

# *factoids*

UNTRUTHS, HALF-TRUTHS AND MISUNDERSTANDINGS HELD FOR FACTS

*For your convenience – English factoids in a PDF*

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September 21, 2009



# factoids

## The United States of America

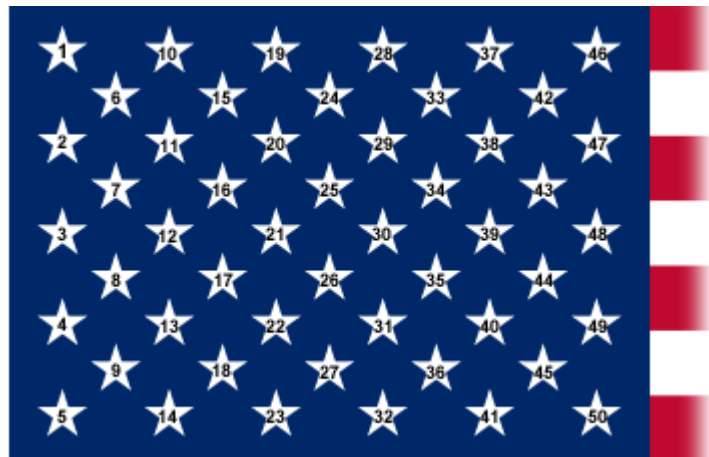
52

USA has had 50 states since 1959.

- |                |               |                   |                    |                   |
|----------------|---------------|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Alabama     | 11. Idaho     | 21. Massachusetts | 31. New Mexico     | 41. South Dakota  |
| 2. Alaska      | 12. Hawaii    | 22. Michigan      | 32. New York       | 42. Tennessee     |
| 3. Arizona     | 13. Illinois  | 23. Minnesota     | 33. North Carolina | 43. Texas         |
| 4. Arkansas    | 14. Indiana   | 24. Mississippi   | 34. North Dakota   | 44. Utah          |
| 5. California  | 15. Iowa      | 25. Missouri      | 35. Ohio           | 45. Vermont       |
| 6. Colorado    | 16. Kansas    | 26. Montana       | 36. Oklahoma       | 46. Virginia      |
| 7. Connecticut | 17. Kentucky  | 27. Nebraska      | 37. Oregon         | 47. Washington    |
| 8. Delaware    | 18. Louisiana | 28. Nevada        | 38. Pennsylvania   | 48. West Virginia |
| 9. Florida     | 19. Maine     | 29. New Hampshire | 39. Rhode Island   | 49. Wisconsin     |
| 10. Georgia    | 20. Maryland  | 30. New Jersey    | 40. South Carolina | 50. Wyoming       |

The District of Columbia is a federal district, not a state. Many lists include DC and Puerto Rico, which makes for 52 "states and other jurisdictions". Maybe that's the root of the myth? Or do people think of a deck of cards, the weeks in a year, or the country code of Mexico? Does the number 50 appear to be too rounded to be accurate?

The flag has 50 stars, one for each state. It is updated as needed.



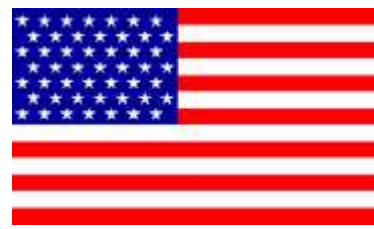
A common explanation is that the flag doesn't include Alaska and Hawaii, thus  $50 + 2 = 52$ . But Alaska became the 49th state on the 3rd of January 1959, and the flag got its 49th star on the 4th of July the same year. Hawaii became the 50th state on the 21st of August the same year, and the flag got its 50th star on the 4th of July 1960. Here's some older glories:



1908-1912



1912-1959



1959-1960

**46 states****48 states**  
+ Arizona, New Mexico**49 states**  
+ Alaska

Historical flags from FOTW - Rick Wyatt + 2 x Mark Sensen

## Flag-spotting

Counting stars might sound like a pastime for really bored nerds, but since the stars are arranged in certain patterns, some of which are quite distinctive, a small piece is often enough to identify the version of the flag.



Joe Rosenthal: Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima

The straight column of stars tells us that this has to be the 48-star flag. (On a *genuine* photo.)



Mort Kunstler: The Great White Fleet Sails

In this flag there are six rows of stars, with the 3rd and 5th being longer than the 2nd and 4th - this doesn't match any of the flags above. That is what one would expect from a historically accurate painting, since Teddy's fleet sailed in 1907. See the links below for this version of the flag, and many more.

I presume, however, that anachronistic flags are very common indeed. The next time I see a World War movie, I'll keep an eye on the american flags - they should feature the same simple 6 x 8-pattern as the one on Iwo Jima. (Not that I would mind if they don't; I'm not that bored.)

### Sources:

Wikipedia: Political divisions of the United States; Flag of the United States

Flags Of The World (FOTW): History of the Stars and Stripes (U.S.)

The Evolution of Old Glory - flags for sale

Related:

Can you pass the third grade? - nice game featuring the 48 continental states

Thanks to Christer who came up with this factoid  
and Freya Buchanan for proof-reading

# factoids

## 640 kB

*In 1981, Bill Gates said that "640 k ought to be enough for anyone"*

Here's the background: For quite some time, a PC couldn't use more than 1 MB RAM, i.e. 1024 kB. Of these, 384 were reserved for the system, and 640 left for the user. In the early 80's, this was an awful lot of memory, not to mention that it cost an awful lot of money, so initially it was hardly considered as anything but a theoretical limit. This soon changed, however, and various work-arounds had to be developed. Now, this is thankfully history, but many of us have cursed that silliness over the years (have you ever experienced a game that won't run because it's a few kB short of memory, despite being run on a machine which has several megabytes left?), and wished they had went for a much higher limit when they had the chance. Like 16 MB. Or 64 MB, or... With 32 bits you can address 4 Gb directly, and who knows how long that will last?

This wasn't, of course, the first or last time such limits were set; all systems that handles memory, or does some other kind of addressing, have built-in limits somewhere, and when they are designed the limits are set comfortably high. But that doesn't mean the designer is convinced that the limit will suffice forever. (A similar example in the Macintosh world is the initial limit of 128 fonts - not on a single machine, but on all Macs, worldwide. This fact is somewhat less well known than the 640 kB-quote.)

That's how Bill Gates reason when he denies the quote:

I've said some stupid things and some wrong things, but not that. No one involved in computers would ever say that a certain amount of memory is enough [...] But even 32 bits of address space won't prove adequate as times goes on [...] Meanwhile, I keep bumping into that silly quotation attributed to me that says 640 k of memory is enough.

Bill Gates

The supposed quote resembles an excuse, and many believe that the limit was set by Microsoft, but it wasn't; it was an hardware issue, the main reason being that the 8088/8086 architecture could address 1 MB of memory. If you ran DR-DOS, or any other non-Microsoft OS on a PC, the limit was still there. Some argue that if those 384 kB of reserved memory had not been in the top of that megabyte, it would have been easier to work around; anyway, if you want to blame anyone, blame IBM, because they designed the hardware.

