcissistic supply from their physique, exercise, physical or sexual prowess and "conquests").

Narcissists are either "Classic" - see definition here (<http://samvak.tripod.com/npdglance.html>) - or they are "Compensatory", or "Inverted" - see definitions here: (<http://samvak.tripod.com/faq66.html>) .

NPD is treated in talk therapy (psychodynamic or cognitive-behavioral). The prognosis for an adult narcissist is poor, though his adaptation to life and to others can improve with treatment. Medication is applied to side-effects and behaviors (such as mood or affect disorders and obsession-compulsion) - usually with some success.

<http://samvak.tripod.com/>

http://www.mentalhelp.net/poc/view_doc.php?type/doc/id/419

<http://www.suite101.com/links.cfm/npd>

Nero

According to the historian Suetonius, Emperor Nero (37-68), fifth Emperor of Rome from AD 54 to 68, was a fan of murder. Clad in disguise, he assaulted passing pedestrians in back alleys, stabbed them repeatedly, and dumped the bodies into the sewer. When he was almost killed by one of his would-be victims, he surrounded himself with armed bodyguards who overcame any unexpected resistance.

Nero's original name was Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus. When Agrippina the Younger married her uncle, Emperor Claudius I, she convinced him to adopt the child and he acquired his new name, Nero Claudius Caesar Drusus Germanicus. Nero married his stepfather's daughter, Octavia. He was declared Emperor at the tender age of 17. Nero promptly had his

mother poison Claudius' son, Britannicus - but his first five years were marked by the moderating influence of Burrus, the prefect of the Praetorian Guards, and the philosopher Seneca, his tutor.

Nero abolished the pernicious habit of secret trials, put the affairs of the state at the hands of a nascent bureaucracy, and made the Senate more independent. He forbade bloodshed in public circus contests, abolished capital punishment, reduced taxes and allowed slaves to sue their unjust masters. He initiated competitions in poetry, drama, and athletics. He pardoned plotters and authors of scathing epigrams against him. Claudius, by comparison, has executed 40 Senators for treason. Nero even helped the Jews - a scourge of the Roman empire - and rehabilitated disaster-stricken cities.

But then there was a marked - and mysterious - change for the worse. Nero murdered his mother, who criticized his mistress, whom he later married, having executed Octavia. Burrus died, probably poisoned. Seneca retired to his estate.

Two thirds of Rome burnt to the ground in July 64. Nero was in Antium at the time - 60 kilometers away. He did not burn the city, he did not play the violin, or the lyre while it burnt. It is dubious whether - as Tacitus and Suetonius claim - he blamed the few Christians in Rome for the conflagration, let alone persecuted them.

On the contrary, he sheltered the homeless and rebuilt Rome with strict fire precautions. His contemporaneous notoriety had to do with the fact that he appeared as an actor, lyre player and charioteer in religious dramas all over the empire, sometimes absent from Rome for as long as 15 months at a time.

Following a coup and assassination attempt, he executed 18 of the 41 conspirators - including his beloved Seneca. He kicked his wife to death, murdered Statilia Messalina's husband and wed her and finally - faced with a rebellion of his legions - he fled Rome and committed suicide.

<http://www.roman-empire.net/emperors/nero-index.html>

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10752c.htm>

<http://www.roman-emperors.org/nero.htm>

New Economic Policy (NEP)

Mikhail Gorbachev (1931-) was not the first to introduce Perestroika - the economic liberalization of the communist system along capitalistic lines.

During the Russian civil war (1918-1922) the Bolsheviks implemented what they called "War Communism" (1917-1921), the militarization of the economy. Between 1916 and 1920, industrial output plunged by more than four fifths. Grain harvests in both 1920 and 1921 disastrously dwindled, leading to widespread famine, claiming five million lives. A series of rebellions of sailors broke out, most famously in the Kronstadt naval base.

To counter the party's loosening grip on power, Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924) introduced the New Economic Policy (NEP). Trade was liberalized, as were industrial and agricultural production. Peasants were allowed to sell surplus produce on the open market and taxes were made proportional to net output.

In stark departure from communist ideology, farmers could lease land and hire laborers. The state embarked on an ambitious privatization program of small and medium-size enterprises, though it maintained control of the finance, transportation, heavy industry, and foreign trade sectors (the "commanding heights", as they were called at the time).

In 1921-2, Lenin re-introduced money to re-monetize the economy which consisted of barter, quotas, and centrally issued economic directives. Within less than 7 years, production in many parts of the economy reverted to pre-revolutionary levels. Nor did the NEP die with Lenin. It continued for 4 years after his death in 1924.

But the policy was not without its faults.

NEP was characterized by inflation and the need to cap the prices of non-agricultural goods. Peasants hoarded grain for speculation purposes. A black market in goods was developed by Nepmen - private traders. Communist party General Secretary Joseph Stalin (1879-1953), reinstated agricultural production quotas in 1929, collectivized all arable land, and criminalized private trading in 1930. In 1928, he promulgated the first Five-Year Plan (1928-1932) and central planning replaced market mechanisms. The NEP was dead.

<http://web.jjay.cuny.edu/~jobrien/reference/ob40.html>

<http://www.pvhs.chico.k12.ca.us/~bsilva/projects/russia/lenin/nep.htm>

<http://mars.acnet.wnec.edu/~grempe/courses/stalin/lectures/NEP.html>

Newton, Isaac

Isaac Newton (1642-1727), the father of modern physics and mathematics, was an avowed and dedicated alchemist, mystic, theologian, and astrologer. He was a bad student and his mother wanted

him to become a farmer. He was admitted to Trinity College at Cambridge as a "subsizar" - i.e., on condition that he performs certain domestic services.

The story of the apple is not a legend. It was recounted by Newton himself when he was old. He said the falling apple made him think about the movement of the moon around the earth.

Newton's work was so savagely criticized when it was first published that, for a few years thereafter he ceased publishing altogether.

<http://www-gap.dcs.st-and.ac.uk/~history/Mathematicians/Newton.html>

<http://www.newton.cam.ac.uk/newtlife.html>

Nightmare

The word nightmare is the private name of a medieval female demon that attacked sleeping people. "Mare" means goblin in Old English.

<http://psychology.about.com/cs/dream/>

<http://www.shpm.com/articles/dreams/index.shtml>

Nobel Prizes

The Nobel prizes are awarded on December 10. In 1911, the Polish-French scientist, Marie Curie, became the first person to win a second Nobel prize for the discovery of radium & polonium. Her second prize was in Chemistry. She won her first Nobel prize in physics only eight years earlier, in 1903.

Marie Curie was also the first woman to win the prize and a member of the first couple, together with her husband, Pierre, to win the coveted award (in 1903).

Linus Pauling won the Nobel prize in chemistry in 1954 and The Nobel prize for Peace in 1962.

<http://www.nobel.se/>

Nokia

Some companies have at least nine lives, it would seem. Nokia was

founded in southwestern Finland, in 1865, by a mining engineer, one, Frederik Idestam, as a wood-pulp mill. An eponymous town formed around it. Independently, the Finnish Rubber Works took on the town name in the 1920s, having been established there in 1898.

The Nokia rubber company acquired Finnish Cable Works - another enterprise located in Nokia since 1912. In 1967, the three became the Nokia Group. In the 1980s, Nokia took over Mobira, Salora, Televa and Luxor of Sweden and became a consumer electronics group - manufacturing televisions and such.

Nokia continued with its acquisitions spree and, in 1987, bought the consumer electronics operations and part of the component business of the German Standard Elektrik Lorenz, the French consumer electronics company Oceanic, and the Swiss cable machinery company Mallefer. It proceeded to become the largest Scandinavian information technology company by digesting Ericsson's data systems division. In 1989, Nokia emerged as a leader in the cable industry in Continental Europe by purchasing the Dutch cable company NKF.

During the 1990s the consolidated group refocused on the mobile phone market and divested all its other businesses.

<http://www.nokia.com/>

Number Notation

The United States does not use the metric system. But this is not the only confusing difference between the USA and Europe.

The hierarchy of numbers is universal: million, billion, trillion, quadrillion, quintillion, sextillion, septillion, octillion, nonillion, decillion, undecillion, duodecillion, tredecillion, quat(t)uordecillion, quindecillion,

sexdecillion, septendecillion, octodecillion,

novemdecillion, vigintillion.

In the French and American system of notation, each number is a thousand times the preceding number. Thus, one billion is a thousand times one million and one trillion is a thousand billions. Yet, in the English and German system, each number is a MILLION times the preceding one!

While a vigintillion is written as a 1 followed by 63 zeros by the French and Americas - it is followed by no less than 120 zeros in England and Germany!

Googol is universally 1 followed by 100 zeros. Googolplex is 10 to the

power of googol.

To exacerbate matters, decimals are written in the form 1.23 in the United States, 1-23 in the United Kingdom, and 1,23 in continental Europe. Thus \$14,100 is 14 thousand US dollars in the United States - but only 14 dollars and ten cents in Vienna.

<http://www.math2.org/math/general/numnotation.htm>

<http://www.math.com/tables/general/numnotation.htm>

O

OK

Andrew Jackson (1767-1845), the American President (1829-1837) was much ridiculed for his Bushisms (lack of grasp of the English language). He was - erroneously - "credited" with the creation of the much used OK by spelling "all correct" as "oll korrekt."

This apocryphal story competes with yet another anachronism: during the second World War OK (zero+K) meant "zero killed". But OK much preceded the twentieth century, let alone the 1940s. It is found in the March 23, 1839 issue of the Boston Morning Post, for instance, and did, indeed, stand for "Oll Korrekt". OK caught on fast. By 1840, it was all over the USA from New York to New Orleans. President Van Buren (1782-1862) used it in his campaign, when it signified "Old Kinderhook", his birthplace in the Hudson Valley.

There are numerous other etymologies attributing OK to a host of other languages, from Native-American to Creole, and to everything from telegraphic signaling to German generals - but they have all been convincingly debunked.

