

# Did You Know?

*Thousands of  
Brilliant Facts from  
the Past*

**David Barrow**

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ELY  
Cambs CB7 4AH

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# Did You Know?

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## **Interesting Facts About The Byzantine Empire**

The Byzantine Empire existed for nearly 1,125 years, and it's one of the greatest empires of all time. Yet many people know little about it, other than the word "byzantine" being synonymous for highly intricate, complex, and devious dealings. Beginning its adult life as the capital for the Eastern part of the Roman Empire, the city of Constantinople—later Byzantium, and Istanbul today—became the center of an extremely vibrant society that preserved Greek and Roman traditions while much of Western Europe slipped into the Dark Ages. The Byzantine Empire protected Western Europe's legacy until barbarism waned, when finally the preserved Greek and Roman masterworks opened the eyes of Europeans and stoked the fires of the Renaissance. Many historians have agreed that without Byzantium to protect it, Europe would have been overrun by the tide of Islamic invaders. The purpose of this list is for the readers to take an accurate historical journey—based on real facts—very much worth taking.

### **Origin of the Empire's Name**

The origins of Byzantium are clouded by mystery, but for our list we will follow the generally accepted version. Around 660 B.C., a Greek citizen, Byzas, from the town of Megara near Athens, consulted the oracle of Apollo at Delphi. Byzas requested advice on where he should found a new colony, since the mainland of Greece was becoming overpopulated. The oracle simply whispered, "opposite the blind." Byzas didn't understand the message, but he sailed northeast across the Aegean Sea. When he came to the Bosphorus Strait, he realized what the oracle must have meant. Seeing the Greek city of Chalcedon, he thought that its founders must have been blind, because they had not seen the obviously superior site just half a mile away on the other side of the strait. So he founded his settlement on the better site, and called it Byzantium after himself.

### **Geopolitics Favored Byzantium**

Byzantium had an excellent harbor and many good fishing spots in its vicinity. It occupied a strategic position between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea, and therefore soon became a leading port and trade center, linking the continents of Europe and Asia. Occupation, destruction and regeneration became the rule for the city. In 590 B.C., Byzantium was destroyed by the Persians. It was later rebuilt by the Spartans, and then fought over by Athens and Sparta until 336 B.C. From 336 to 323 B.C., it was under the control of the famous Greek general, Alexander the Great. After the death of Alexander, Byzantium finally regained its independence. In the following years, right before the city became the capital of one of the greatest empires ever, it was attacked by various invaders such as the Scythians, the Celts, and of course the Romans.

### **The Byzantine Empire Is Born**

In A.D. 324 the Emperor of the West, Constantine I, defeated the Emperors of the East, Maxentius and Licinius, in the civil wars of the Tetrarchy. Constantine became the first Christian emperor of the Roman Empire—though the complete conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity was not accomplished during his lifetime. There's no doubt that during the rule of Constantine, Christianity

became the dominant religion of the Empire—but it's very possible that Constantine's biggest regret was that he was never able to achieve a unified Christian Church. The construction of the city of Constantinople, however, was one of his absolute triumphs. While other Ancient Greek and Roman emperors built many fine cities during their reign, Constantinople exceeded them all in size and magnificence. It soon became the capital of the Byzantine Empire, and thus marked the dawn of a new era.

### **The Split of the Empire**

Most historians today have trouble deciding exactly which event or date signifies the fall of the Roman Empire. One of the most common conclusions is that when the Empire was split in two, it would never be able to reach its former glory again. There's even more debate on the religions of the age, which were probably the decisive factor separating the Byzantine Empire from the spirit of Classical Rome. Theodosius I was the last emperor to rule over the whole Roman Empire. He was also the one who split it right down the middle, giving Rome (West) to his son Honorius and Constantinople (East) to his other son Arcadius. The more classical, Western part of the Roman Empire weakened significantly when the land was divided, while the Greek-influenced Eastern half continued to develop the oriental aspects of its culture. The Roman Empire, as the world had known it, no longer existed.