Only when Intel launched the 80386, which could work with 32 bit addresses, the problem was finally solved - at least for a while...

To sum it up: Though many believe, and want to believe, that Bill Gates said such a short-sighted or downright stupid thing, I consider it a myth, until proved otherwise - and it's noteworthy that no one has yet shown exactly when or in what context he said it, only that it was in 1981, the year the IBM PC was released.

### Sources:

Wikiquote: Bill Gates links to several articles  
The PC Guide, Conventional memory



# factoids

## Autobahn

*No speed limits*  
*Hitler's creation*

The famous German highway system is subject to at least two half-truths.



Recommended speed limit



Actual speed limit

The myth of no speed limits is countered by the fact that Tempolimits are a fact of life on most of Germany's highways, and traffic jams are common. Signs suggesting a recommended speed limit of 130 km/h (80 mph) are posted along most autobahn, while urban sections and a few dangerous stretches sometimes have posted speed limits as "low" as 100 km/h (62 mph). [ or even 80, as in the electronic sign above ]

[www.german-way.com](http://www.german-way.com)

The German autobahns are famous for being some of the only public roads in the world without blanket speed limits for cars and motorcycles, though traffic on them is usually heavy enough to restrict speeds to little above typical motorway speeds in most cases. However, speed limits do apply at junctions and other danger points, like sections under construction or in need of repair. Some limits were imposed to reduce pollution and noise. Limits can also be put into place temporarily through dynamic traffic guidance systems that display the according traffic signs.

Wikipedia

While you can't outlaw traffic jams and such (the *Stau* concept is almost as well known as the *Autobahn* itself), the myth in question is that you never ever have to consider any speed limits whatsoever while on the Autobahn. In addition to the set limits there's electronic ones which can be activated and adjusted as needed, and surveillance cameras to track those who don't follow them.

It's always interesting to watch a German in an S-class Mercedes driving one moment like the Autobahnmeister at 240k+ kph only to slow down to 60 kph when he encounters a construction zone.

Garageboy

As for the fines, *Der Spiegel* kindly offer us a simple tool with which you can find out that +10 km/h will cost you 10 euro, +30 km/h 50 euro + 3 points (a kind of yellow cards you collect), and +50 km/h 100 euro + 3 points + license withdrawn for a month. So this is one of those factoids which can make a real difference.

Another note: Autobahn is not a single highway that stretches across the country, but the entire highway system. Since the word *Autobahn* means "highway", it's possible to make expensive mistakes in Switzerland and Austria, two german-speaking countries which certainly have speed limits on all of their *Autobahnen*.

## Hitler und der Autobahn

You sometimes hear that Hitler at least had the Autobahn built - whatever difference that would make. But highways were planned and built in the 20's, in Germany as well as in other countries. The very word was coined in a project with the decidedly un-catchy name *HaFraBa*, an abbreviation for Hamburg-Frankfurt-Basel. Like other early highway projects it was funded with private means. The *Reichsautobahn*, however, the first of which was opened in 1932 between Cologne and Bonn, was federal, funded by taxes and thus free for all to use. The *Bundesautobahn* of today - that's the full official name - is funded by the government in the same fashion, which is part of the *Autobahn* idea - high quality, no fees.

In April 1933 Hitler met Willy Hof, the chairman of HAFRABA, for discussions. Hof was amazed on the one hand at Hitler's detailed knowledge, and equally amazed on the other that the dictator was not interested in just building a partial stretch of road as a trial. In his notes on their conversation Hof recorded:

The Chancellor (Hitler) thought that we had surely talked earlier about a network ... and wanted to know whether such a network existed. I then showed the Chancellor the plan indicating the form the network would

have to take in Germany. He immediately took up this idea with great enthusiasm.

Uwe Oster

But even if highways were planned and built and even used in Germany well before Hitler came to power in 1933, it is a fact that the Nazis made a much bigger deal out of it than the Weimar republic would ever have bothered to.

The military value of the Autobahn is still in dispute. Though the highways were of course used and of some value, it's not a very good idea to let e.g. heavy armour run on them. Most of the transports within the Reich were by railway.

Related: Did Mussolini made the trains run on time? Not according to Mikkelson's of snopes.com.

**Sources:**

The German Way & More: The Autobahn

Wikipedia: Autobahn

Wikipedia: Autobahn (german)

How to Germany: Driving

Spiegel Online: Was zu schnelles Fahren kostet = Fines, make sure you check "Außerorts"

Uwe Oster, *The Autobahn Myth*, History Today, 1 november 1996

Brian's Guide to Getting Around Germany: The Autobahn

German Myths: Hitler and the Autobahn

Garageboy: That's The Last Time I Go to Germany... (the "Autobahnmeister"-quote)

Relaterad:

Snopes.com: Loco Motive on Mussolini's trains



# factoids

## The Cross of Satan

An "inverted" latin cross is called St. Peter's cross. When the apostle was to be crucified, he asked, the legend claims, to be hung upside down. Whether this is true or not is, of course, irrelevant; what matters is that the supposedly satanic symbol have been used by the catholic church for a very long time.



Satanists are not the brightest folks to begin with, but you would think they would check to see if a symbol already had a meaning before adopting it as their own. Satanists think if they invert a symbol, it will make it evil or if they spell something backwards it makes it cool. The fact is that this symbol has been known as Peter's Cross for the better part of two-thousand years. It is written and widely believed that Peter was crucified upside down by his own request.

www.nazarite.net

I beseech you the executioners, crucify me thus, with the head downward and not otherwise: and the reason wherefore, I will tell unto them that hear.

*The Acts of Peter, XXXVII*

Apparently, quite a few people, christians and satanists and "satanists" alike, not to mention everybody else, believe that a symbol is satanic just because someone says so. Perhaps they should check with the good christians below? There are more out there, these are just some I found available on the net. As for the satanists: With so many truly non-christian symbols available, why on earth should you choose a christian one?



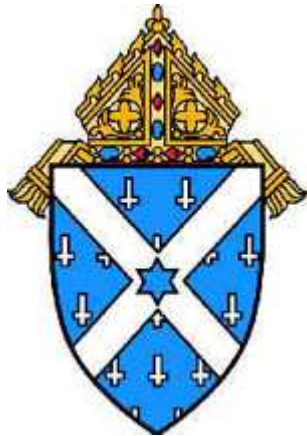
The Parish of Saint Peter the Apostle, Byers Green, Church of England

Note: The "keys of heaven" is another symbol of Saint Peter.