<http://www.ling.ed.ac.uk/linguist/issues/4/4-694.html>

http://www.straightdope.com/classics/a2_250

<http://c2.com/cgi/wiki?EtymologyOfOkay>

<http://c2.com/cgi/wiki?EtymologyOfOk>

Oil Spills

The largest oil spill in history was in Tobago. The Atlantic Empress spilled 287,000 tons in 1979. Then comes the ABT Summer in Angola (260,000 in 1991), The Castillo de Bellver in South Africa (252,000 in 1983), the Amoco Cadiz in France (223,000 in 1978).

By comparison, the famous Exxon Valdez spill in the United States in 1989 involved only 37,000 tons. The Prestige in Spain in 2002 carried a load of 77,000 tons but most of it sank with it to a depth of 4 kilometers.

<http://response.restoration.noaa.gov/kids/spills.html>

http://directory.google.com/Top/Science/Environment/Energy/Petroleum_in_the_Environment/Oil_Spills/?tc=1

http://dmoz.org/Science/Environment/Energy/Petroleum_in_the_Environment/Oil_Spills/

Organelles

Multi-cellular organisms, such as plants and humans, evolved over billions of years. Ancient bacteria infiltrated the first eukaryotic cells - i.e., the first cells with a nucleus. They helped these cells convert food into ATP - the cellular "battery" molecule.

As time passed, these bacteria degenerated. Their remains still occupy the cytoplasm of eukaryotes in the form of "organelles", tiny organs. But these remains contain their own DNA - distinct from the host cell's. They also encompass their own ribosomes - cellular miniature protein factories. So, in a way these organelles - the mitochondria in living creatures and the chloroplasts in plants - are separate organisms. They maintain a symbiotic relationship with cells. They are symbionts.

All the cells in the human body contain mitochondria. Mitochondria are more abundant in cells with heavy energy requirements, like muscle cells.

A third type of such symbiont was recently discovered in the malaria parasite, the Plasmodium falciparum. It is called an apicoplast and is, perhaps, the remains of an alga. It, too, has its own unique genome.

<http://www.sas.upenn.edu/~striepen/apicoplast.html>

<http://directory.google.com/Top/Science/Biology/Genetics/Organelles>

Oscars (Academy Awards)

Ben Hur (1959) and Titanic (1997) won 11 academy awards (Oscars) each.

Gigi (1958) and The Last Emperor (1987) were nominated for 9 awards

and won them all.

The Turning Point (1977) and The Color Purple (1985) were nominated for 11 awards each, but didn't win even a single one.

Limelight (1952) by Charlie Chaplin won an Oscar for original dramatic score only in 1973, a year after it was screened in Los Angeles for the first time.

These winners were still shot in black and white. Notice the years: Schindler's List (1993), The Apartment (1960), Marty (1955), On the Waterfront (1954), From Here to Eternity (1953).

These winners were shot in color. Notice the years: Gone With the Wind (1939), An American in Paris (1951), The Greatest Show on Earth (1952), Around the World in 80 Days (1956), The Bridge on the River Kwai (1957).

War and Peace (1968) is the longest film ever to win the Oscar at 7 hours 33 minutes. Gone With the Wind (1939) and Lawrence of Arabia (1962) were each 3 hours and 42 minutes.

Walt Disney - with 26 statues - won the most awards. Alan Menken for music and Denis Muren for visual effects each garnered 8 Oscars.

John Ford won consecutively for The Grapes of Wrath (1940) and How Green Was My Valley (1941)

So did Joseph L. Mankiewicz for A Letter to Three Wives (1949) and All About Eve (1950).

<http://academyawards.20m.com/trivia.htm>

P-Q

Pakistan

Under British rule, Pakistan was part of India. At the request of the Muslim League, the British decided, in 1947, to split it from India. Pakistan became independent one day before India did. West Pakistan was separated by 1600 kilometers from East Pakistan (today's Bangladesh). Three principalities, including Kashmir, chose not to join either country and to become independent. India annexed by force of arms two of these and Kashmir's Hindu prince joined India as well. As a result, a war broke between the two countries in 1948.

<http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/gthursby/pak/history.htm>

<http://www.pak.gov.pk/public/govt/history.html>

Parachute

The word "parachute" means, in French, "fall-preventing". "Paratroopers" means parachute troopers. The Chinese used parachutes for entertainment purposes or attached them in the 11th and 12th centuries to prisoners and forced them off steep cliffs. Drawings of clumsy, square, parachutes can be found in Leonardo da Vinci's notebooks from 1483. The Thai king's tumblers vaulted from trees armed with umbrellas as late as 1687.

A Venetian, Fausto Veranzino, leaped, using a parachute from a tower. Louis-Sébastien Lenormand jumped from a tree with two parasols in 1783.

Another French Jean Pierre Blanchard parachuted a dog from a balloon in 1785. A more intrepid inventor, André-Jacque Garnerin, sprang, on October 22, 1797, from a hot air balloon over Parc Monceau in Paris, dangling from a cloth canopy. In 1802, in England, he jumped from 2.4 kilometers (8000 feet).

The Encyclopedia Britannica (2003 edition):

"Early parachutes--made of canvas or silk--had frames that held them open (like an umbrella). Later in the 1800s, soft, foldable parachutes of silk were used; these were deployed by a device (attached to the airborne platform from which the jumper was diving) that extracted the parachute from a bag. Only later still, in the early 1900s, did the rip cord that allowed the parachutist to deploy the chute appear."

Capt. Albert Berry of the United States Army was the first to hop from an airplane over St. Louis in 1912.

<http://inventors.about.com/library/inventors/blparachute.htm>

Pentagon

The Pentagon was completed in 16 months. It was built on a swamp and on the area of the old Washington airport. Trucks hauled some 5.5 million cubic yards (4.2 million cubic meters) of junk and soil and dumped it in the marshes. The building's foundation rests on 41,492 concrete piles.

The purchase of land cost \$2.25 million (in 1943 dollars). The building itself cost c. \$50 million, or \$83 million with outside

facilities. The Pentagon stands on 29 acres (=c. 120,000 sq.m.).

The center court alone occupies 5 acres (c. 20,000 sq.m.). The heating and refrigeration plant and the sewage structure sprawl on 1 acre each (c. 4,000 sq.m.). Fifty miles (=80 kilometers) of access highways were especially constructed, replete with 21 overpasses and bridges. The parking space is spread over 67 acres (c. 270,000 sq.m.) and can accommodate up to 8,800 vehicles.

Each wall of the Pentagon is more than 920 feet long (=300 meters). It is almost 78 feet high (or a little short of 25 meters). It should have been higher but the planners wanted to preserve the view of the neighboring Arlington National Cemetery. There are almost 18 miles (c. 29 kilometers) of corridors in the building, 131 stairways, 19 escalators, 13 elevators, 672 fire hose cabinets, 284 rest rooms (toilettes), 691 drinking fountains, 4200 electric clocks with sockets for another 2800, 16,250 light fixtures (250 bulbs are replaced daily), 7,754 windows, and 7 acres of glass - or c. 29,000 sq.m.

More than 23,000 people work in the Pentagon. It contains a heliport, huge restaurant and shopping mall, and bus and taxi terminals. The Pentagon has its own metro (subway) station.

This masterpiece of engineering was designed by George Edwin Bergstrom. Despite its gargantuan size, the distance between every two points in the complex never requires more than a 7 minutes walk. Plans to convert the Pentagon to a hospital after the second world war were abandoned with the outbreak of the Cold War.

The September 11 attack demolished 400,000 sq. feet of space and damaged another 1.6 million. To recover them would cost \$700 million. About 1000 tons of limestone in 3700 separate pieces were quarried in Indiana to overhaul the facade. More than a 1000 laborers worked in three shifts for almost nine months until the facade was remade. Restoration will be completed in Spring 2003.

The State Department says that "a condolence book, a Presidential photo, and handmade sympathy cards written by children were included in a bronze box that was sealed into the limestone facade of the newly rebuilt section of the Pentagon. The capsule is not intended to be opened."

<http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/pentagon/>

<http://usinfo.state.gov/topical/pol/terror/020815pentagon.htm>

http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Jun2002/t06112002_t611pren.html

Phi

The irrational number Phi - the golden ratio or divine proportion of antiquity - is 1.6180339887. It is found in the arrangement of rose petals, mollusc shells, sunflower florets, spirals of pine cones, hurricanes, fractals, the breeding patterns of rabbits, the structure of crystals, the behaviour of the stock market, and the shape of the Milky Way.

It is - wrongly - said to be found in the proportions of the Great Pyramids, the Pantheon, the Mona Lisa, and in Stradivarius violins. It is present, though, in Dali's "The Sacrament of the Last Supper".

Phi is crucial to the drawing of the pentagram, a powerful magic symbol. The ratio enchanted scholars throughout the ages - from Pythagoras, Kepler, and Penrose to current mathematicians dedicated to studying the Fibonacci numbers (permutations of phi). Artists like Goethe, Cezanne, Bartok studied it obsessively.

Its discovery is attributed to Euclid (c. 300 BC) who postulated that phi is yielded by dividing a line into two segments such that the ratio of the length of whole line to that of the bigger segment is the same as the ratio of the length of the bigger segment to that of the smaller one.

If you divide phi by one you get 0.6180339887 - that is phi minus 1. Leonardo Fibonacci (1170-1240) developed his famous series in the 12th century. Each number in the series is the sum of the previous two: 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55. Dividing any number in the series by the preceding one yield almost-phi (the results of the division are phi-asymptotic).

<http://www.mcs.surrey.ac.uk/Personal/R.Knott/Fibonacci/phi.html>

<http://jwilson.coe.uga.edu/emt669/Student.Folders/Frietag.Mark/Homepage/Goldenratio/goldenratio.html>

Plane Crashes

September 11, 2001 was not the first time an airplane crashed into a skyscraper. Actually, such tragedies are more common than is thought.

On July 28, 1945, for instance, a U.S. Army B-25 bomber traveling at 200 miles (c. 370 kilometers) per hour in heavy fog crashed into the Empire State Building in New York City. Luckily it was a Saturday, though dozens were injured and 14 killed. People thought the city was being bombed:

Doris Pope, Boynton Beach, Fla. told The Palm Beach Post in 1999:

"We heard this terrible noise, and the building started to shake. ... As we looked out our third-floor window, we saw debris fall on to the street. We immediately thought New York was being bombed."