### **The Golden Era of Justinian I**

One of the most widely known contributions of Justinian I was the reform of the laws of the Byzantine Empire, known as "The Justinian Code." Under his rule the Byzantine Empire flourished and prospered in many ways. Justinian gained power and fame for his buildings and architecture. One of his most famous buildings was the Hagia Sophia, which was completed in A.D. 538. It became the center of the Greek Orthodox Church for a number of centuries. This massive cathedral still stands today in Istanbul, and remains one of the largest and most impressive churches in the world. Justinian also encouraged music, arts, and drama. As a masterful builder himself, Justinian commissioned new roads, bridges, aqueducts, baths, and a variety of other public works. Justinian is considered a saint by the Eastern Orthodox Church nowadays, even though a good amount of Orthodox Christians don't agree with his sanctification.

### **The Greek Element Takes Over**

Most historians agree that after the accession to the Byzantine throne of Heraclius in 610 A.D., the Byzantine Empire became essentially Greek in both culture and spirit. Heraclius made Greek the official language of the Empire, and it had already become the most widely spoken language of the Byzantine population. The Byzantine Empire, having had its origins in the Eastern Roman Empire, now evolved into something new—something different from its predecessor. By 650 A.D., only a very few lingering Roman elements remained alongside the pervasive Greek influence. According to various historical sources, a large majority of the Byzantine population from 650 A.D. onwards was of Greek cultural background. Additionally, the Byzantine army fought in a style, which was much closer to that of the Ancient Athenians and Spartans than that of the Roman Legions.

### **The Byzantine Navy Uses Greek Fire**

The Byzantine Navy was the first to employ a terrifying liquid in naval battles. The liquid was pumped onto enemy ships and troops through large siphons mounted on the Byzantine ships' prows. It would ignite upon contact with seawater, and could only be extinguished with great difficulty. The ingredients of "Greek fire" were closely guarded, but historians think it was a mixture of naphtha, pitch, sulfur, lithium, potassium, metallic sodium, calcium phosphide and a petroleum base. Other nations eventually came up with similar version of the stuff, but the fact that it was dangerous for their own troops, too, made it go out of military fashion by the mid-to-late fifteenth century.

### **Byzantine Cuisine**

When we hear the term "Greco-Roman," we automatically think of culture, architecture, philosophy, the Olympic sport of wrestling—but not of Byzantine cuisine. To learn about Byzantine cuisine properly, we need to go back to its roots. It involved a mix of Greek practices and Roman traditions. Byzantine culinary tastes focused on the regions where Hellenism flourished: cheese, figs, eggs, olive oil, walnuts, almonds, apples, and pears, were all staples of the Byzantine diet, indigenous to the lands of the empire and appreciated by aristocracy and common people alike. The Byzantines also loved honey, and often used it in cooking as a sweetener, since sugar was not available. Bread was an essential staple of the Byzantine table, and a guarantee of stability for the government in Constantinople. And it was a massive enterprise—the bakeries of Constantinople regularly producing over 80,000 loafs per day. The Byzantines could count on a steady diet of bread, cheese, meat, and fish, much of it cured and preserved in salt and olive oil. But just like in modern Greece, this diet was supplemented with vegetables that were produced in small gardens.

Despite the limited information we have today, our knowledge of Byzantine cuisine is like the restoration of a damaged mosaic; even though a lot of the pieces are still missing, the picture still has a beautiful quality to it. Today, the aromas and ingredients of Greek and other Mediterranean food gives us a little taste of what Byzantine food must have been like.

### **Byzantium's Economy Was The Most Powerful In Europe**

The Byzantine Empire was mainly comprised of an array of small towns and seaports connected by a developed infrastructure. Production was very high, and there was a notable growth in land ownership. The Byzantines followed a Christian lifestyle, which revolved around the home, where women dedicated themselves to the upbringing of their children. There were also various public places where men sought relaxation in their leisure hours. From A.D. 500 to A.D. 1200, Byzantium was the wealthiest nation in Europe and western Asia. Its standard of living was unrivaled by other nations in Europe, and it led much of the world in art, science, trade, and architecture. We could even say that the "Byzantine Dream" existed long before the American one.