Archbishop Emeritus James Patrick Keleher, S.T.D.,  
The Archdiocese of Kansas City,  
Kansas, USA



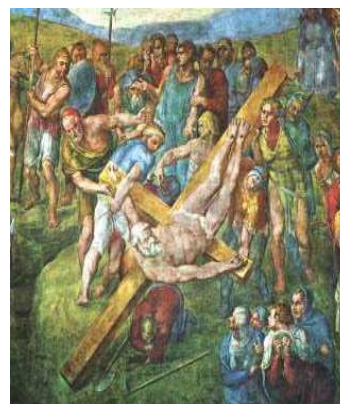


The Diocese of Little Rock, Arkansas, USA

with a page dedicated to the frequently asked question, Why are the crosses upside down?

Below left: In March 2000, the pope visited a certain holy site. (Trivia: The word *cathedral* originates from the very chair, *cathedra*, the bishop used in his church. Since Peter was (according to legend) bishop of Rome, i.e. pope, he's sometimes referred to as *Petrus cathedra*, "Peter in the chair". The use of Peter's cross on a chair thus has quite a symbolic meaning, especially when it's used by the pope. I'm sure this connotation did not escape the Vatican people.)

Below right: The crucifixion of Peter, painted by Michelangelo in the early 16th century.



**Sources:**

www.nazarite.net: Satanic symbols

Wikipedia: Cross of St Peter

The Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas

The Catholic Diocese of Little Rock

Cephas Ministry: JP2 USES ANOTHER BLACK MAGICK SATANIC SYMBOL...

The Acts of Peter (translation by M. R. James)

Thanks to tyskaorden of Skalman for the heraldica





# factoids

## The Eagle's Nest

The famous name *The Eagle's Nest* can be attributed to several buildings/complexes: two in Berchtesgaden/Obersalzberg, one in Hessen, and, as a bonus, one in Werfen, Austria.



## Berghof

This place has the strongest connection by far to Adolf Hitler. It was situated on Obersalzberg, a hill or part thereof (*ein Berghang*) near the town of Berchtesgaden in southeast Bavaria, not far from the Austrian border and places like Salzburg and Werfen. Hitler spent a lot of time at Berghof, met important people, held conferences, sent PMs etc.



The rise and fall: From *Haus Wachenfeld* to final *Zerstörung*.

Hitler found his way to this picturesque area in the early 20's. He rented *Haus Wachenfeld* several times until he, recently appointed *Reichskanzler* and with *Mein Kampf* doing great, was able to purchase it in 1933. It was then refurbished and expanded considerably, and got its new name *Berghof* in 1936, *Hof* meaning "court" or "farm" (though in comparison with some other projects, it could very well be considered a modest mountain hut). Soon enough Obersalzberg was turned into a veritable Nazi ghetto, so to speak; the villagers were driven out, several in the party elite got their own houses there, and SS blocked the area from public use. In the end of the war the place was heavily bombed, and today there are hardly any visible remains of this building.

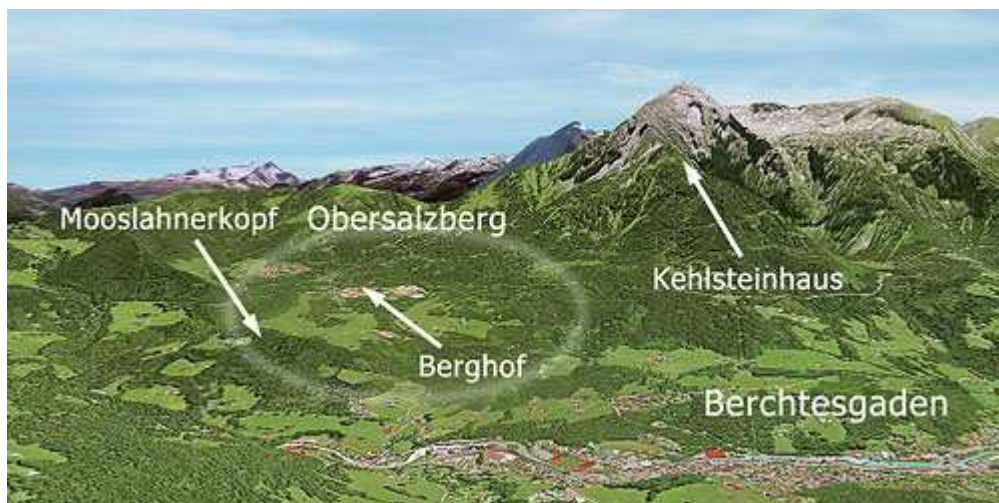


Image: Google Earth

## Kehlsteinhaus

Berchtesgaden and Obersalzberg are at the foot of the Alps, in particular the mountain Watzmann, at 2710 m the third highest in Germany. From the only slightly lower peak Hoher Göll (2522 m) the ridge Mannlgrat extends towards the mountain Kehlstein, and there (on 1834 m) Martin Bormann had a house built, which in April 1939 was given to Hitler on his 50th birthday. This house is called *Das Kehlsteinhaus*, and is as close as one can get to the popular image of The Eagle's Nest.



Kehlsteinhaus in the 50's. Since then a terrace has been built to the right of the house.

The project was very demanding and expensive. Just getting there required building a road winding its way up the steep mountain side (the photo shows the other side). The final leg had to be solved by other means; no cable car, but something as bourgeois as an elevator, inside the mountain. Visitors expecting a *Schloss* might be disappointed; the house isn't even a mansion. But the location is indeed nothing short of stupendous. Maybe it was a little too much for Hitler - perhaps the thin air got the better of him, or whatever the problem was, but he only came to the house a couple of times (Florian M. Beierl in his *History of the Eagle's Nest* (Plenk, 1998) sums it up to a total of 14), and he never slept there. Since the house had no military value nor "political" connections, it was saved from destruction.

The Germans called the house Kehlsteinhaus, never The Eagle's Nest, *Adlerhorst*. The term was supposedly in use in English as early as 1938, having been introduced by the French diplomat André François Poncet. The earliest evidence I have found indeed quotes him:

In the German press no hint of the Führer's astounding new retreat has been printed, but by last week many authentic details of the Adlerhorst (Eagle's Nest) had seeped through to the U. S. Perched on the pinnacle of Kehlstein Mountain, the house itself is comparatively small, consists mainly of one large circular room lined, except for a spot near the fireplace, with large windows. There are also a guard room, an electrically operated kitchen, and a balcony lookout. It is 6,000 feet above sea level, commands superb views of Bavaria and old Austria by night and day. The winds howl around it continually, white clouds float by.

*Time*, March 13 1939

The road signs in the area direct tourists to "Eagle's Nest". The Nazis never used that name for Kehlsteinhaus.





Sometimes the Kehlsteinhaus is labeled "Hitler's tea-house". This might be a joke or a mistake; the "diplomat house", *Das Diplomatenhhaus*, was abbreviated to *Das D-Haus*, which was easily turned into *Das T-Haus* = *Tee-Haus* = tea-house. Anyway, neither Hitler nor Bormann drank very much tea there.

## Mooslahnerkopf Teehaus



Mooslahnerkopf Teehaus



Utsikt

It could also be a confusion with an actual *Teehaus* in the area, built on the hill Mooslahnerkopf north of Berghof in 1937. This was another relatively small building with a relatively stunning view; nothing close to Kehlsteinhaus of course, but on the other hand it was far more frequented by Hitler.