Another eyewitness, Helen J. Hurwitt, from Greenacres, Fla., told the Post:

"I heard a horrendous noise. My husband and I were in a building directly opposite the Empire State Building. ... Large plate-glass windows looked out onto 34th Street. The floor we were on was pretty high. At some point, we heard a horrendous noise and rushed to the windows. ... We were horrified to see a B-25 half in and half out of the Empire State Building."

"The building shuddered, realigned itself, and settled. Probably instantly, although several witnesses said there seemed to be a moment's interval, came the explosion, and the top of the fog-shrouded Empire State Building was briefly seen in a bright orange glow. High-octane airplane fuel spewed out of the ruptured tanks and sprayed the building...The heat was so intense that partition frames within offices disappeared, and the shattered glass from windows and lamp fixtures melted and fused into stalactites....One engine, part of the fuselage, and a landing gear tore through the internal office walls, through two fire walls and across a stairway, through another office wall and out of the south wall of the building, with the parts coming to a fiery rest at 10 West Thirty-Third Street in the penthouse studio/apartment of sculptor Henry Hering, who was off playing golf in Scarsdale at the time"

John Tauranac, *The Making of a Landmark*, New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1997, (originally printed in hardcover by Scribner, 1995)

One of the massive aircraft's engine crossed the entire skyscraper, from north wall to south wall, and landed on the roof of another building nearby. The damage was estimated at \$1 million (that's 1945 dollars). It took 3 months to repair the 78th and 79th floors.

But the September atrocities provoked a wave of copycats and renewed awareness of such risks.

On April 18, 2002 a small airplane ran into the 26th floor of Milan's tallest building, the Pirelli Tower. Three people were killed, dozens injured and the building was severely damaged.

On January 5, 2002, a 15-year old deliberately crashed a small, single engine, craft into the 28th floor of the Bank of America Plaza in Tampa, Florida. The pilot dies. There were no other casualties.

At the beginning of May 2002, an Indian air force jet hit crashed into a bank building in northwestern India. Eight died in the ensuing fire.

http://abcnews.go.com/sections/us/DailyNews/WTC_planecrash_empirestate010911.html

<http://www.esbnyc.com/>

<http://www.thecityreview.com/tauranac.htm>

Planets

The planets in the solar system rotate anticlockwise, except Venus, Uranus and Pluto which rotate clockwise. No one knows why.

In the case of Venus, the Sun's gravity may have slowed it down until its rotational period equalled its orbital period, a situation known as spin-orbit resonance. It would not account for its retrograde rotation, though. This may be the outcome of an impact with a large celestial body. Uranus' strange angle of rotation is almost certainly due to such a collision - but Venus' unusual direction of spin requires another explanation.

<http://csep10.phys.utk.edu/astr161/lect/solarsys/revolution.html>

<http://pds.jpl.nasa.gov/planets/welcome.htm>

<http://seds.lpl.arizona.edu/nineplanets/nineplanets/nineplanets.html>

Polygamy

Polygamy refers to both polyandry - marrying more than one man - and polygyny, wedding more than one woman. Hard to believe, but the United States outlawed polygamy only in 1882.

Humans are not the only polygamous species. The Northern Fur Seal and the Baikal Seal, for instance, mate with all the females in their territory.

Examples of polygamous societies include the Kikuyu, Masai and Oromo in east Africa; Swaziland in southeast Africa; some Native American tribes (such as the Blackfoot and Illinois); some nations in the Philippines, Indonesia and Polynesia and, in west Africa, in Cameroon, Ghana, Mali and Niger; the Mormons in the United States and throughout the world (though they rarely practice it).

<http://www.polygamy.com/>

<http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/humanrelations/womeninislam/polygamy.html>

Popcorn

Corn pollen more than 80,000 years old was found in Mexico. Proper popcorn was known in China, Sumatra, and India for at least 5000 years. Popped popcorn and kernels 5600 years old were discovered in the "Bat Cave" in New Mexico in 1948-1950. Popcorn kernels - ready to pop - were unearthed in ancient Peruvian tombs. In a cave in southern Utah, fluffy, fresh looking, white popcorn was dated to 1000 years ago.

Popcorn was used by the Aztecs and Indians as a decorative motif in headdresses, necklaces, and ornaments on statues of divinities. In the 16th century, both Hernando Cortes (in Mexico) and Christopher Columbus (in the West Indies) described these unusual uses of the snack. Father Bernardino de Sahagun (1499-1590), a Franciscan priest with deep interest in Mexican culture, described a ritual in honor of the Aztec gods of fisheries:

"They scattered before him parched corn, called momochitl, a kind of corn which bursts when parched and discloses its contents and makes itself look like a very white flower; they said these were hailstones given to the god of water."

French explorers in the early 17th century reported that the Iroquois Indians in the Great Lakes region drank popcorn beer and ate popcorn soup. In either 1621, or in 1630, popcorn was brought as a gift by the Indian Quadequina, brother of Chief Massasoit of the Wampanoag tribe, to the colonists in Plymouth, Massachusetts at their first Thanksgiving dinner in the new land.

This may be an apocryphal story but, in any case, it would not have been popcorn as we know it today. An oiled ear was held on a stick over an open fire and the popped kernels would be chewed off. Popcorn later served as a morning cereal, eaten with cream or milk. The colonists called it "popped corn", "parching corn", or "rice corn".

Most of the world's popcorn ("prairie gold") is produced in Nebraska, Iowa and Indiana, in the United States. The kernel is a seed containing a plant embryo and its soft, starchy food. The seed is protected by a hard shell. Heating the kernel converts water held in the seed into pressurized steam which causes the kernel to pop and the starch to expand to 40 times its original size.

<http://www.factmonster.com/spot/popcorn1.html>

<http://whatscookingamerica.net/History/PopcornHistory.htm>

http://okok.essortment.com/whatisthehist_rsdt.htm

Potemkin Village

Grigori Aleksandrovich Potemkin (1739-1791) attained the rank of Count and Field Marshall at an early age. He was involved in a palace coup against Peter III, husband of Catherine the Great, whose lover Potemkin was rumored to have been between 1774-6. He was appointed by her, long after their two year affair ended, to be governor of the new province of "New Russia" (southern Ukraine and Crimea).

The apocryphal (untrue) story is that, in 1787, anxious to prove his administrative skills, Potemkin organized a lavish royal tour of southern Russia for Catherine the Great. The tour took 4 years to prepare and covered 1000 miles along the river Dnepr. Throngs of peasants welcomed the queen. Yet, all the villages - and villagers - were fake. The houses consisted only of facades. The crowds were transported from one scenery to another ahead of the visiting monarch.

Hence the expression "Potemkin village" - a false political facade aimed to disguise unsavory facts.

http://www.lib.ndsu.nodak.edu/grhc/history_culture/history/catherine.html

http://www.ehistory.com/world/amit/display.cfm?amit_id=2216

President of the United States of America (USA)

The first president of the united States was not George Washington.

Washington was the first president under the Constitution of June 21, 1788, ratified by 1790.

The first constitution of the USA was titled "Articles of Confederation" and was in force between 1781 and 1788. It created a single house of Congress and no executive - but for one year during this period (1781-2, John Hanson served as "President of US in Congress Assembled" - or, in short, President of the United States. He was elected by his peers, including George Washington.

Hanson was followed by Elias Boudinot (1783), Thomas Mifflin (1784), Richard Henry Lee (1785), Nathan Gorman (1786), Arthur St. Clair (1787), and Cyrus Griffin (1788).

Washington was the EIGHTH president of the USA.

<http://www.marshallhall.org/hanson.html>

<http://www.stamponhistory.com/people/hanson.html>

Many of the features of the American presidency are fairly recent. The length of the presidency was not limited to 2 terms until 1951 in the 22nd Amendment to the US Constitution. Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882-1945) was elected to 4 successive terms between 1932 and 1944.

The president's inauguration day used to be on March 4. After Roosevelt died in office in 1945, it was changed to February 20.

Blacks could not become president until 1870 and women not until 1920.

The presidential salary remained the same for almost 100 years. It was pegged at \$25,000 per year until 1873 when it was doubled. The president had no expense account until 1907 when \$25,000 were added to his compensation to cover expenses connected to his office. The salary today stands at \$390,000 plus \$50,000 in expenses.

Retired presidents were not eligible for a state pension until 1958. The Former President's Act gave them \$25,000 a year, an office and minimal staff. The pension today stands at c. \$161,000 - the same as a cabinet secretary.

Presidents are not elected by popular vote but by an electoral college representing the states. John Quincy Adams (1824), Rutherford Hayes (1876), Benjamin Harrison (1888) and George W. Bush (2000) lost the overall vote but won the presidency.

<http://gi.grolier.com/presidents/preshome.html>

<http://web.uccs.edu/~history/index/presidency.html>

Prions

Prions are aberrant proteins that cause diseases collectively known as transmissible spongiform encephalopathies. Prions have normal, non-pathogenic forms, resident on the surface of brain cells, white blood cells, muscle cells and other tissues - but whose function is unknown. Prions are infectious and multiply. Not susceptible to enzymatic activity, they accumulate within the nerves, destroying them. The brain becomes potholed, like Swiss cheese or a sponge - hence, spongiform.

In humans, prions cause Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD), Gerstmann-Sträussler-Scheinker disease, fatal familial insomnia (FFI), Alpers Syndrome and kuru. Animals are afflicted by scrapie, bovine spongiform encephalopathy (mad cow disease or BSE), transmissible mink encephalopathy (TME), and chronic wasting disease (CWD).

Prions have no nucleic acid (DNA or RNA) - they are not destroyed by ultraviolet radiation - and therefore are not a life form. They are

also thought to cause hereditary and sporadic forms of disease. Neurodegenerative disorders such as Alzheimer's disease or Parkinson's disease may be caused by prions as well.

"Proteinaceous infectious particles" or "prions" - about one hundred times smaller than any known virus - were isolated in the early 1980s by American biochemist Stanley B. Prusiner and others. Prusiner was awarded the 1997 Nobel Prize in physiology or medicine for his discovery.

Prions are controversial. Some scientists think that the encephalopathies are caused either by slow acting viruses or by another class of proteins called chaperones.