## **The Great Schism**

Most historians of Byzantium agree that the Empire's greatest and most lasting legacy was the birth of Greek Orthodox Christianity. Eastern Orthodoxy arose as a distinct branch of Christianity after the "Great Schism" of the eleventh century between Eastern and Western Christendom. The separation was not sudden. For centuries, there had been significant religious, cultural, and political differences between the Eastern and Western churches. Many historians assure us today that religion was the main reason why Roman culture lost all its influence on the Byzantine Empire. There were major theological differences between Roman Catholics and Greek Orthodox Christians, on topics such as the use of images, the nature of the Holy Spirit, and the role (and identity) of the Pope. Culturally, the Greek East has always tended to be more philosophical, abstract, and mystical in its thinking, whereas the Latin West tended towards a more pragmatic and legal-minded approach. All these factors finally came to a head in 1054 A.D., when Pope Leo IX excommunicated the Patriarch of Constantinople, who was the leader of the Greek Orthodox Church. In response, the Patriarch condemned the—and nearly one thousand years later, this division in the Christian church has still not been healed.

## **Terrible Famines In History**

Famine is often considered one of the worst natural disasters on Earth. Its effects are widespread, and the damage caused by a famine can last for months, if not years. Often times caused by other natural disasters, it can destroy whole villages, and cause mass exodus. Death by starvation and malnutrition is slow and painful, and often hits the youngest and the elderly the hardest. Unfortunately, at times it is brought upon by political incompetency, and cruelty towards others can exacerbate the situation. Below are 10 terrible famines experienced throughout human history.

### **Great Famine Ireland**

1.5 million dead, 2 million emigrated. One of the most famous famines in history, the Great Famine was caused by a devastating potato disease. 33% of the Irish population relied on the potato for sustenance, and the onset of the disease in 1845 triggered mass starvations that lasted until 1853. Ireland experienced a mass exodus, with upwards of 2 million people fleeing the country, many to the United States. At its conclusion in 1853, 1.5 million Irish were dead, and an additional 2 million had emigrated. In total, the population of Ireland shrunk by a resounding 25%.

### **Vietnamese Famine of 1945**

As a protectorate under France, Vietnam was under colonial rule for much of World War II. As Japanese expansion began in Indochina, Vietnam was taken for the Japanese, and a collaborationist French government sided with the Japanese. Agricultural focus shifted from sustenance to war-materials, specifically rubber. The Japanese exploited what little crop farms remained, and the invading forces commandeered most of these crops. This, teamed with an unbearable drought followed by biblical flooding, caused mass starvation across much of Northern Vietnam. The resulting famine killed 2 million Vietnamese.

### **North Korean Famine**

3 million dead. As the most recent famine on this list, North Korea suffered a tremendous famine from 1994 to 1998, brought about by a combination of misguided leadership and large scale flooding. Torrential rains in 1995 flooded the farming regions, and destroyed 1.5 million tons of grain reserves. Politically, Kim Jung Il implemented a "Military First" policy, which placed the needs of the military above the needs of the common people, food rations included. The isolated nation suffered from a stagnating economy, and was unable and unwilling to import food. As such, the childhood mortality rate rose to 93 out of 1000 children, and the mortality rate of pregnant women rose to 41 out of 1000 mothers. Over a 4-year span, an estimated 2.5-3 million people perished due to malnutrition and starvation.

### **Russian Famine of 1921**

5 million dead. The early 20th century was a tumultuous time for Russians, as they lost millions in World War I, experienced a violent revolution in 1917, and suffered from multiple Civil Wars. Throughout the wars, the Bolshevik soldiers



often forced peasants to sacrifice their food, with little in return. As such, many peasants stopped growing crops, as they could not eat what they sowed. This resulted in a massive shortage of food and seed. Many peasants had taken to eating seeds, as they knew they could not eat any crops they grew. By 1921, 5 million Russians had perished.

### **Bengal Famine of 1943**

7 million dead. The Bengal Famine of 1943 was set about by a whirlwind of catastrophic events. With World War II raging and Japanese imperialism growing, Bengal lost their largest trading partner in Burma. A majority of the food the Bengalis consumed was imported from Burma, but the Japanese suspended the trade. In 1942, Bengal was hit by a cyclone and three separate tidal waves. The ensuing floods destroyed 3200 square miles of viable farmland. An unpredictable fungus, destroying 90% of all rice crops in the region, then struck crops. Meanwhile, refugees fleeing the Japanese from Burma entered the region by the millions, increasing the need for food supplies. By December of 1943, 7 million Bengalis and Burmese refugees were dead due to starvation.