## Adlerhorst - The Eagle's Nest

Though Berghof as well as Kehlsteinhaus have been called "The Eagle's Nest" incorrectly, Hitler indeed had an actual *Adlerhorst*. But it wasn't in Bavaria, wasn't nearly as visually stunning as Kehlsteinhaus, and additionally it was top secret, unlike the others. This Führer HQ was located next to the town of Langenhain-Ziegenberg, near Bad Nauheim in the Taunus mountains, Hessen, and was called Adlerhorst - The Eagle's Nest.



Adlerhorst: Guardhouse bunker. Note the facing. Some wood and paint, and it would look like any house.



Another bunker: the preserved *Pressehaus*.

This bunker complex was built in 1938-40 in the vicinity of castle Ziegenberg. It had an area of 3800 m<sup>2</sup>. The seven bunkers above ground were camouflaged to look like common houses. Adlerhorst was built to be used as the Führer's HQ during the invasion of England (*Operation Seelöwe*), which never came to be. Instead, it was used during the Ardennes offensive ("The Battle of the Bulge") in December 1944 - January 1945, and by other military commanders until the allied forces reached it in March. (According to Geoff Walden of ThirdReichinRuins.com Hitler considered it "far too lavish" and preferred the more spartan *Felsenest*, "The Rock Nest" nearby. I haven't got this information confirmed; all other sources, including Military History Online, Antony Beevor, *Die Zeit* (November 25th 2004) and Bundesarchiv, claim that Hitler indeed left Adlerhorst on the 15th of January 1945, for Berlin and *Der Untergang*.)

### "The Eagle's Nest"?

As for the confusing popular images of Hitler's mountain HQ, I think the name comes from Adlerhorst, the magnificent location from Kehlsteinhaus, and the importance from a real *Führerhauptquartier* like Berghof. That Poncet had even heard the name *Adlerhorst* could be a German screw-up, or maybe they had this idea, that people would confuse the top secret bunker with a Kehlsteinhaus of zero

military importance. - In which case they succeeded very well indeed.

## Burg Hohenwerfen

I include this one due to it's silver screen fame.



Burg Hohenwerfen



Schloss Adler, *Where Eagles Dare* (1968)  
The cable car enters the lit "cave".

"The Eagle Castle", *Schloss Adler* in the film *Where Eagles Dare*, is actually Burg Hohenwerfen. It's a genuine medieval castle, and it's located in the Austrian town of Werfen, some 50 km south of Salzburg. It's also located on a hill, as castles often are - not on a mountain top, though. It has no cable cars - they were filmed in Ebensee - though in 2006, a kind of train was installed.



*Sound of Music* (1965)



*Aufzug*

This *Festung* was "given" to the Nazis after the *Anschluss* of 1938. They used it for civilian education, *Gauschule*. It had no military purpose.



A final remark: In this context, the eagle refers to the German eagle, the symbol of the country. Together with the swastika of the party, it formed the symbol of the Third Reich.

### Sources:

General:

Third Reich in Ruins, [www.thirdreichruins.com](http://www.thirdreichruins.com) - recommended

Wikipedia: Führer Headquarters

Berchtesgaden & Obersalzberg:

Wikipedia: Berchtesgaden; Obersalzberg

Berghof:

Third Reich in Ruins: Haus Wachenfeld; Berghof

Wikipedia: Berghof (residence)

Kehlsteinhaus:

Third Reich in Ruins: Kehlsteinhaus

American Airborne Association: Berchtesgaden

Wikipedia: Kehlsteinhaus

"Führer's Nest", *Time*, March 13 1939

Brett Harriman: Berchtesgaden-Obersalzberg, Germany (Part 2 of 2) [YouTube]

Mooslahnerkopf Teehaus:

Third Reich in Ruins: Teehaus on the Mooslahnerkopf

Adlerhorst:

Military History Online: Adlerhorst - recommended

Third Reich in Ruins: Adlerhorst

Wikipedia (Ger.): Führerhauptquartier Adlerhorst

Verlag Werner Sünkel: Adlerhorst - Autopsie eines Führerhauptquartiers [German]

Bundesarchiv: Adlerhorst - images [German]

Antony Beevor, *Berlin* (Swedish translation; Historiska media 2002), page 36-37

"Als die Höllenfahrt begann", *Die Zeit*, 25 november 2004

Burg Hohenwerfen:

Wikipedia: Burg Hohenwerfen

transportbahnen.at: Schrägaufzug «Burg Hohenwerfen»



YouTube bonus: *Ich hock' in meinem Bonker*



# factoids

## "Everything that can be invented has been invented"

- Attributed to Charles H. Duell, Commissioner of the United States Patent and Trademark Office, 1899

That the commissioner of such an office should resign from his post for such a reason doesn't sound very probable - why it hasn't generated more skepticism than it has is a mystery. Here's what one librarian found, his prime source being an article published in 1940 by Dr. Eber Jeffery:

Jeffery found no evidence that any official or employee of the U.S. Patent Office had ever resigned because he thought there was nothing left to invent. However, Jeffery may have found a clue to the origin of the myth. In his 1843 report to Congress, the then-commissioner of the Patent Office, Henry L. Ellsworth, included the following comment: "The advancement of the arts, from year to year, taxes our credulity and seems to presage the arrival of that period when human improvement must end." As Jeffery shows, it's evident from the rest of that report that Commissioner Ellsworth was simply using a bit of rhetorical flourish to emphasize that the number of patents was growing at a great rate. Far from considering inventions at an end, he outlined areas in which he expected patent activity to increase, and it is clear that he was making plans for the future.

Samuel Sass

Additionally, Bengt-Arne Vedin writes (in a Swedish journal) about a tongue-in-cheek article from 1837, about an employee of the office who resigned since nothing was left to invent.

No one has been able to verify the Duell quote, from 1899 or any other year. It abounds in secondary sources, but no primary ones.



Charles H. Duell

Charles Duell wasn't commissioner for very long. He was suggested for the post in January 1898 and resigned in March 1901. The reason was no actual or foreseen shortage of filed patents, but quite the opposite:

Mr. Duell's purpose in resigning is said to be that he may be able to devote his entire time to his patent business. The salary of the Commissioner of Patents is \$5,000 a year, but Mr. Duell's patent practice, when he is able to give it his entire attention, is understood to be considerably above that figure, so that there is no financial consideration which would warrant him in retaining the office.

New York Times, July 30 1900

The quote is not only wrong, but out of place; the late 19th century was indeed a time of optimism, of all kinds.