<http://www-micro.msb.le.ac.uk/3035/prions.html>

<http://www.ohsu.edu/clinweb/C10/C10.228.228.800.html>

Progeria

Hutchinson-Gilford Progeria Syndrome, discovered in 1886, causes an accelerated ageing of the body starting at the age of 18 months. By the age of 4, most patients are bald, their skin sagging and their bones brittle. Even ten years later, they weigh as little as 15 kilos and are no more than a meter tall. The afflicted die of old age - from a heart attack or a stroke - in their early adolescence. Most of them have above average intelligence. The syndrome is now thought to be caused by a misplaced amino acid (mutation) on a gene called LMNA and affects 1 in 4 to 8 million newborn - but it is not genetically inherited.

<http://www.progeriaresearch.org>

Puccini, Giacomo

Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924) is known and loved today as one of the greatest opera composers ever. Suffice it to mention "Manon Lescaut" and "La Boheme". Yet, his early career was quite disheartening.

The first performance of his "Madame Butterfly" on February 17, 1904 in La Scala was an unmitigated fiasco. It was booed because the audience found it too much like his earlier work.

The crowd also recalled his elopement with a married woman, Elvira Gemignani, and the birth of his son, Antonio, out of wedlock in the late 1880s. This was, at the time, the cause of an enormous scandal. They married only in 1904, after her husband died.

Nor was "Madame Butterfly" Puccini's only failure. His second opera,

"Edgar", also flopped badly in 1889. His publisher, Giulio Ricordi, was so desperate that he sent him to Bayreuth in Germany to listen to the works of Richard Wagner.

His marriage to the madly envious Elvira was tumultuous.

In 1908 the Puccinis returned from Cairo, Egypt to Torre del Lago. Elvira suspected Doria Manfredi, a young servant from the village and veteran employee of the Puccinis, of having an affair with her husband. She threatened to kill Doria, who then ran away and poisoned herself. An examination of the body, commissioned by the incensed parents, found her virginity intact.

The Manfredis charged Elvira Puccini with persecution and calumny and she was found guilty but used her husband's connections to avoid sentencing. Puccini paid an undisclosed amount to the grieving family and they withdrew their accusations. Elvira, blackmailed by her husband, agreed to grant him full freedom - presumably, also romantically.

<http://opera.stanford.edu/Puccini/main.html>

<http://www.puccini.it/portale%20ing.htm>

R

Revolution

Around 2800-2500 BC, Lagash and Umma were two Sumerian city-states located 25 kilometers apart in today's territory of Iraq. Clay cylinders and albast, copper and gold tablets found at the site recount the story of the first revolution in human history: the people rose and deposed officials who kept raising taxes but pocketed the proceeds. The earliest-known written appearance of the word "freedom" (amagi), or "liberty" is in a clay cuneiform document written about 2300 B.C. in Lagash.

<http://campus.northpark.edu/history/classes/Sources/UmmaLagash.html>

<http://www.earth-history.com/Ancient-texts/Sumer/sumer-iinscription-umma-lagash.htm>

Rigor Mortis

The stiff is poised theatrically at the scene of the crime, hand extended to heaven, eyes wide open in unspeakable terror. This is the onset of rigor mortis. Ten hours after death, as the muscles' energy

stores - adenosine triphosphate (ATP) - are depleted, the small muscles of the body and muscles that were most vigorously exercised prior to death stiffen. In most cadavers, rigor mortis progresses from the upper parts of the body downward (Nysten law). Three to four days after the event the body's muscles begin to decompose. Some studies suggest that rigor mortis progresses faster in red muscles and in higher room temperatures.

Rigor mortis implies that the natural state of muscles is rigid and contracted. Muscles invest energy in ... relaxing!

<http://www.vet.uga.edu/vpp/ia/SRP/vfp/timeofdeath.html>

http://anil298.tripod.com/vol_003_no_002/papers/paper001.html

Roman Family

The father in the Roman family (paterfamilias) exercised absolute and lifelong power over all other family members (patria potestas): his wife, children, and slaves. If the father's father was alive - then he was the supreme authority in the household. Fathers were even allowed to execute their grown sons for serious offenses like treason.

Each house maintained a cult of ancestors and hearth gods and the paterfamilias was its priest. The family was thought to possess a "genius" (gens) - an inner spirit - passed down the generations. The living and the dead members of the family shared the gens and were bound by it.

Legitimate offspring belonged to the father's family. The father retained custody if the couple (rarely) divorced exclusively at the husband's initiative. The father had the right to disown a newborn - usually deformed boys or girls. This led to a severe shortage of women in Rome.

The father of the bride had to pay a sizable dowry to the family of the groom, thus impoverishing the other members of the family. Moreover, daughters shared equally in the estate of a father who died without a will - thus transferring assets from their family of origin to their husband's family. No wonder females were decried as an economic liability.

At the beginning, slaves were considered to be part of the family and were well-treated. They were allowed to save money (peculium) and to purchase their freedom. Freed slaves became full-fledged Roman citizens and usually stayed on with the family as hired help or paid laborers. Only much later, in the vast plantations amassed by wealthy Romans, were slaves abused and regarded as inanimate property.

<http://ancienthistory.about.com/library/weekly/aa081997.htm>

<http://myron.sjsu.edu/romeweb/SOCIAL/art1.htm>

Rubber

It was the British chemist, Joseph Priestley, who gave rubber its name in 1770, when he discovered that it can rub away - erase - pencil marks.

<http://www.rubber.org/>

<http://home.nycap.rr.com/useless/priestley/>

S

Sahara Desert

The Sahara desert covers 8.6 million square kilometers (or 3.2 million square miles) - the size of the USA. Only 2.5-3 million people live in it - one hundredth the population of the United States. Contrary to its popular image, only 25% of this surface is covered by sand. The rest of the Sahara is made of rocks and desert varnish (weathered rock). The word "Sahara" in Arabic means "deserts", in the plural.

http://library.thinkquest.org/16645/the_land/sahara_desert.shtml

<http://www.danheller.com/sahara.html>

Salmon

The Pacific Salmon, when sexually mature, return from the ocean to the freshwater stream of their birth to lay eggs and die. The trip is hundreds to thousands of miles long. The Atlantic Salmon make it a few times in a lifetime - the Pacific varieties (there are five) only once.

The Salmon do not eat until they reach their destination and built a nest. The US Fish and Wildlife Service describe the few survivors as "often gaunt, with grotesquely humped backs, hooked jaws, and battle-torn fins. The females are swollen with a pound or more of eggs. Both have large white patches of bruised skin on their backs and sides."

The ordeal continues in the spawning grounds - males fight over females, females over nesting sites.

Why do the Salmon die after spawning?

Probably because of stress. Their cortisol level surges as they struggle upstream. This potent hormone facilitates the provision of energy but also eliminates the appetite, destroys the immune system and adversely affects the digestive tract. The Salmon die of exhaustion, starvation, and infection - not because they are "programmed" to die.

http://species.fws.gov/bio_salm.html

<http://www.psc.org/Pubs/Frp98-webb.pdf>

Senses

Scientifically speaking, onions, apples and potatoes share the same taste molecules but emit different smell molecules. Their differing "tastes" are, therefore, actually, the way we experience their smells.

In humans, the senses of taste and smell are connected. That is why we fail to taste well when we have a cold. But in snails the functions are separate. One pair of antennas is to smell with and another pair to taste with.

We can detect four tastes (sweet, salty, bitter and sour) - and, maybe, a fifth one (MSG or monosodium glutamate).

But we can distinguish more than 10,000 separate smell molecules by their shape. Still, there appear to be seven primary odors--camphorlike, musky, floral, peppermintlike, ethereal (like dry-cleaning fluid), pungent (vinegarlike), and putrid. They correspond to the seven types of smell receptors in the olfactory-cell hairs

When the food is high energy, we taste it as sweet. When the food contains certain chemicals it tastes salty.

Heated food releases more molecules to the air and to the saliva and thus is easier to smell and taste.

Children have more taste buds than adults. Women have more taste buds than men. They experience tastes much more intensely. Adults have c. 9000 taste buds on and around the tongue.

<http://www.accessexcellence.org/WN/SU/taste42k.html>

<http://www.reciprocalnet.org/common/taste.html>

<http://www.chem.uwec.edu/Scott/Taste/taste.html>

S/he (Etymology)

The widespread use of the word "she" as the female singular pronoun is astoundingly new.

The word "she" existed in both Middle English, where it was written as "scae", or "sche" and in Old English where it was "sio", or (as in Norsk-Viking languages) "seo", or, in the accusative, sie.

But women simply did not deserve a pronoun all their own.

Prior to the 12 century - when the English language was already 400 years old - the female pronoun was "heo" ("hye", or "hie" in Middle English). "Heo" was also was the plural of all genders. "She" as a noun (she-cousin) was not in acceptable use prior to the 14th century.

Even today, the plurals of all genders in English have no feminine forms, as opposed, for instance, to Semitic languages. "We" and "they" in english are unisex. In Hebrew, for example, "hem" is the male plural and "hen" the female plural.

"He" derives from the Indo-European word for "this (here)". Hence here, her, and ... hence.

<http://www.geocities.com/etymonline/s5etym.htm>

Shooting Stars

The average meteor - a piece of a steroid or planet, or dust left by passing comets - is the size of a baseball and is moving through space at 50,000 kilometers per hours. Hence the myth that meteors burn upon entry due to friction with the Earth's atmosphere. The truth is that meteors do not burn - they vaporize due to "ram pressure".

Meteors do heat - to more than 3000 degrees Fahrenheit or 1649 Celsius - and, as a result, they glow. But this is not due to friction. The meteor's advancing front compresses the air and raises its temperature. It is this seething air that, in turn, vaporizes most meteors, transforming them into shooting stars, 100 kilometers above. Larger meteors splatter into exploding fireballs. But they all finally become meteorites - cold shreds of meteors found on the ground.

<http://www.space.com/scienceastronomy/solarsystem/meteors-ez.html>

Sistine Chapel

Ross King published a book titled "Michelangelo and the Pope's Ceiling" debunking many of the myths attending to this masterpiece.

Michelangelo (1475-1564) collaborated with assistants on painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel . He did not paint his bits on his back, suspended inches from the ceiling. Aged 71 and already a wealthy artist, he got well paid for the job - though he had practically no experience with wet plaster (or, for that matter, painting). It took three and a half years to complete. It was unveiled, unfinished, in November 1509. It was restored 1979-1999.