### **Bengal Famine of 1770**

10 million dead. Yet another famine in Bengal, this horrific event killed a third of the population. Largely ruled by the English-owned East India Company, reports of severe drought and crop shortages were ignored, and the company continued to increase taxes on the region. Farmers were unable to grow crops, and any food that could be purchased was too expensive for the starving Bengalis. The company also forced farmers to grow indigo and opium, as they were much more profitable than inexpensive rice. Without large rice stocks, people were left with no food reserves, and the ensuing famine killed 10 million Bengalis.

### **Soviet Famine of 1932-1933**

10 million dead. Incredibly, the severity of this famine was not fully known in the West until the collapse of the USSR in the 1990s. The main cause was the policy of collectivization administered by Josef Stalin. Under collectivization, large swaths of land would be converted into collective farms, all maintained by peasants. Stalin went about implementing this by destroying the peasants existing farms, crops, and live-stock, and forcibly taking their land. Reports of peasants hiding crops for individual consumption led to wide-scale search parties, and any hidden crops found were destroyed. In actuality, many of these crops were simply seeds that would be planted shortly. The destruction of these seeds and the forced collectivization of land caused mass starvation, killing an estimated 10 million people.

### **Chalisa famine**

11 million dead. The Chalisa famine refers to the year in the Vikram Samvat calendar used in Northern India. Occurring in 1783, the region suffered from an unusually dry year, as a shift in the El Nino weather system brought significantly less rain to the region. Vast swaths of crops withered and died, and livestock perished due to lack of food and drinking water. The tumultuous year killed 11 million Indians.

### **Chinese Famine of 1907**

25 million dead. Ranking second in terms of death toll, the Chinese Famine of 1907 was a short-lived event that took the lives of nearly 25 million people. East-Central China was reeling from a series of poor harvests when a massive storm flooded 40,000 square miles of lush agricultural territory, destroying 100% of the crops in the region. Food riots took place daily, and were often quelled through the use of deadly force. It is estimated that, on a good day, only 5,000 were dying due to starvation. Unfortunately for the Chinese, this would not be their last great famine.

### **Great Chinese Famine**

43 million dead. Much like the Soviet Famine of 1932-1933, the Great Chinese Famine was caused by Communist leaders attempting to force change upon an unwilling population. As part of their "Great Leap Forward", the owning of private land was outlawed in China in 1958. Communal farming was implemented in an attempt to increase crop production. More relevant, however, was the importance the Communist Regime placed on iron and steel production. Millions of agricultural workers were forcibly removed from their fields and sent to factories to create metal. In addition to these fatal errors, Chinese officials mandated new methods of planting. Seeds were to be planted 3-5 feet under the soil, extremely close together, to maximize growth and efficiency. In practice, what little seeds that sprouted were severely stunted in growth due to overcrowding. These failed policies, teamed with a flood in 1959 and a drought in 1960, affected the entirety of the Chinese nation. By the time the Great Leap Forward had ended in 1962, 43 million Chinese had died from the famine.

## **Lesser-Known Events in Early American History**

“History is a relentless master. It has no present, only the past rushing into the future.”—John F. Kennedy. Some past incidents are swallowed by history’s relentless march forward and are forgotten or become obscure footnotes, which doesn’t mean they aren’t interesting or important. Here are 10 events in early America that often go unmentioned in school. These items include scandal, sex, and violence—just the way we like our history.

### **First Barbary Coast War 1801-1805**

“From the halls of Montezuma to the shores of Tripoli...” Sound familiar? The line about Tripoli in the U.S. Marine Corps hymn commemorates an action in 1805—the Battle of Derna—occurring during the First Barbary Coast War when the fledgling American government had to take on the pirates of the Mediterranean. Tripoli, Algiers, Morocco, and Tunis were North African states on the infamous Barbary Coast, long considered a haven for pirates who preyed primarily on merchant ships. Prior to America achieving independence from Britain, the colonists’ ships were protected by the Royal Navy.