### Sources:

Samuel Sass, "A Patently False Patent Myth still! [...]", *Skeptical Inquirer*, May-June 2003

"Duell at the White House", *New York Times*, January 20 1898

"Mr. Duell will resign", *New York Times*, July 30 1900

"Commissioner of Patents resign", *New York Times*, March 15 1901

Bengt-Arne Vedin in *Dagens Forskning* [Swedish journal], June 10 2002



# factoids

## Famous dyslectics

It's very easy to find lots and lots of famous dyslectics on the net. I just had to google for a few minutes to find these, and I've only included the ones I have heard about.

Albert Einstein, Leonardo da Vinci, Winston Churchill, Walt Disney, Steve Jobs, Thomas Edison, Alexander Graham Bell, Michael Faraday, Isaac Newton, James Clerk Maxwell, Charles Darwin, Richard Branson, Henry Ford, Ted Turner, John Chambers (Cisco), William Hewlett (HP), George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, George Burns, Werner von Braun, John von Neumann, Harrison Ford, Danny Glover, Whoopi Goldberg, Jay Leno, Quentin Tarantino, Robin Williams, Marilyn Monroe, Ansel Adams, George Patton, John Lennon, Cher, Kurt Cobain, Agatha Christie, Muhammad Ali, the prophet Muhammad (!?!), Bruce Jenner, Magic Johnson, Nolan Ryan, Charles Schwab, Nelson Rockefeller, F.W. Woolworth, William Butler Yeats, Ludwig van Beethoven, H. C. Andersen, Steven Spielberg, the Wright brothers, Stonewall Jackson, Fred Astaire, Harry Belafonte, Lewis Carroll, Ada Lovelace, Picasso, Vincent van Gogh, Robert Rauschenberg, Auguste Rodin, Michelangelo, Mark Twain, Ernest Hemingway, Gustave Flaubert, Charles Dickens, Ingvar Kamprad (IKEA), Tore Wretman (Swedish chef), Selma Lagerlöf (Nobel laureate)...

The problem with this list is of course not that it includes many intelligent or extremely intelligent and successful people, the problem is that there are so many people on it who were **not** dyslectic. What does it take to include someone - is it enough if anyone anywhere just says so, or is there any kind of evidence involved? Who made the conclusions in the first place? And how do you diagnose someone who died centuries ago?

Here are some people claimed to be dyslectic who weren't.

### Albert Einstein

Albert began to speak somewhat late, according to himself his parents took contact with a physician: "How old I was I can't tell, certainly not under three." It's obviously a relief for worried parents, and worried kids as well - Valentin tells about young relatives of the Einsteins who were told about their famous uncle Albert who began talking so late - but it isn't extremely late, and it is certainly not a sign of dyslexia.

There is a rumour that Albert still couldn't speak properly at the age of nine, which is just as false as the statement that he couldn't read at the age of nine, which in turn is just as false as the statement that he couldn't lace his shoes at the age of nine.

He did have an admittedly late development of speech, little interest in playing with other kids, and some kind of frenzy. The psychoanalyst Erik H. Erikson concluded after studying the case that at least the speech problem could "be symptomatic of a defect in his development", and that similar cases today would definitely deserve attention or even treatment.

But it is hardly possible to make a better diagnose now, and Erikson had nothing to say about the case when Albert had finally acquired his language; the problems had apparently ceased when he got to school, which is indicated by the fact that he began in the second grade. He certainly didn't like school, some of the teachers certainly didn't like him, and at times he was downright sloppy - not the perfect student, but that didn't stop him from doing well when he felt like.

Yesterday Albert got his grades, he was *primus* [ best in class ] again, he got excellent remarks.

Alberts mother Pauline Einstein in a letter dated August 1, 1886

Evidence that Einstein did in fact have great grades is supplied by Dr. H. Wieleitner, principal of the school which succeeded the Luitpold-*gymnasium* where Albert were in 88-94. The principal (who certainly must have been less worried about the reputation of the Nobel laureate than that of his school) went through the archives and found that Albert Einstein:

...in Latin always had at least the grade 2, and in sixth class even 1, the highest grade. In Greek he had the final grade 2. [...] Never in the 'secret remarks' does anyone complain over his abilities in languages.

The school archives were destroyed in the bomb raids during World War II, so this letter published in *Münchner Neueste Nachrichten* on March 14, 1929, on Alberts 50th birthday, is the single piece of evidence we have regarding this part of his education.

We do, however, have the grades from his next school, the school of the swiss *kanton* Aargau. Here are the grades that are most typical and/or most important for his career.

	1895/96		1896/97
	III.	IV.	I.
German	<i>gut</i> 2-3	2-3	4
History	1 1-2	2	5
Arithmetics and algebra	1	1	6



Geometry			
Physics	1-2	1-2	6-5
Chemistry	1 <i>Bem[erkung]</i>	2 3	5
Music <i>Violin</i>	1	1-2	5-6

(You got grades in the middle and end of each semester. "1-2" probably means a grade between 1 and 2. Where there are two grades, the upper is for tenacity, the lower for actual progress. As for the remarks, *gut* is "good" and *Bemerkung* something like "great".)

As Wieleitner wrote, 1 is the highest grade. Then this is surely a great student who suddenly turned into a terrible one? No, since in 1896/97 the grades were inverted in order to conform with the final "maturity examination" (*Maturitätsprüfung*), so you just had one kind of grades to worry about instead of two. After that, 6 was the highest grade and 1 the lowest. Alberts grades, including the ones I have omitted here, show nothing like a catastrophic descent; indeed, the 96/97-I. grades are almost identical to the 95/96-IV. ones. A myth is born!

Does his good grades in German prove that he wasn't a dyslectic? No, dyslectics can have excellent grades in language (as has been pointed out for me). But the point is that his supposedly bad grades is the *only* evidence for his dyslexia.

There is a rumour that Einstein needed help with his math by a professional mathematician. That is not completely untrue, but misleading. Albert mentions that he choose not to study advanced mathematics since he thought that as a physicist he could do with a general idea of it, a notion he later realized was wrong. His old friend Marcel Grossman, who also happened to be professor in mathematics, assisted him with some of the math involved in the general theory of relativity, but then we're speaking about advanced math indeed, the kind you certainly don't have to be a dyslectic to have trouble with.

I've found one (1) indication that anything at all was unusual with the linguistic abilities of Albert as an adult - here on answers.google.com a study from the University of North Carolina "20 years ago" is mentioned, that apparently showed that Einstein had strephosymbolia, which means that you mix letters in words in this way. With regard to the "bad grades" this sounds suspicious, but since I haven't read or even found anything else about this study there isn't much I can say about it.

#### Sources:

Albrecht Fölsing, *Albert Einstein*

David Bodanis, *E = mc<sup>2</sup>* - see www.davidbodanis.com

Antonia Valentin, *Albert Einstein: geniet och människan* (Swedish translation)

Abraham Pais, *Subtle is the Lord, the Science and Life of Albert Einstein*

*The Collected Papers of Albert Einstein* (Princeton University Press) with his grades in vol. 1

## Leonardo da Vinci

Three signs of the dyslexia of Leonardo: He did "mirror writing", his spelling was peculiar, and most importantly, he described himself as a "man without letters".