<http://www.cnn.com/2003/SHOWBIZ/books/03/05/michelangelo.ceiling/index.html>

<http://sun.science.wayne.edu/~mcogan/Humanities/Sistine/>

<http://www.kfki.hu/~arthp/tours/sistina/>

Smog

Smog - airborne smoke particles combined with solid and liquid fog - could be lethal. Among numerous other substances, smog also contains cyanide and sulfuric acid. During the autumn of 1909, there were more than 1,000 "smoke-fog" deaths in Glasgow and Edinburgh. In 1952 smog killed more than 4000 people in Greater London within the three weeks. Los Angeles and Tokyo also suffer from smog pollution.

Photochemical smog has nothing to do with either smoke or fog. It originates from nitrogen oxides and hydrocarbon emissions mainly from cars. These then undergo photochemical reactions in the lower atmosphere and yield the highly toxic gas ozone in the presence of sunlight.

Smog was so severe in London well into the end of the 1970s that winter sunshine hours were reduced by one third.

<http://www.aqmd.gov/smog/inhealth.html>

http://www.doc.mmu.ac.uk/aric/eae/Air_Quality/Older/Great_London_Smog.html

Soccer War

Wars were fought for strange reasons - but none as bizarre as the one that led to the 4 days long skirmish between El Salvador and Honduras in July 14, 1969.

The former lost to the latter in a playoff game for the 1970 World Cup. El Salvador fans then proceeded to beat up their Honduran counterparts. Soon, the two countries were engaged in a full-blown war, known ever since as the Soccer War. It left 3000 dead, 6000 wounded and more than \$50 million in damages. It led to the election of Colonel Sanchez Hernandez as president of El Salvador a year later.

But this was merely the latest manifestation of constant friction between the two neighboring polities. Their international border was never undisputedly demarcated. Honduras was the destination country for 300,000 impoverished El Salvadoran immigrants. Hondurans long campaigned to have them expelled. In 1968, thousands of them were.

Honduran and Salvadoran businesses bitterly competed in the same markets. The Soccer War merely epitomized this deep-set rivalry.

<http://www.geocities.com/SoHo/Museum/8350/war.html>

http://ldbelveal.net/futbol_war.htm

Spam

Spam is a slang word. The official term is Unsolicited Commercial E-mail (UCE) - defined by the US Federal Trade Commission as "any commercial electronic mail message sent, often in bulk, to a consumer without the consumer's prior request or consent." Unsolicited non-commercial e-mail is also spam.

SPAM (in capital letters) has been a trademark of the Hormel Foods Corporation since 1937 (acronym of "Shoulder Pork and hAM"/"SPiced hAM"). It is a kind of fluffy canned luncheon meat and it gained fame (or notoriety) during the second world war when it was served to American soldiers throughout the world. The Hormel Foods Corporation failed in its legal battle to block the use of the word "spam".

No one knows how the term originated.

Yourdictionary.com suggests that it is derived from a Monty Python skit in their Flying Circus television show in 1970. In it a group of Vikings harass two patrons in a restaurant with incessant chants of "spam, spam, spam..."

Spam may be an acronym of Simultaneously Posted Advertising Message. It was the derogatory phrase used to describe the April 1994 marketing campaign of the Canter and Siegel law firm. They posted an offer to every news group thus provoking an outcry and giving rise to - spam.

<http://samvak.tripod.com/busiweb32.html>

Spanish Inquisition

The Spanish Inquisition is notorious for its prosecution and bestial torture of the Jews in Spain and its territories. Yet, contrary to common "knowledge", the Inquisition had no jurisdiction over the Jews. It did not detain or torture a single Jew.

Its remit was, as the Catholic Encyclopedia reminds us:

"The Spanish Inquisition, however, properly begins with the reign of Ferdinand the Catholic and Isabella (at the end of the 15th century). The Catholic faith was then endangered by pseudo converts from Judaism (Marranos) and Mohammedanism (Moriscos).

On 1 November, 1478, Sixtus IV empowered the Catholic sovereigns to set up the Inquisition."

The Inquisition persecuted, tortured, imprisoned, and prosecuted only Jews and Moslems who converted to Christianity. Since the property of the "pseudo" converts was impounded, both the crown and ecclesia were happy to pursue this profitable vocation.

http://dmoz.org/Society/Religion_and_Spirituality/Christianity/Church_History/Inquisitions/

<http://www.catholic.net/RCC/Periodicals/Dossier/1112-96/article2.html>

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08026a.htm>

Spider Silk

Spiders are not the only insects to produce "webs" of silk. Centipedes, millipedes, and mites, among others, do it too. Spider silk is made of a protein called fibroin and is secreted from up to 7 glands in the spider's abdomen. The spider exerts abdominal pressure to force the silk out and varies the rate of flow by using muscles in the ducts and spigots at the extremities of the glands. Each gland produces a different type of silk intended for distinct purposes - wrapping prey, constructing the web, issuing sperm drops, and manufacturing the egg sac.

Spider silk strands are more uniform in diameter than most man-made artifacts. Per same diameter and weight, spider silk is 5 times stronger than steel and one of the most elastic substances on earth. It does not break even if stretched to 4 times the original length.

It is water resistant. It does not become brittle even at minus 40 degrees Celsius.

<http://www.szgdocent.org/ff/f-ssilk.htm>

<http://www.uky.edu/Agriculture/Entomology/ythfacts/stories/spidrweb.htm>

Squid, Giant

On the morning of 25 March 1941, the 8799 ton passenger ship Britannia of the Anchor Line, carrying 500 passengers, was sunk by a German marine raider, Thor, off the west coast of Africa. The few survivors insisted that one of them was gobbled up by a giant squid.

Giant squids (*Architeuthis dux*) - up to 20 meters long and one ton (1000 kilograms) heavy - are not fabulous sea monsters. They exist. There have been more than 250 sightings of these behemoths, mostly stranded or dead. In 1874, Rev. Moses Harvey of Newfoundland displayed a dead giant squid caught by fishermen in his tub. The specimen was described in a scientific monograph written by Professor Addison Verrill of Yale University six years later.

Undigested pieces of giant squids have been found in the stomachs of sperm whales. Whale skins are often scarred by the tentacled suckers of their foes. The marks are between 2 and 5 centimeters in diameter.

The eyes of this beast - which stalks the darkness of the deepest seas, up to 1000 meters below the surface - are as big as human heads. The squid grows fast and attains full size in 3-4 years.

Giant squids eat deep sea fishes - as well as smaller squids. They use their very long feeding tentacles, equipped with "clubs" (suckers, or suction cups) to capture their prey. The hapless victim is then held by eight smaller arms ("arm crown"). The squid proceeds to bite chunks off the game, using its sharp and powerful beaks (the parrot-like equivalents of jaws).

<http://seawifs.gsfc.nasa.gov/squid.html>

<http://partners.si.edu/squid/Default.html>

<http://dsc.discovery.com/convergence/giantsquid/giantsquid.html>

Stamps

On May 1, 1840, Great Britain was the first country to issue a postage stamp - the Penny Black, a one penny, adhesive, paper quadrangle. The government saw no need to print the country of origin on the stamps - as no other polity produced such. But it did carry the image of Queen Victoria.

All British stamps since bear the simile of the reigning royal and do not name the country of origin - the United Kingdom.

The stamp was good for use from May 6. Thus the first letter bearing the Black Penny is dated May 6 - and not May 1. On May 8, 1840 another stamp - a two pence blue Victoria - was disseminated. Both the Black Penny and the Blue Victoria enjoyed print runs of millions and so - contrary to urban legend - are not rare, though highly valued by philatelists. The two immediately became collectors' items. Perforation was introduced only in 1848-54.

Stamps were first proposed by a schoolmaster and civil servant, Rowland Hill, in 1837, in his manifest "Post Office Reform". He was knighted for the idea - but it wasn't his. Some countries in Europe printed stamps as early as a century before. They were used to pay a tax on newspaper delivery. At first he proposed pre-paid envelopes - but they were largely ignored by the public, partly due to their flawed design.

<http://members.tripod.com/~midgley/rowlandhill.html>

<http://www.glassinesurfer.com/f/gsrowlandhill.shtml>

Star of David

The "Magen David" ("Shield of King David") - two interpenetrating triangles that form a six-pointed star - has been the symbol of the Zionist movement since 1897. It is an important part of the flag of the State of Israel. It has been a Jewish symbol for a mere 400 years, though. It appears, for instance, on medieval cathedrals.

The symbol is known in India as the Sri-Yantra ("the complete interpenetration of the sexes"). The pupils of the Christian mystic and alchemist Jacob Bohme, who lived in the early part of the 17th century, believed that it symbolized Christ who, as a second Adam, restored the first Adam's androgyny (bisexuality).

<http://www.us-israel.org/jsource/Judaism/star.html>

Statues

The United States boasts a few statue-related records. The Statue of Liberty is the largest copper sculpture in the world. Mount Rushmore - in the Black Hills near Keystone - is both the largest monument and the most sizable figure carved in a rock. Each of the four heads of the U.S. Presidents measure 18 meters tall. Compare it to the Zizkov Monument in Prague, the biggest equestrian memorial. It stands a mere 9 meters tall.

There are rules regulating the appearance of horse-mounted military men. If the person died in battle, the two front legs of the horse must be extended in the air. If only one of the horse's front legs is lifted, the person was merely wounded in battle, though he died later of his wounds. All four legs firmly on the ground - the person died of natural causes.

<http://www.nps.gov/stli/>

<http://www.google.com/url?sa=U&start=1&q=http://www.nps.gov/stli/&e=747>

<http://www.nps.gov/moru/>

http://prague.czech_republic.findmyroom.com/detail/prague/_/czech_republic/165543/http://www.google.com/url?sa=U&start=1&q=http://www.nps.gov/moru/&e=747

Suicide

According to British law, there were two types of suicide: an act committed by a person of unsound mind and "felo de se" ("felon upon himself") - an act of self-destruction committed knowingly and willingly by a person of sound mind:

"A felo-de-se, therefore, is he that deliberately puts an end to his own existence."--Blackstone: Commentaries, book iv. chap. xiv. p. 189.