During the war, a treaty with France ensured the safety of American merchants. After the war, French protection ceased. In 1784, the Continental Congress solved the problem of the pirates in the same way as every other independent nation: bribery. Basically, the Barbary pirates ran a global protection scheme and the American government had to pay to keep its citizens and their vessels safe. Some members of Congress like Thomas Jefferson believed paying the pirates would only lead to more demands, but an annual tribute and exorbitant ransoms for captured sailors continued since that was considered cheaper than all-out war until Jefferson became President. He refused to pay tribute directly to the Pasha of Tripoli in 1801, and the Pasha declared war on the United States. After 4 years of conflict with wins and losses on all sides, in 1805 the Battle of Derna in Tripoli—memorialized in the hymn mentioned above—settled matters to a certain degree, but America still had to pay ransom for hostages taken by the pirates. It wouldn’t be until 1815 that all tribute ceased to be paid by the American government.

### **Yazoo Land Fraud Scandal 1795**

Millions of acres of prime real estate. Millions of dollars at stake. Politics, greedy businesses, bribery and corruption. Sound like an episode of a TV drama? A modern political conspiracy? Nope, it’s the late 18th century’s Yazoo Land Fraud scandal. Right after the Revolutionary War, state boundaries weren’t quite fixed. Georgia claimed land as far west as the Mississippi River, biting off a little more than they could metaphorically chew. The frontier territory, called the Yazoo lands after a river, was already home to Cherokee, Creek, and other tribes (and is now part of Alabama and Mississippi). The lands were untamed, difficult to develop or defend, and twice Georgia tried to cede the territory to the federal government to no avail. The Yazoo lands seemed like a big white elephant nobody wanted ... except greedy land speculators. From the 1780s, companies

lobbied state legislators with proposal after proposal for establishing settlements in the Yazoo lands, few of which came to fruition.

Speculators continuing bombarding the state legislature, sweetening the pressure with bribes like company stock. Other influential men were bought. Finally, in 1795 a law was passed essentially allowing four land speculation companies to purchase 35 million acres of the territory for less than 2 cents an acre—even adjusted to modern prices, that's suspiciously cheap. The land was sold for huge profits to other speculators or pioneers looking for a homestead to settle. But all did not go smoothly. When news broke about the corruption surrounding the new law and the Yazoo lands, Georgians were furious. The anti-Yazooites gained political power and eventually oversaw the law rescinded and the sale overturned, even going so far as to arrange a public burning of the law and its records. In 1802, the lands were sold to the federal government for \$1.25 million, but claims for compensation from losers in the land fraud continued to plague the court systems until 1814.<sup>8</sup>

### **First American Kidnapping 1605**

George Weymouth, an Englishman and captain of the ship Archangel, sailed his vessel from England to America—specifically Maine, near Cape Cod—while searching for the mythical northwest passage to India in 1605. Or so he said, but it's also believed his voyage had more than one purpose: to spy on the French and their new colony in Nova Scotia, and try to settle English dissident (Catholic) colonists in prime locations in the New World. After some exploration, Weymouth and his crew made contact with local natives, who were friendly and offered them hospitality and gifts. However, the good neighborly treatment clearly wasn't enough for Weymouth, who decided that the perfect thing to take back to England would be some samples of indigenous life, namely the natives themselves—for the advancement of scientific knowledge, of course.

Through various deceptions, the treacherous Weymouth pretended to befriend several young native men, then lured or violently captured five of them and took them aboard his ship by force. He promptly sailed home to England with his prizes. Three of the kidnap victims were given to Sir Fernando Gorges, a sponsor of Weymouth's expedition. The other two were turned over to Sir John Popham, the Chief Justice of England. Unlike Weymouth, Popham and Gorges treated their native captives with kindness. Later, Gorges sent his three new English-speaking friends back to their American homeland. As an interesting side note, one of the natives who returned may have been the famous Squanto, who met the Pilgrims when they first arrived on America's shores—and while this was purportedly Squanto's first kidnapping, it wasn't his last. He'd suffer abduction and slavery three more times before the Pilgrims showed up.

### **Pelican Girls and Casket Girls 1704-1721**

When the French controlled the Gulf of Mexico territory containing Louisiana, they had a problem—too many men. The male settlers included soldiers, farmers, and tradesmen. Valuable assets, of course, but as all governments of the time understood, a really successful and lucrative colony needed families, not just single men. To do that, the men needed wives. It comes as no surprise that

most men involved eagerly agreed with the idea. However, finding ladies willing to marry a stranger and endure the rough frontier with their husbands for the rest of their lives wasn't easy. Beginning in 1704, the *Compagnie des Indes* (Company of the Indies) which held the monopoly on trade in the area decided to send 20 young and virtuous French women aged 14-18 to Louisiana via the ship *Le Pélican*. These "Pelican girls" were snapped up by men desperate for marital bliss and/or the generous dowry and other benefits subsidized by the King.