According to Bramly it is estimated that Leonardo wrote something like 13000 pages during his lifetime, of which 7000 are preserved. That should offer ample possibilities to prove or disprove his dyslexia.

### The mirror writing

Leonardo was left-handed, and it's worth noting that this usually was viewed with suspicion at the time, though there are no signs that it ever was a problem for him.

Though there are many left-handed dyslectics who do mirror writing, it is in no way a certain sign of dyslexia; for children learning to write it's the norm, even for right-handed children.

But Leonardo could write from left to right as well as from right to left, the latter was just a little bit easier for him. He didn't have to acquire it by practice, neither was he forced to. That his mirror writing should have been a simple code is plain silly, since anyone who can read at all can identify mirror writing as such. If someone like Leonardo had something to hide he would of course have done so with far more subtlety.

Why do people who write like me write from left to right? Because the hand moves across fresh paper, so you won't mess up your writing - provided you're using your right hand, that is. So there is a good reason for left-handed people to write from right to left.

#### Sources:

Tom Finsterbach, *Il Mancino: Leonardo da Vinci and Cerebral Hemisphere Asymmetry*

Learning Disabilities Online: Mirror Writing

Serge Bramly, *Leonardo da Vinci*

### Leonardo's spelling considered "strange and full of errors"

Leonardo used a kind of shorthand of his own invention. I haven't found any good description of how it worked, or even a decent example. Considering his intellectual abilities it is not hard to imagine him having ideas regarding the improvement of writing.

As for the errors, you can only spell wrong if there is a spelling considered right. Such norms didn't exist in those days, at least not for common languages - dictionaries and grammars existed for latin and greek, not for e.g. italian.

It was actually quite common to vary your spelling, even in the same text, something many dyslectics certainly would approve of.

### Leonardo called himself a "man without letters", *uomo senza lettera*

Isn't this an attempt to give a name to dyslexia?

No, this is very simple - it's a translation error.

What is *un uomo di lettere*? Someone who can write? No, it's precisely the same thing as spanish *hombre de letras* and french *homme de lettres*, that is, "a man of letters". When Leonardo used the negated expression, he didn't mean he couldn't read or write, he just meant that he lacked formal education. It's the very same argument you use when dealing with experts: "I'm no expert, but..."

Leonardo got his first education in the workshop of Andrea del Verrocchio, which was a place of many crafts like painting, sculpting and so on, but not of books. He didn't, for example, get to learn latin, which of course was a must for any "man of letters"; he did learn it by himself in his forties. He certainly made up for his lack of education in other areas as well, there are lists of over 170 books he read, and he sometimes owned more books than many scholars of the time.

Since he never went to school he never got the opportunity to show off his dyslexia, so to speak, but the current evidence should do well enough.

**Sources:**

Frank Zöllner, *Leonardo da Vinci - The Complete Paintings and Drawings*

Serge Bramly, *Leonardo da Vinci*

## Winston Churchill

From an official homepage:

Winston Churchill was not dyslexic, had no learning disability whatsoever. In his autobiography he played up his low grades at Harrow, undoubtedly to convince readers, and possibly himself, how much he had overcome; but in this he exaggerated. He was actually quite good at subjects he enjoyed and in fact won several school prizes. The best source on his actual school performance is Jim Golland's *Not William - Just Winston* (Harrow: 1988), still available from the Harrow School Bookshop.

Since those low grades appears to be the single piece of hard evidence on the matter, we now have no indication at all that Winston was a dyslectic. Considering his career, he wrote quite a number of books, one could imagine that there would be at least some signs of dyslexia somewhere, but there aren't. (He even got the Nobel prize in literature, but whether this was a reward for his writing or for his fight against the Nazis is another matter entirely.)

**Source:**

[www.winstonchurchill.org](http://www.winstonchurchill.org) - FAQ

## Walt Disney

The single source I think I need here is a biography by Marc Eliot; it's title, *Walt Disney: Hollywood's Dark Prince*, is a good indication of the level of this quite sensational and not very trustworthy book. The slightest hint of Disney being a dyslectic I wouldn't have given much thought, but since Eliot on this matter for once *doesn't* try to paint him in the darkest colours available, he turns out a lot more credible.

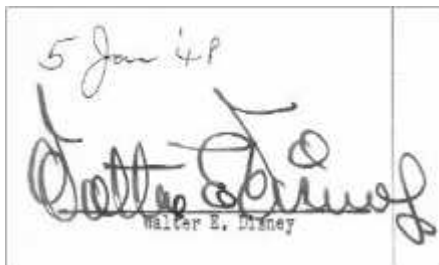
Perhaps a desire for revenge was behind the rumour from the Hyperion studio that spread in Hollywood, that Walt couldn't even write his own name, and that his famous signature and the logotype of his company was one of the many creations of Iwerk that he didn't get any credit for.

(Re-translated from Swedish since I don't have a copy of the original)

In those days, Disney's films never mentioned the people who hade made them, it was always "Walt Disney presents" and nothing more. Ub Iwerks spent quite a lot of his career at Disney, and was arguably his most skilled artist, but not even he got any official credit for his work. He was, even according to more reliable sources than Eliot, responsible for quite a lot of the look of Mickey Mouse, and of course the famous signature of Walt Disney. Ub gave it a bit more style, and Walt then tried to learn the modified version. This would indeed explain some genuine signatures produced by Walt, some of which are not remotely similar to the well-known logotype.

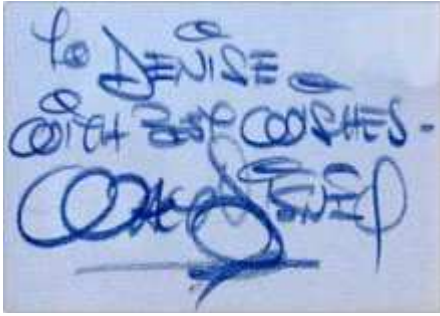


Walt Disney indeed.



Signature on a contract from 1948.

[www.phil-sears.com/walt\\_disney\\_2.htm](http://www.phil-sears.com/walt_disney_2.htm)



Autograph on a drawing from *Alice in Wonderland*, finished in 1951.

[www.adlerandco.com/animation/alicesignature.html](http://www.adlerandco.com/animation/alicesignature.html)



Autograph from 1962 or 1963.

[www.phil-sears.com/Disney-signature.htm](http://www.phil-sears.com/Disney-signature.htm)

No wonder some people who got Disney's autograph doubted it's authenticity...

To conclude: Walt was not such a good cartoonist as many think he was, but he certainly had no trouble writing or reading.

**Source:**

Marc Eliot, *Walt Disney: Hollywood's Dark Prince*

## Steve Jobs

This is a simple one, methinks: Considering Steve being the founder of Apple and God for legions of Mac-evangelists, I expect the slightest amount of dyslexia to be well documented on the net. Since I find absolutely nothing, I presume there isn't anything to document.