But killing oneself inadvertently, while trying to kill another, is also considered felo-de-se:

"If one commits any unlawful malicious act, the consequence of which is his own death, as if attempting to kill another he runs upon his antagonist's sword, or shooting at another the gun bursts and kills himself."

Prior to 1870, the estate of a felo-de-se - except his land - reverted to the crown. The relatives could redeem the chattels and goods for a fee. The body was subjected to an "ignominious burial on the highway, with a stake driven through the body." The Burial Act of 1823 forbade such practices and ordered to bury the felo-de-se within 24 hours after the coroner's inquest, between 9 PM and midnight, and without Christian last rites.

The Interments act of 1882 permitted to inter the culprit in a churchyard or parish burial grounds, again without rites - though a special kind of rite was allowed.

British law did not cross the ocean. Thus, William Penn included this clause in the charter of privileges he granted to the inhabitants of Pennsylvania:

"If any person, through temptation or melancholy, shall destroy himself, his estate, real and personal, shall notwithstanding, descend to his wife and children, or relations, as if he had died a natural death."

<http://www.lectlaw.com/def/f106.htm>

http://3.1911encyclopedia.org/F/FE/FELO_DE_SE.htm

The "winter blues" are supposed to cause suicidal ideation. There is even a mental health syndrome called Seasonal Affective Disorder, supposedly alleviated by bright light therapy (therapy using artificial sources emulating daylight).

But suicide rates are highest in the spring and summer months. They are lowest in winter. The propensity to commit suicide INCREASES with increasing hours of daylight. It is not correlated with any other meteorological variable, such as rainfall or temperature.

Suicide rates appeared to increase with increasing hours of daylight, and showed no connection to other meteorological factors such as

changing temperature or rainfall.

Surprisingly , sunlight is known to indirectly induce heightened brain levels of serotonin, a biochemical inversely linked to depression. The lower the levels - the deeper the depressive episode. Serotonin drops during winter months.

SOURCE: American Journal of Psychiatry 2003;160:793-795.

<http://herkules.oulu.fi/isbn9514256042/html/x1225.html>

<http://www.vifp.monash.edu.au/raicog/season.html>

T

Tapeworms

Tapeworms affect not only the digestive tract - but also the liver. They range in size from 1 millimeter (0.04 inch) to a whopping 15 meters (50 feet!).

They are found in almost all vertebrates, including fish. Many of them have distinct heads and bodies. None of them has a mouth or any trace of a digestive tract. They absorb their food rather than digest it.

Tapeworms are hermaphrodite - i.e., each individual is both male and female. They fertilize themselves. When "pregnant" each tapeworm contains hundreds of thousands of embryos. Such embryos, when lodged in the intestinal wall can bore through it into a blood vessel and be carried to their final destination in a muscle.

Tapeworms are only one of a few kinds of human worm-parasites.

<http://www.eeb.uconn.edu:591/tapewormsdotorg/home.htm>

<http://www.dr-dan.com/tapeworm.htm>

<http://directory.google.com/Top/Science/Biology/Microbiology/Parasites/?tc=1>

Teapot Dome

With the exception of Watergate, there has never been a scandal more egregious and with wider implications than the Teapot Dome affair during the presidency of Warren G. Harding. It involved the secret leasing to private companies of oil-containing tracts owned by the Navy, mainly in Wyoming and California.

"Domes" are natural reservoirs of crude oil. The "Teapot Dome" - named after a rock resembling the kitchen implement - was near Casper,

Wyoming. It was "reserved" in 1920 for the future energy needs of American Navy vessels.

Senator Albert B. Fall of New Mexico - Harding's secretary of the Interior - opposed this "conservation" policy. Hence his furtive attempt - in collusion with Secretary of the Navy, Edward Denby and others - to lease the domes to private extractors. Teapot Dome was leased to Harry F. Sinclair's Mammoth Oil Company. The Elk Hills reserve in California was rented to Edward L. Doheny's Pan-American Petroleum and Transport Company. The two gave Fall and others gifts and "loans" amounting to \$400,000 - an enormous fortune at the time.

The scandal was made public in 1922 in a long investigation by the U.S. Senate's Committee on Public Lands led by Senator Thomas J. Walsh from Montana and Senator Robert M. La Follette.

After much prevarication by Attorney General Harry M. Daugherty, Fall was brought to justice. He sentenced to one year in prison and \$100,000 fine in 1929 and many officials were implicated. Daugherty himself resigned in 1924. When Harding died in 1923, he was succeeded by Calvin Coolidge and public outrage subsided. Coolidge acted resolutely and appointed special prosecutors under his personal supervision to protect the interests of the government.

The Supreme Court annulled both the Elk Hills and the Teapot Dome leases in 1927. But, though government officials were convicted of corruption and conspiracy - no oilman was found guilty of bribing (still, they paid damages). Sinclair refused to collaborate with a second Senate investigation and hired gumshoes to shadow members of the jury in his case. He served a short sentence for tampering with a jury and for criminal contempt.

The Democrats failed to capitalize on the affair and lost the presidential elections in both 1924 and 1928.

<http://gi.grolier.com/presidents/ea/side/teapot.html>

<http://www.teachervision.com/lesson-plans/lesson-2851.html>

Television

The transmission of images obsessed inventors as early as 1875 when George Carey of Boston proposed his cumbersome system. Only five years later, the principle of scanning a picture, line by line and frame by frame - still used in modern television sets - was proposed simultaneously in the USA (by W.E. Sawyer) and in France (by Maurice Leblanc). The first complete television system - using the newly discovered properties of selenium - was patented in Germany in 1884, by Paul Nipkow. Boris Rosing of Russia actually transmitted images in 1907. The idea to incorporate cathode -ray tubes was proposed in 1911 by a Scottish engineer, Campbell Swinton.

Another Scot, John Logie Baird, beat American inventor C.F. Jenkins to the mark by giving the first public demonstration of - a dim and badly flickering - television in 1926 in Soho, London. Britain commenced experimental broadcasting almost immediately thereafter. Irish actress

Peggy O'Neil was the first to be interviewed on TV in April 1930. The Japanese televised an elementary school baseball match in September 1931. Nazi Germany started its own broadcasting service in 1935 and offered coverage of the 1936 Olympics. By November 1936, the BBC was broadcasting daily from Alexandra Palace in London to all of 100 TV sets in the kingdom.

At the beginning there were many competing standards on both sides of the Atlantic. Baird's technological solutions were trounced by Isaac Shoenberg and his team, set up in 1931 by Electric and Musical Industries (EMI). RCA refined its own system, as did the Dutch Philips. Not until 1951 were the standards for public broadcasting set in the USA and in Europe.

But the Americans were the ones to grasp the commercial implications of television. Bulova Clock paid \$9 to WNBT of New York for the first 20-seconds TV spot, broadcast during a game between the Brooklyn Dodgers and the Philadelphia Phillies in July 1941. Soap operas followed in February 1947 (DuMont TV's A Woman to Remember) and the first TV news helicopter was launched by KTLA Channel 5 in Los Angeles on 4 July 1958.

The first patent for color television was issued in Germany in 1904. Vladimir Kosma Zworykin, the Russia-born American innovator, came up with a complete color system in 1925. Baird himself demonstrated color TV transmission in 1928. Various researchers at Bell Laboratories perfected color television in the late 1920s. Georges Valenso of France patented a series of breakthrough technologies in 1938. But color TV became widespread only in the 1960s.

<http://www.tvhistory.tv/>

<http://www.novia.net/~ereitan/>

Terrorists

Domestic terrorism is not a new phenomenon in the United States.

On March 1, 1954, Puerto Rican freedom fighters - or terrorists - led by Lolita Lebron, opened fire in the US House of Representatives (Congress). Five congressmen were wounded. They protested the United States' "military occupation" of their country. The attackers were apprehended, imprisoned and released in 1979. They are considered heroes by the island's independence movement to this very day.

<http://www.albizucampos.com/march4.asp>

http://www.nzz.ch/english/background/background1999/background9905/bg990504puerto_rico_usa.html

Thunder

Lightning strikes men about four times more often than it strikes women. Most men are under the age of 39. Men account for 84% of lightning-related fatalities and 82% of injuries, according to a study titled "Demographics of US Lightning Casualties and Damages from 1959 - 1994," by Ronald L. Holle and Raúl E. López of the National Severe Storms Laboratory and E. Brian Curran of the National Weather Service.

In the United States alone there were 3,239 deaths and 9,818 injuries from lightning strikes between 1959 and 1994, according to The National Weather Service publication Storm Data.

Lightning travels less than 20 kilometers from the cloud in which it was hatched. The air within the bolt is heated to many times the temperature on the surface of the sun (50,000 degrees Fahrenheit, or c. 28,000 degrees Celsius).

<http://www.lightningstorm.com/>

http://science.nasa.gov/newhome/headlines/essd18jun99_1.htm

<http://www.nws.noaa.gov/om/hazstats.shtml>

Titanic

The Titanic sank in less than 3 hours despite its 16 watertight compartments. Of 2220 passengers and crew aboard - 1513 died, including a few millionaires. Three survivors are still alive today. The Titanic carried passengers transferred to it from two other cruise liners due to a strike.

The radio operator of the "Californian" was asleep and did not hear the Titanic's distress signals.

The story of a huge gash inflicted on the 269 meters long ship is a myth. Sonar findings indicate that the damage was limited to 35 meters of the hull and had a surface area of merely 1 square meter. The ship seems to have broken in three pieces BEFORE it sank.

<http://www.encyclopedia-titanica.org/>

<http://www.sciencedrive.com/mitchk/interest.htm>

Tussaud, Madam Marie

Marie Tussaud (her real name was a less French sounding Grosholtz) must have been a remarkable woman. From truly humble origins - her mother worked as the housekeeper of one, Dr. Philippe Curtius - she sprang to fame in less than 10 years. The good doctor owned and operated a small wax museum in Paris and, when he died in 1794, Marie - who was his trainee and maybe more - inherited his collection of death masks and a house or two in Paris.