Other shipments of volunteer brides occurred periodically. Many were orphans, some less than respectable from houses of correction. Perhaps the most famous were the seventy-eight upstanding "casket girls" or *filles à la cassette*, named after the small caskets (like suitcases) that carried their belongings. Upon arrival, they were popped into the newly built Ursuline convent in New Orleans and supervised by the nuns until they found husbands. Today, claiming a "casket girl" as an ancestress is a matter of pride for native Louisianans. Despite the pressure put on new arrivals, not all girls chose to marry. Some entered convents, received the education denied their secular sisters, and became nuns. But most women married, many were widowed, and if they survived the hardships of childbirth and frontier life, they often prospered due to generous inheritance laws.

### **The Notorious Joseph Bradish 1698-1699**

Most people have heard of the Scotsman Captain William Kidd and his exploits along the eastern seaboard of America. Fewer people know about Joseph Bradish, a home-grown pirate born in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1672. His connection to Kidd came at the end of his life before facing the Execution Dock at Wapping in London. Bradish was a young man when he worked as a boatswain's mate aboard *Adventure*, a British 400-ton "interloper"—a ship interfering in trade monopolies—from London bound for the island of Borneo. During the voyage, he incited the crew to mutiny, marooned the captain and officers, and took over the roles of navigator and captain himself. With his newly formed pirate band, he enjoyed "some adventuring in Eastern seas." While details are sketchy, it's believed he seized valuable prizes of gold and jewels as well as *Adventure's* cargo of lead, Spanish gold, opium, and other goods. He sailed to Long Island in America in late 1698 or early 1699 and scuttled the ship. However, he was unable to buy a replacement vessel and settled on a small sloop.

After seeing the majority of his crew scattered along the coast (and according to legend, burying treasures at Montauk Point and Block Island), he entered Boston. Unfortunately, Dame Fortune wasn't on his side. Bradish was promptly arrested, but that isn't the end of his tale. The pirate captain's luck hadn't entirely run out. The local jailer, Caleb Ray, was a relation of Bradish's and helped him escape (although in later accounts, the serving girl got the blame). An enraged governor ordered a search. Bradish was recaptured and shipped to England with William Kidd as his cellmate. Both men were executed.

### **A Ghostly Lawsuit 1792-1797**

In Queen Anne's County, Maryland, a prosperous farmer named Thomas Harris enjoyed a long-term relationship with Ann Goldsborough, though the lady wasn't his wife. They had four children out of wedlock. Harris' unexpected death not only shattered the life he'd built with his family, it provided the catalyst for one of America's strangest court cases. In his will, Thomas Harris instructed his brother James to act as executor, sell the property, and divide the proceeds between his four children. He also had a conversation with James about his wishes prior to his death, but James had other ideas. He cast doubt on the will, ignored his deceased brother, and kept the money for himself. A few months after Thomas Harris' death, William Briggs—his best friend since boyhood and a respected Revolutionary War veteran—happened to ride past the graveyard where Harris was buried. His horse (which once belonged to Harris) suddenly wheeled around. Briggs saw an apparition of Harris in a blue coat, the same he'd worn in life. The apparition vanished, but that wasn't the only time Briggs would be visited by his best friend's spirit. After several other sightings and some phenomena including being struck in the face by a mysterious force and having both his eyes blackened, Briggs finally learned what Thomas Harris wanted. The ghost told him about the will and James Harris' betrayal. To make sure James believed the message came from his dead brother, Briggs was given several details about the conversation no one but Thomas and James could have known. Briggs went to James with his story. The details were correct. James had a change of heart and promised to fulfill the terms of his brother's will, but before he could make the arrangements, he died. His widow, Mary, refused to acknowledge James' promise and claimed all her husband's property as her own. Years later, Thomas Harris' illegitimate children filed a lawsuit against Mary. The key witness and main evidence in the trial was William Briggs, who testified in detail about seeing and speaking to his friend's ghost. Although the defense attempted to refute Briggs' testimony, and the outcome of the case hasn't been discovered yet in Maryland's archives, the judge did officially acknowledge the existence of ghosts in court.

