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Quirky (but True) Stories from History

by MELANNIE SVOBODA SND on APRIL 8, 2019.

Here are six quirky (but true) stories you may not have heard in history class. I found these in Rick Beyer's book, *The Greatest Stories Never Told: 100 Tales from History to Astonish, Bewilder, and Stupefy*.

It was the time of the Civil War in the U.S. A young man was standing on a crowded train platform in Jersey City. The train started to move. The young man was pushed forward by the crowd and was about to fall between the platform and the moving car. Suddenly another man reached down, grabbed the collar of the young man, and pulled him to safety. Who was the young man? Robert Todd Lincoln, Abraham Lincoln's son. Who was the man who pulled him to safety? Edwin Booth, the older brother of John Wilkes Booth who would assassinate Lincoln the following spring.

In 1314, King Edward II of England banned the game of soccer. Back then, the game often pitted one town against another and entailed hundreds of players on each side running madly around the fields. The King's new edict threatened players with severe prison terms. Other English kings also banned the game. Some also banned golf. Why? The kings believed these sports were distracting the men in their realm from archery practice. And archery was essential to the defense of the nation. In time, though, the laws were



About Sister Melannie Svoboda, SND

Sister of Notre Dame, teacher, student, author, speaker, listener, friend, poet, farm girl.



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About Sunflower Seeds

Each Monday I'll post a short reflection, a simple musing on some aspect of spirituality— the everyday kind of spirituality that



includes things like walking in the park, slicing an onion for the casserole, caring for a child, studying for an exam, reading a line from scripture, laughing at a joke, or mourning a significant loss.

Along the way I welcome your questions, comments and insights too. After all, we're all in this life—this spiritual life—together!

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ignored and even forgotten. (P.S. Not all British royalty opposed golf. Mary Queen of Scots was an avid golfer!)

How do new words get into a language? This word comes from Ireland. In 1880 Irish tenant farmers were so enraged over high rents, they organized against the British estate owners. The group devised a new tactic that has become a part of nonviolent organizations down to this day. They targeted one estate owner, refusing to sell him supplies, harvest his crops, or even talk to him. Eventually the estate manager was forced to leave the country. But his name lives on. He was Charles Cunningham *Boycott*.



Do you start your day with a cup of coffee? If so, you can thank a pope for making that possible. About 600 years ago coffee was wildly popular in the Middle East. But coffee soon became controversial. Early coffee houses were noted for producing radical ideas. Soon the authorities in Mecca and Cairo tried to ban the drink, but they were unsuccessful.

When coffee came to Europe in the late 1500's, some Vatican priests thought the drink should be banned because it was associated with Muslims. But Pope Clement VIII tasted a cup of coffee and liked it so much, he gave it his blessing.

How did the Frisbee get its name? In 1947 a California inventor, Walter Frederick Morrison, created a toy that looked like a flying saucer. Sales were disappointing, so he improved the toy and called it the Pluto Platter. Eventually a toy company named Wham-O began marketing the toy on college campuses. At Yale University, one of the Wham-O founders learned that college students had been playing a lawn game for thirty years, tossing around metal pie tins. Instead of calling out "Fore!" before throwing the pie tin, they called out "Frisbie!" the name of the pie company that was emblazoned on the tin. Wham-O adopted the name for their toy, changing its spelling to Frisbee!

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In the 1600's, Europe was hit with a critical shortage: rags. Rags were vital because they were used to make paper. And paper was in great demand. The situation was so dire, that, in 1666, England banned the use of cotton and linen for the burial of the dead, stating the cloth must be saved for making paper. Then a French scientist named Rene-Antoine Ferchault de Reaumur, "took a walk in the woods." He came upon a deserted wasps' nest. As he examined it closely he had a sudden insight: it was made of paper—without the use of rags. How did wasps make their paper? By chewing wood and plant fibers. His realization inspired inventors to create methods for making paper from wood pulp! (P.S. Concern for deforestation has led scientists to find new ways to produce paper. Years ago, one of my retreatants gave me some paper made from *stones!*)



Did any of these stories stand out for you?

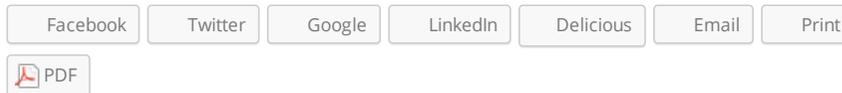
Do you know any other quirky stories from history that you would like to share with us?

Today I chose this song by Matt Redman: "Blessed Be Your Name." It seems like a good Lenten song to me, reminding us that no matter what is going on in our life, we can still choose to bless God's name, knowing God is with us through it all.



I invite you to respond to this reflection below. We love hearing from you!

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Nancy Lessard April 8, 2019 at 4:50 am



When hearing the Lord' name a curse word,respond, Blessed be His holy name!

REPLY

Kathleen Magiera April 8, 2019 at 5:19 am

Sr. Melannie,



I like the Boycott story. The Irish were so persecuted by the English at that time, it is easy to see why the Irish would rise up.

Interesting stories!

Kathleen

REPLY

John E Hopkins April 8, 2019 at 5:23 am



Thank you, Melannie, for these quirky historical tidbits!

Thank God for Pope Clement!

REPLY

Peter Hirst April 8, 2019 at 8:03 am



I loved the Frisbee pies especially the little ones. I never connected the name association. Thank you Pope Clement, I couldn't start my day without a cup of coffee.

REPLY

Claire April 8, 2019 at 8:32 am



Knowing how you enjoy history, I thought you might enjoy this.

REPLY

Jean Canatsey April 8, 2019 at 12:31 pm



I love quirky stories! However, being a soccer fan, I'm having a little problem wrapping my head around 100's of players on the field at one time.....and no referee! Guess whichever group still has players standing at the end of the game wins!

REPLY

Josita DiVita April 8, 2019 at 3:17 pm



Hi Melannie, Loved these quirky stories ...so interesting. The one that really struck me was Lincoln's. Ironically coincidental !
Thanks for always keeping our minds open.
May the end of this Lenten Season bring you many blessings for a glorious Easter.
Josita

REPLY

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