## ?aixelsyd

The purposes of listing celebrities with dyslexia are obvious: Encouraging dyslectics, kids who think they might be dyslectic and their parents, and to show dyslectics and non-dyslectics alike that dyslexia have nothing to do with stupidity or laziness, and that there are indeed many highly intelligent dyslectics who have succeeded very well in life.

But the best of purposes can never be an excuse for bad or non-existent research. On the contrary, it suggests that you have to tamper with facts to get a good collection of famous dyslectics, which is not only untrue but can (worst of all) be interpreted as an indication that what one is trying to disprove is actually true.



# factoids

## The first step on the moon

The iconic photo is not of Neil Armstrong's very first step on the moon. It's not even his footprint. It was made by Edwin E. "Buzz" Aldrin Jr.



Buzz was here

The photo wasn't taken for future posters, T-shirts, mouse pads etc., but for a strictly scientific purpose: to study how the moon soil (regolith) would behave when compressed by the boot, and thus learn something about its geological properties. That's why Aldrin also took a photo of the surface before he made the footprint.

One important objective of the *Apollo 11* mission was to observe the properties of the regolith and assess how these properties affected the crew's ability to move about and to work on the lunar surface. This investigation was known as the Soil Mechanics Investigation, which on *Apollo 11* consisted of verbal descriptions by the crew and close-up photographs of the regolith, including three-dimensional stereo photographs.

NASA



Aldrin makes the footprint

The picture above comes from a 16 mm film camera, mounted on the lunar module. Aldrin went to a patch of undisturbed soil, took a



photo, made the footprint, and then two more photos. The little stone in front of him can be seen in the photos below. The time, by the way, is 110:25:09, in hours, minutes and seconds from the lift off (though 5876-5878 apparently weren't taken in the same second).



AS11-40-5876



AS11-40-5877



AS11-40-5878



AS11-40-5880

The codes are the unique ones with which all photos from the Apollo project were identified. They come from the site Apollo 11 Image Library, where all images from all the projects are published, with comments of varying verbosity. Note that the last photo shows another footprint in front of the other one, next to the little stone. This is what that moment looks like on the 16 mm film; the famous footprint can be seen behind Aldrin's foot.



Aldrin makes the footprint in 5880

One reason that the footprint couldn't be the very first one can be seen here, with Aldrin just about to step out on the surface.



AS11-40-5869

The astronauts climbed down the ladder, stood in the landing pad, and then took a step backwards; that's why Armstrong said "I'm going to step off the LEM [lunar module] now". If the famous footprint had been the one he then made, the pad would have been in the picture.

Is there a picture of man's first footprint? Apparently not. That part of the ground was in the shade during the entire so-called EVA (Extra-Vehicular Activity) which lasted some two and a half hours. In addition, when Aldrin stepped out, he put his foot on the very same spot.

Are these footprints still on the moon? The ones next to the lunar module were erased by the rocket thrust when the astronauts left. The effect decreases with distance considerably faster than in an atmosphere, though. In his book *Return to Earth*, Aldrin mentions that even the flag was toppled over, a piece of information that at least one source I found apparently didn't trust entirely. However, in the following landings, the flag was put a bit further away from the lunar module.

It is uncertain if the flag remained standing or was blown over by the engine blast when the ascent module took off.

Anne M. Platoff

## Related about Apollo 11

When Armstrong became the first man on the moon, and said his "A small step for a man, a giant leap for mankind", an article apparently disappeared in the radio communication, if not *errare humanum est*. But the strange phrase "A small step for man, a giant leap for mankind" was obviously not what he intended to say. Thus, it's often referred to as "A small step for (a) man, a giant leap for mankind".

"The eagle has landed" - where these the first words uttered when they had landed? Well, the *very* first were Aldrin's matter-of-fact: "Contact light. OK, engine stop."

And the Chinese wall? No, they couldn't see it. No way.

Finally: There is an amusing anecdote about an additional saying by Armstrong: "Good luck, Mr. Gorsky". Heard about it? - Here's what snopes.com has to tell about Mr Gorsky.

### Sources:

NASA, Apollo 11 Lunar Surface Journal: Image Library (5876 ff); Mobility and Photography (110:25:09)

Lunar and Planetary Institute, Apollo 11 Mission: Landing Site Overview; Soil Mechanics Investigation

Lunar and Planetary Institute: Apollo Image Atlas - nicely thumbnailed

Anne M. Platoff: Where No Flag Has Gone Before - about the flag

"Contact light":

NASA, Apollo: Sounds from Apollo 11 (text + sounds)

# factoids

## Goldfish memory

*Three seconds / five seconds / thirty ...*

Goldfish have excellent memory. That's why they are frequently used in scientific studies of memory and learning.

On the first day, the goldfish took up to 20 minutes to learn to avoid the high-voltage end. But, put back again a day later, it took them only two minutes to give it a wide berth.

Fiona MacRae describes such an experiment (2006)

The fish, previously believed to have a memory of just a few seconds, can distinguish between different times of day and can also be taught to follow a routine, according to research.

Mark Henderson (2003)

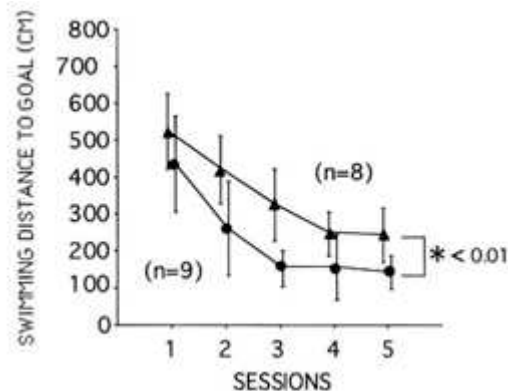
When, if ever, science believed in "goldfish memory" is unclear, but it certainly didn't in 1966:

In one experiment inspired by that theory [that "memory" is formed in proteins], University of Michigan Biochemist Bernard Agranoff taught goldfish to swim over a barrier, then injected them with puromycin, an antibiotic that prevents protein synthesis. When the injection was given hours after learning, it had no effect, suggesting that memory proteins had already formed. Injected just before or just after training, the drug prevented learning.

*Time*, April 19, 1971  
(the experiment described was carried out in '66)

Heavier stuff still - two japanese make a serious attempt to figure out how well goldfish can remember where they swim:

We found that goldfish exhibited spatial learning in a maze, the hole board task, which resembles the Morris water maze.\*



Ur Saito & Wanabe: "Mean swimming distance to the goal".

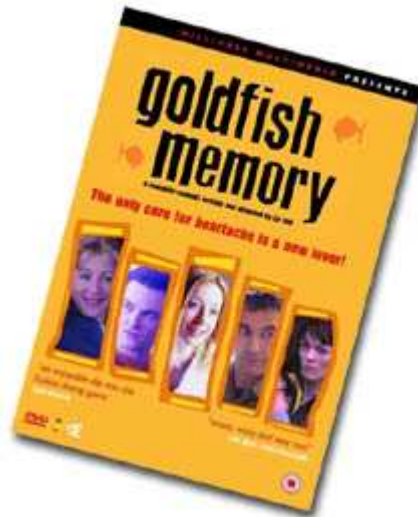
The curve with the ▲ shows the results for fish who got a "moving target", the curve with the ● shows the results for the fish who had the bait in the same place in all trials. Both groups learned the rules of the game, the latter also where the bait was.