### **First American Executed For Bestiality 1642**

Thomas Granger worked as a servant for Love Brewster in the Plymouth colony in Duxbury, Massachusetts. In 1642, at about 16 or 17 years of age, Granger was accused of violating statutes based in Biblical law, specifically Leviticus 20:15—“And if a man lie with a beast, he shall surely be put to death: and ye shall slay the beast.” The Massachusetts area was experiencing something of a bestiality panic at the time, so was Granger a pervert, or was this just a prank that got out of hand due to hysteria? Either way, he lost his life. Granger was caught performing lewd acts with a mare (the chronicler, William Bradford, governor of the colony, protected the delicate sensibilities of future generations by refusing to detail the acts in question). When confronted, Granger at first denied the accusation. However, it wasn't long before he not only confessed to the magistrates to having done the deed with the mare numerous times, he also named a cow, 2 goats, 5 sheep, 2 calves, and a turkey as the objects of his past attentions. The confession was enough to earn him the death penalty from a jury. A parade of sheep was brought into the courtroom so Granger could identify which ones he'd abused. All the animals he'd named were killed while he

watched. The law required no part of the “unclean” animals be used, so a pit was dug and the carcasses buried. Following the slaughter, Granger was executed for committing “sodomy”—one of the death penalty crimes on the books. He became the youngest person in America to be hanged under these statutes. Despite his age, Granger was survived by a wife and two children. The poet Charles Olson wrote about Thomas Granger in 1947.

### **Final Blow Struck for the Revolution 1783**

During the conflict, what did the British do with prisoners of war? Put them in prisons, of course, but these jails were soon overcrowded. Hulks—ships in too bad shape to see service—were anchored in harbors to serve as convenient places of confinement for POWs and regular criminals. These British prisons were infamous for the appalling conditions, which included starvation, poor sanitation, and disease. The man in charge of prisoners in New York City was the cruel and petty Provost Marshal, William Cunningham. Following surrender, British forces had to leave New York City during Evacuation Day in late September 1783. To signal the end of the occupation and indicate the last British soldier had left aboard ship, it was agreed the British commander would fire a cannon at 1 o'clock. Jubilant, the newly independent Americans didn't wait—they celebrated by knocking over a statue of King George III and flying the American flag. One such patriot was Mrs. Day, who ran Day's Tavern located at 128th Street and St. Nicholas Avenue. The very unpopular Provost Marshal Cunningham, infuriated by the displays ahead of the official time, ended up in front of Day's Tavern where a rebel flag proudly flew. He tried to tear the flag from the pole, but Mrs. Day ran out of her drinking establishment toting a broom to defend her property. According to the story, she hit him with the broom with such force, powder flew off his wig and his nose was bloodied. True or wishful thinking? The jury's out, although Cunningham's existence and his mistreatment of prisoners is not disputed. If Mrs. Day did, indeed, assault one of the most hated men in NYC, she certainly struck the last blow in the Revolutionary War.

### **Ladies Had the Vote in New Jersey 1776**

The framers of the U.S. Constitution left it up to the individual states to determine their own voter qualifications. Some states imposed religious requirements on their citizens (although this pretty much ended by 1790). Others decided who had the right to vote based on property ownership or tax payments. And then there was New Jersey. The men who drew up the state of New Jersey's Constitution didn't have a problem with women voters provided they met the rather low property ownership requirement. When every other new state deliberately left women out of the voting equation, New Jersey legislators embraced the radical idea that not only ladies should be members of the political community, but free blacks and aliens (non citizens), too. This led to an unusual circumstance. According to the laws of the time, when a woman married, all her property automatically became her husband's. Since a married woman owned nothing of her own in a legal sense, wives couldn't vote as they no longer met the property ownership requirement. However, no such bar existed for single women and widows. Did women cast ballots in New Jersey elections? From 1797, records clearly show the names of women on the polls. In fact, the female vote was courted in some cases by the Democratic-Republican and

Federalist parties. Did women vote in great numbers? Not really. And the enfranchisement of women remained controversial and a subject of great debate in the state. Women, it was argued, were too delicate to make political decisions, unfit by nature to involve themselves in men's business, and were too busy raising children anyway. Eventually, the naysayers got their way. New Jersey rescinded women's right to vote in 1807. Ladies wouldn't get it back until the state ratified the 19th Amendment in 1920.