In 1780, nineteen years old Marie was appointed art tutor to the sister of King Louis XVI. For the next nine years her official residence was the sumptuous Palace of Versailles. When the French Revolution turned into the Reign of Terror, she was commissioned to make death masks of the guillotined. With 70 wax figures she embarked on a tour of England. The collection included replicas of the late Royal Family of France, a model of the guillotine, and an Egyptian mummy. It was a morbid hit.

In 1835 she settled in London and opened her establishment in Baker Street. The rest, as they say, is history.
<http://www.madame-tussauds.com/frameset.htm>
<http://www.tussauds.com/cfm/home/index.cfm>

Twins

Twins are born together or, at the most, a few minutes apart. Right? Wrong.

When one twin dies, the other can be born as much as 153 days later. When both survive, the second twin can be born even two months later. This is called "Delayed Interval Delivery".

<http://am-i-pregnant.com/aip.data/article/show/birth/0/164717.shtml>

<http://www.expectingmultiples.com/Article2.htm>

<http://www.straightdope.com/columns/021108.html>

<http://www.kfshrc.edu.sa/annals/191/98-075.html>

U-V-W

Uganda Scheme

Theodore Herzl, the visionary who founded Zionism, was an assimilated Jew, who did not consider Palestine the optimal choice for a resurgent Jewish nationalism.

When the British offered to him a homeland in East Africa (today's Uganda), he accepted and proposed it to the Sixth Zionist Congress in Basle in 1903. After bitter recriminations, the Congress decided (295 for, 178 against) to send an "investigatory commission" to the territory to inspect it and report back.

Herzl vowed that the Uganda scheme is not a substitute for the reclamation of Palestine as the historic homeland of the Jewish people. But his actions defied his speech. He pursued the British proposal to his death (in 1904) as did many other prominent Jewish leaders, organized in the Jewish Territorialist Organization (ITO).

The plan was decisively abandoned only after the Balfour Declaration which granted the Jewish people a homeland in Palestine under the British mandate.

Yet, in the meantime, other territorial plans emerged: in Canada, Australia, Iraq, Libya, and Angola. Close to 10,000 Jews settled in Texas. Stalin created a "Jewish Homeland" in Birobidjan. Even the Nazis tried to revive some of these "solutions to the Jewish question" - notably in Lublin, Poland and in the island of Madagascar.

<http://www.us-israel.org/jsource/Zionism/Uganda.html>

<http://www.jewishamerica.com/ja/timeline/zionism.cfm>

Verdi, Giuseppe

Like Puccini, the career of Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901) did not start auspiciously.

Coming from a tiny hamlet and the son of an innkeeper and farmer, he was snootily rejected by the Milan Conservatory due to his "advanced age" and "poor playing of the piano". He, thus, had to take private lessons from the Milanese composer, Vincenzo Lavigna. His second opera, King for a Day, was a flop. When his wife and two children died, he gave up composing altogether.

Luckily, the director of La Scala, the Milanese opera house, succeeded to convince him to rescind his vow. The result was Nabucco (1842). The opera was so adored that it was still playing in Buenos Aires and St.

Petersburg a decade later.

As opposed to nostalgic re-writing of history, not least by Verdi himself, the fact is that the opera's subject matter - the Babylonian captivity of the Jews - was not meant to allude to the subjugation of the Italian people to Austrian rule. Only after Italy was unified in 1861, did Verdi propagate the apocryphal story of how he snapped out of his depression when the libretto fell and opened in the chorus "Va, pensiero", the song of the enslaved Hebrews. The new nation of Italy needed heroes and Verdi was "recruited", his earlier work deliberately recast as subversively anti-Austrian and nationalistic.

A series of successful operas - such as Rigoletto (1851), Il Trovatore (1853) and La Traviata (1853) - brought him international acclaim. When the Suez canal was completed, the Khedive of Egypt commissioned Aida (1871) to celebrate the opening of the waterway.

Verdi's dream was to retire early as a "gentleman-farmer" to land he purchased in 1844. He reluctantly served as a member of the Chamber of

Deputies after the unification of Italy in 1861 but soon resigned. He did finally settle down in 1873 and became a very wealthy landowner.

Like Puccini, Verdi lived, out of wedlock, with the common-law wife of a musical agent, the prima donna Giuseppina Strepponi. When she met Verdi, she already had three children, the oldest of whom was being reared by her former maid. Verdi refused to allow her to accompany him on official travels, due to the scandal that swirled around their relationship. Moreover, he had at least one documented affair with the fiancée of his best friend, Angelo Mariani. Her name was Teresa Stolz and she was a soprano opera singer. He loved her so much that she was even allowed to attend his deathbed.

Verdi was a very unpleasant and cantankerous person. He was known for his litigiousness, evasiveness, vindictiveness, reversals and constant bickering. He frequently clashed with censors due to the bold subject matter and librettos of his operas. But he gave rise to so much beauty that his personal foibles are all but forgotten by now.

<http://opera.stanford.edu/Verdi/main.html>

<http://www.r-ds.com/verdiana.htm>

Video Cassette Recorder

A Californian company, Ampex Corporation, invented the video cassette recorder in 1956. The Ampex VR1000 weighed 665 kilograms and stood 110 centimeters tall. It was not until 1972 that a home version was introduced by Philips of the Netherlands. Sony introduced the first affordable home video recorder and player in 1969 but it was JVC (Matshushita) from Japan which invented the VHS recording system in 1976 and competed with Sony's less successful Betamax standard.

<http://www.tvhistory.tv/VCR%20History.htm>

<http://www.cedmagic.com/history/>

Vinci, Leonardo da

Leonardo da Vinci was a painter, sculptor, architect, cartographer, engineer, scientist and inventor in the 15th century. Yet, despite his genius, he referred to himself as "senza lettere" (the illiterate, the man without letters). For good reason: until late in life, he was unable to read, or write, Latin, the language used by virtually all other Renaissance intellectuals, the lingua franca, akin to English today. Nor was he acquainted with mathematics until he was 30.

Leonardo was born out of wedlock but was raised by his real father, a

wealthy Florentine notary. He served at least ten years (1466-1476) as Garzone (apprentice) to Andrea del Verrocchio and painted details in Verrocchio's canvasses. Only in 1478, when he was 26, did he become independent.

He was not off to an auspicious start. He never executed his first commission (an altarpiece in the chapel of the Palazzo Vecchio della Signoria, Florence's town hall). His first large paintings were left unfinished ("The Adoration of the Magi" and "Saint Jerome", both 1481).

Most of the sketches and studies for Leonardo's works of art and engineering are found on his shopping lists, personal notes, and personal expenditure ledgers.

No one was allowed to enter Leonardo's den, where he kept, as Giorgio Vasari in "Lives of the Artists", describes: "a number of green and other kinds of lizards, crickets, serpents, butterflies, locusts, hats, and various strange creatures of this nature".

Leonardo's clients were often dissatisfied with his glacial pace, lack of professional discipline, and inability to conclude his assignments. He was frequently involved in litigation. The Cofraternity of the Immaculate Conception sued him when he failed to produce the Virgin on the Rocks, an altarpiece they commissioned from him in 1483. The court proceedings lasted 10 years. The head of Jesus in "The Last Supper" was left blank because Leonardo did not dare to paint a human model, nor did he trust his imagination sufficiently. Leonardo worked four years on the Mona Lisa but never completed it, either. He carried it with him wherever he went.

Leonardo's terra cotta model for a colossal bronze sculpture of the father of his benefactor and employer, Ludovico Sforza, was used for target practice by invading French soldiers in 1499. The metal which was supposed to go into this work of art was molded into cannon balls.

Leonardo was a member of the commission which deliberated where to place Michelangelo's magnificent statue of David. His cartographic work was so ahead of its time, that the express highway from Florence to the sea - built in the 20th century - follows precisely the route of a canal he envisioned. His scientific investigations - in anatomy, hydraulics, mechanics, ornithology, botany - are considered valuable to this very day. Bill Gates owns some his notebooks containing scientific data and observations (known as the Codex Hammer).

But Leonardo's loyalties were fickle. He switched sides to the conquering French and in 1506 returned to Milan to work for its French governor, Charles D'Amboise. Later, he became court painter for King Louis XII of France who, at the time, resided in Milan. In 1516, he relocated to France, to serve King Francis I and there he died.

Leonardo summed up the lessons of his art in a series of missives to his students, probably in Milan. These were later (1542) collected by his close associate, Francesco Melzi, as "A Treatise on Painting" and published in print (1651, 1817).

<http://www.mos.org/sln/Leonardo/LeoHomePage.html>

http://www.artcyclopedia.com/artists/leonardo_da_vinci.html

War

In 1896 Zanzibar surrendered to British forces after 38-45 minutes. It was the shortest war in history.

On 25 August 1896, following Sultan Hamid bin Thuwain death, an usurper declared himself the new Sultan in the palace. England ran a protectorate on the island of Zanzibar since 1890. On August 27, three warships of the Royal Navy opened fire and, in less than an hour, leveled the palace and deposed the wannabe.

The 100-years war between Britain and France lasted 117 years (1337-1453). The Britons were expelled from Calais only in 1558. This is by far the longest war in history.

<http://www.geocities.com/factszone/history.html>

http://www.readnrun.com/shortest_war.htm

http://www.ku.edu/kansas/medieval/108/lectures/hundred_years_war.html

Warfare, Biological and Chemical

Chemical and biological warfare are not an invention of the 20th century.

Solon (638-559 BC) used a strong purgative, the herb hellebore, in the siege of Krissa. During the 6th century BC, the Assyrians poisoned enemy wells with rye ergot. In the Peloponnesian War (431-404 BC), the Spartans flung sulfur and pitch at the Athenians and their allies. In the Middle Ages, besiegers used the bloated and dripping bodies of plague victims as readymade "dirty bombs".

In 1346, during its siege of Kaffa (present day Feodosia in Crimea), the Tartar army suffered an outbreak of the Plague. They hurled the corpses of their infected dead over the city walls and into the city's water wells. The resulting epidemic led to the city's surrender. It is widely believed that people afflicted with the horrendous disease fled the place and started the Black Death pandemic which consumed at least one third of Europe's population within a few years. Russian troops adopted the same tactic against Sweden in 1710.