### **Whaling Aids American Independence 1781**

The connection may not seem obvious, but Nantucket whalers played a pivotal role in the American fight for independence, helping bring about American victory over the British, ultimately ending the Revolutionary War with General Cornwallis' surrender. One of the best kept secrets of the war was made earlier by curious New England whalers and merchants, who observed whale migrations in the Atlantic. They found the Gulf Stream, a strong ocean current first recorded by John White, governor of Virginia's Roanoke colony, in 1506. Through years of trial and error, the whalers gained a good working knowledge of the current. Their observations caught the attention of Benjamin Franklin, who undertook a scientific journey to verify the claims and satisfy his own curiosity.

Why wasn't the Gulf Stream generally known to all shipmasters? Because shipping routes were well established and had been determined by trained navigators, a conservative bunch who didn't tend to share their information. The Gulf Stream was important since using it shaved off time from the journey between North America and Europe. The secret charts made by Franklin gave the American rebels an advantage over the British. In 1781, the Continental Congress anticipated the arrival of their ally, Admiral Henri de Grasse, and a fleet of 173 French ships. So did British admiral Sir George Rodney in the Caribbean and his subordinate, Admiral Alexander Hood, who waited in the Leeward Islands. In France, British spies sent a report about De Grasse's armada and its destination to Rodney via a fast cutter, but the cutter's captain knew nothing about the Gulf Stream. By the time the message made it across the Atlantic, De Grasse's fleet had already defeated Hood. Had Rodney received the warning in time, he would probably have supported Hood and perhaps defeated De Grasse, which means the Battle of Yorktown—which gave America a decisive victory against the British thanks in part to the French troops brought by De Grasse—wouldn't have happened or may have had a different outcome.



## **Famous Gladiators From Ancient Rome**

Gladiators were the athletic superstars of Ancient Rome. Their battles in the arena drew thousands of fans, often including the most important men of the day. Traditionally purchased as slaves, successful gladiators gained thousands of supporters, enjoyed lavish gifts, and could even be awarded freedom if they'd tallied up enough victories. Described below are ten gladiators who all experienced glory and fame—both in and out of the arena—in Ancient Rome.

### **Tetraites**

Originally discovered through graffiti found in Pompeii in 1817, Tetraites was documented for his spirited victory over Prudes. Fighting in the murmillones style, he wielded a sword, a rectangle shield, a helmet, arm guards, and shin guards. The extent of his fame was not fully comprehended until the late Twentieth Century, when pottery was found as far away as France and England, which depicted Tetraites' victories.

### **Priscus & Verus**

Not much is known about these two rivals, although their final fight was well-documented. The battle between Priscus and Verus in the First Century AD was the first gladiator fight in the famous Flavian Amphitheatre. After a spirited battle which dragged on for hours, the two gladiators conceded to each other at the same time, putting down their swords out of respect for one another. The crowd roared in approval, and the Emperor Titus awarded both combatants with the rudis, a small wooden sword given to gladiators upon their retirement. Both left the theater side by side as free men.

### **Spiculus**

Spiculus, another renowned gladiator of the First Century AD, enjoyed a particularly close relationship with the (reportedly) evil Emperor Nero. Following Spiculus' numerous victories, Nero awarded him with palaces, slaves, and riches beyond imagination. When Nero was overthrown in AD 68, he urged his aides to find Spiculus, as he wanted to die at the hands of the famous gladiator. But Spiculus couldn't be found, and Nero was forced to take his own life.

### **Marcus Attilius**

Though a Roman citizen by birth, Attilius chose to enter gladiator school in an attempt to absolve the heavy debts he had incurred during his life. In his first battle he defeated Hilarus, a gladiator owned by Nero, who had won thirteen times in a row. Attilius then went on to defeat Raecius Felix, who had won twelve battles in a row. His feats were narrated in mosaics and graffiti discovered in 2007.

### **Carpophorus**

While other gladiators on this list are known for their hand-to-hand combat against other humans, Carpophores was a famed Bestiarius. These gladiators fought exclusively against wild animals, and as such had very short-lived careers.

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