Smallpox was another favorite. Francisco Pizarro (1476-1541) gave South American natives clothing items deliberately contaminated with the variola virus. During the French and Indian wars in North America (1689-1763), blankets used by smallpox victims were given to American Indians. General Jeffery Amherst (1717-1797) gifted Indians loyal to the French with smallpox-contaminated bedspreads during the French and Indian War of 1754 to 1767. An epidemic broke among the Native American defenders of Fort Carillon and they lost it to the English.

<http://www.nbc-med.org/SiteContent/HomePage/WhatsNew/MedAspects/content.html>

<http://www.vectorsite.net/twgas.html>

Washington DC

People who have resided in Washington DC for longer than 12 months were enfranchised - given the right to vote - only in 1961 with the passing of the 23rd amendment to the Constitution of the United States. The Amendment was proposed in Congress on June 16, 1960 and ratified on March 29, 1961. It reads:

Amendment XXIII

Section 1. The District constituting the seat of government of the United States shall appoint in such manner as the Congress may direct:

A number of electors of President and Vice President equal to the whole number of Senators and Representatives in Congress to which the District would be entitled if it were a state, but in no event more than the least populous state; they shall be in addition to those appointed by the states, but they shall be considered, for the purposes of the election of President and Vice President, to be electors appointed by a state; and they shall meet in the District and perform such duties as provided by the twelfth article of amendment.

Section 2. The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

The District of Columbia was formed in 1802 from bits of Maryland and Virginia.

<http://www.vaix.net/~captainnemo/plan/23rd.htm>

Women's Rights

The equality of the genders is a recent development. Switzerland granted women the right to vote in national polls only in 1971 - long after Muslim women in Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria and Indonesia, for instance, were enfranchised. Britain allowed them to cast ballots only in 1928-9. Women in France were not allowed to be sole signatories of cheques until 1962.

In the USA women were barred from jury duty and public office until the early 1930s. Women in both the Republican and Democratic parties were relegated to special "Divisions" until 1952. The Equal Rights Amendment was proposed in 1923 and passed both houses of Congress only in 1972. It expired in 1982, three states short of adoption.

The first woman governor - Ella Grasso of Connecticut - was elected in 1974 and the first judge of the Supreme Court - Sandra Day O'Connor - was appointed in 1981.

http://dmoz.org/Society/People/Women/Women%27s_Rights/

<http://www.rochester.edu/SBA/history.html><http://www.rochester.edu/SBA/timeline1.html><http://dmoz.org/Society/People/Women/Issues/>

THE AUTHOR

SHMUEL (SAM) VAKNIN

Curriculum Vitae

Click on blue text to access relevant web sites - thank you.

Born in 1961 in Qiryat-Yam, Israel.

Served in the Israeli Defence Force (1979-1982) in training and education units.

Education

Graduated a few semesters in the Technion - Israel Institute of Technology, Haifa.

Ph.D. in Philosophy (major : Philosophy of Physics) - Pacific Western University, California. My doctoral thesis is available through the Library of Congress.

Graduate of numerous courses in Finance Theory and International Trading.

Certified E-Commerce Concepts Analyst.

Certified in Psychological Counselling Techniques.

Full proficiency in Hebrew and in English.

Business Experience

1980 to 1983

Founder and co-owner of a chain of computerized information kiosks in Tel-Aviv, Israel.

1982 to 1985

Senior positions with the Nessim D. Gaon Group of Companies in Geneva, Paris and New-York (NOGA and APROFIM SA):

- Chief Analyst of Edible Commodities in the Group's Headquarters in Switzerland.
- Manager of the Research and Analysis Division
- Manager of the Data Processing Division
- Project Manager of The Nigerian Computerized Census
- Vice President in charge of RND and Advanced Technologies
- Vice President in charge of Sovereign Debt Financing

1985 to 1986

Represented Canadian Venture Capital Funds in Israel.

1986 to 1987

General Manager of IPE Ltd. in London. The firm financed international multi-lateral countertrade and leasing transactions.

1988 to 1990

Co-founder and Director of "Mikbats - Tesuah", a portfolio management firm based in Tel-Aviv.

Activities included large-scale portfolio management, underwriting, forex trading and general financial advisory services.

1990 to Present

Free-lance consultant to many of Israel's Blue-Chip firms, mainly on issues related to the capital markets in Israel, Canada, the UK and the USA.

Consultant to foreign RND ventures and to Governments on macro-economic matters.

President of the Israel chapter of the Professors World Peace Academy (PWPA) and (briefly) Israel representative of the "Washington Times".

1993 to 1994

Co-owner and Director of many business enterprises:

- The Omega and Energy Air-Conditioning Concern
 - AVP Financial Consultants
 - Handiman Legal Services
- Total annual turnover of the group: 10 million USD.

Co-owner, Director and Finance Manager of COSTI Ltd. - Israel's largest computerized information vendor and developer. Raised funds through a series of private placements locally, in the USA, Canada and London.

1993 to 1996

Publisher and Editor of a Capital Markets Newsletter distributed by subscription only to dozens of subscribers countrywide.

In a legal precedent in 1995 - studied in business schools and law faculties across Israel - was tried for his role in an attempted takeover of Israel's Agriculture Bank.

Was interned in the State School of Prison Wardens.

Managed the Central School Library, wrote, published and lectured on various occasions.

Managed the Internet and International News Department of an Israeli mass media group, "Ha-Tikshoret and Namer".

Assistant in the Law Faculty in Tel-Aviv University (to Prof. S.G. Shoham).

1996 to 1999

Financial consultant to leading businesses in Macedonia, Russia and the Czech Republic.

Collaborated with the Agency of Transformation of Business with Social Capital.

Economic commentator in "Nova Makedonija", "Dnevnik", "Izvestia", "Argumenti i Fakti", "The Middle East Times", "Makedonija Denes", "The New Presence", "Central Europe Review", and other periodicals and in the economic programs on various channels of Macedonian Television.

Chief Lecturer in courses organized by the Agency of Transformation, by the Macedonian Stock Exchange and by the Ministry of Trade.

1999 to 2002

Economic Advisor to the Government of the Republic of Macedonia and to the Ministry of Finance.

2001 to present

Senior Business Correspondent for United Press International (UPI)

Web and Journalistic Activities

Author of extensive Websites in Psychology ("Malignant Self Love") - An Open Directory Cool Site

Philosophy ("Philosophical Musings")

Economics and Geopolitics ("World in Conflict and Transition")

Owner of the Narcissistic Abuse Announcement and Study List and the Narcissism Revisited mailing list (more than 3900 members)

Owner of the Economies in Conflict and Transition Study list.

Editor of mental health disorders and Central and Eastern Europe categories in web directories (Open Directory, Suite 101, Search

Europe).

Columnist and commentator in "The New Presence", United Press International (UPI), InternetContent, eBookWeb and "Central Europe Review".

Publications and Awards

"Managing Investment Portfolios in states of Uncertainty", Limon Publishers, Tel-Aviv, 1988

"The Gambling Industry", Limon Publishers., Tel-Aviv, 1990

"Requesting my Loved One - Short Stories", Yedioth Aharonot, Tel-Aviv, 1997

"The Macedonian Economy at a Crossroads - On the way to a Healthier Economy" (with Nikola Gruevski), Skopje, 1998

"Malignant Self Love - Narcissism Revisited", Narcissus Publications, Prague and Skopje, 1999, 2001, 2002

The Narcissism Series - e-books regarding relationships with abusive narcissists (Skopje, 1999-2002)

"The Exporters' Pocketbook", Ministry of Trade, Republic of Macedonia, Skopje, 1999

"The Suffering of Being Kafka" (electronic book of Hebrew Short Fiction, Prague, 1998)

"After the Rain - How the West Lost the East", Narcissus Publications in association with Central Europe Review/CEENMI, Prague and Skopje, 2000

Winner of numerous awards, among them the Israeli Education Ministry Prize (Literature) 1997, The Rotary Club Award for Social Studies (1976) and the Bilateral Relations Studies Award of the American Embassy in Israel (1978).

Hundreds of professional articles in all fields of finances and the economy and numerous articles dealing with geopolitical and political economic issues published in both print and web periodicals in many countries.

Many appearances in the electronic media on subjects in philosophy and the Sciences and concerning economic matters.

Contact Details:

palma@unet.com.mk

vaknin@link.com.mk

My Web Sites:

Economy / Politics:

<http://ceeandbalkan.tripod.com/>

Psychology:

<http://samvak.tripod.com/index.html>

Philosophy:

<http://philosophos.tripod.com/>

Poetry:

<http://samvak.tripod.com/contents.html>

Return

After the Rain

How the West

Lost the East

The Book

This is a series of articles written and published in 1996-2000 in Macedonia, in Russia, in Egypt and in the Czech Republic.

How the West lost the East. The economics, the politics, the geopolitics, the conspiracies, the corruption, the old and the new, the plough and the internet - it is all here, in colourful and provocative prose.

From "The Mind of Darkness":

"'The Balkans' - I say - 'is the unconscious of the world'. People stop to digest this metaphor and then they nod enthusiastically. It is here that the repressed memories of history, its traumas and fears and images reside. It is here that the psychodynamics of humanity - the tectonic clash between Rome and Byzantium, West and East, Judeo-Christianity and Islam - is still easily discernible. We are seated at a New Year's dining table, loaded with a roasted pig and exotic salads. I, the Jew, only half foreign to this cradle of Slavonics. Four Serbs, five Macedonians. It is in the Balkans that all ethnic distinctions fail and it is here that they prevail anachronistically and atavistically. Contradiction and change the only two fixtures of this tormented region. The women of the Balkan - buried under provocative mask-like make up, retro hairstyles and too narrow dresses. The men, clad in sepia colours, old fashioned suits and turn of the century moustaches. In the background there is the crying game that is Balkanian music: liturgy and folk and elegy combined. The smells are heavy with muskular perfumes. It is like time travel. It is like revisiting one's childhood."

The Author

Sam Vaknin is the author of Malignant Self Love - Narcissism Revisited and After the Rain - How the West Lost the East. He is a columnist for Central Europe Review, PopMatters, and eBookWeb , a United Press International (UPI) Senior Business Correspondent, and the editor of mental health and Central East Europe categories in The Open Directory and Suite101.

Until recently, he served as the Economic Advisor to the Government of Macedonia.

Visit Sam's Web site at <http://samvak.tripod.com>

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