The present experiments provide a reasonable method to compare the spatial learning of fish with other animals. One of the characteristics of our maze task is that fish learned the spatial task quickly. They showed improvement within three training sessions. Such fast learning is similar to that of rats in the Morris maze. (...)

The present study showed that goldfish, like rodents, learned not only the fixed-route task, as in the Y or radial maze, but also the free-orienting (open field) task. This suggests that the capacity for spatial learning in goldfish is comparable to that of rodents.

Saito & Watanabe (2005)





Not that I have seen this one - maybe it's making fun of the myth..?

\* A "Morris water maze" is not really a maze but a little pool with opaque water. In this water you put a rodent. Somewhere in the pool is a small platform, just below the surface. In order to reach the safety of the platform, the rodent (who can't see it in the milky water) has to navigate using visual cues placed around the pool. By repeating this experiment one can quickly see how (or if) the animal learns the location of the platform. It is this kind of spatial learning that, according to Saito & Watanabe, goldfish are as good at as rodents.

**Sources:**

Fiona MacRae, Bad Memory? No, Goldfish Have That Thinking Feeling, The Daily Mail, January 25, 2006

Mark Henderson, Goldfish pass memory test, ur The Times, October 1, 2003

THE MIND: From Memory Pills to Electronic Pleasures Beyond Sex, *Time*, April 19, 1971

Agranoff, B. W., Davis R. E., Brink J. J. *Chemical study of memory fixation in goldfish* (1966)

Saito & Watanabe, "Experimental analysis of spatial learning in goldfish" (2005)

Wikipedia: Morris water maze



# factoids

## Hell

### *When hell freezes over*

If you find the word "hell" in the Bible, you know it's a translation. The word is neither Hebrew nor Greek, and the current sense derives from Scandinavia. In Norse mythology, Hel was the witch queen of the kingdom of death, which was also referred to as Hel. It was situated in *Niflhem* or Niflheim and represented the bad place to go, Valhall being the nicer option.

Though the myths of the vikings are often quite vague (much more so than many verbose descriptions can make you believe), there is no doubt that Niflhem is a cold place indeed. So the next time you hear someone talking about "when hell freezes over" -- it's always been that way, etymologically.

... In Norse mythology Loki's daughter, who rules over the evil dead in *Niflheim*, the lowest of all worlds (*nifl* "mist"), a death aspect of the three-fold goddess. Transfer of a pagan concept and word to a Christian idiom, used in the K.J.V. for O.T. Heb. *Sheol*, N.T. Gk. *Hades*, *Gehenna*.

Douglas Harper

The Hebrew word was *geéenna*, don't know the original spelling but in the Greek of the New Testament it's written γεεννα and the Latin form is *gehenna*. It derives from "the valley of Hinnom," *Ge-Hinnom*, south of Jerusalem, where ungodly rituals had supposedly taken place, and as such it was used in several prophecies as a symbol for paganism and its punishment. The association with high temperatures is there early on, and firmly in place at the time of Jesus. When someone many years later translated it into *hel*, the same association had apparently overruled the old cool one of the vikings. So you could also say that hell was frozen over a thousand years ago, but has since thawed considerably.



Gustave Doré illustrating *L'Enfer*; note the three faces of the Devil, and the legs of Judas sticking out from the frontal face

I don't think Dante Alighieri had the hell of Hel in mind when he described the ninth and final circle of Inferno, but his ultimate Hell is indeed deep frozen; Satan himself is trapped in the ice, chewing on Judas Iscariot, Brutus and Cassius.

The Emperor of the kingdom dolorous  
From his mid-breast forth issued from the ice;  
And better with a giant I compare

Dante

### Sources:

Douglas Harper, *Online Etymology Dictionary*: hell  
Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, canto XXXIV

# factoids

## I am become death

*"I am become death, the destroyer of worlds"*

Robert Oppenheimer, Trinity 1945

Robert Oppenheimer was the director of the laboratory in Los Alamos, New Mexico, and the scientific director of the Manhattan project. Since so many talents were involved it's somewhat misleading to call him "the father of the nuclear bomb", but he undeniably made one of the major individual contributions.

In an interview from 1965, Oppenheimer describes the initial reactions as the fruit of their labors, the very first nuclear bomb (the Hiroshima bomb was the second one), detonated early in the morning of July 16, 1945:



We knew the world would not be the same. A few people laughed... A few people cried... Most people were silent. I remembered the line from the Hindu scripture the Bhagavad Gita; Vishnu is trying to persuade the prince that he should do his duty, and to impress him takes on his multi-armed form, and says, "Now I am become death, the destroyer of worlds." I suppose we all thought that, one way or another.

The quote was something he thought, but he didn't say it.

The quote is indeed from the Bhagavad Gita ("Song of the lord"). Some suggest it's a misquote, which would explain the peculiar grammar; but "am become" is not an error but a (poetic) archaism, as in "I am become a name, for always roaming with a hungry heart" (Tennyson, *Ulysses*). Which in turn might be a trace of French; "Je suis devenu la mort".

Since Oppenheimer was proficient in Sanskrit he read the original text, and the translation is his own; I haven't found any other translation with "am become". It certainly gives a certain something to the line, however, and it might had been at least somewhat less well known had it been "I am death".

Here's the verse with a little context, from a translation by Ramanand Prasad. Prince Arjuna hesitates to attack the enemy with his army; Vishnu, in the incarnation of Krishna, encourages him, and motivates him by explaining how the world works, with reincarnations, Brahman, Maya etc. Arjuna asks to see Vishnu in his "cosmic", i.e. real, form, a wish that is granted. The overwhelmed Arjuna asks:

Tell me who are You in such a fierce form? My salutations to You, O best of gods, be merciful! I wish to understand You, the primal Being, because I do not know Your mission.

The Supreme Lord said: I am death, the mighty destroyer of the world, out to destroy. Even without your participation all the warriors standing arrayed in the opposing armies shall cease to exist.

Therefore, get up and attain glory. Conquer your enemies and enjoy a prosperous kingdom. All these (warriors) have already been destroyed by Me. You are only an instrument, O Arjuna.

Bhagavad Gita, chapter 11, verses 31-33

In an ancient Hindu scripture one might expect something a little less violent, but apparently the word that is here translated as "death" can also be interpreted as "time", which softens the message a little, at least if you're Hindu. I am pretty certain the word is *kala*, which can mean "time" or "dark". The feminine form is *Kali*, the infamous goddess of death.

श्रीभगवानुवाच  
कालोऽस्मि लोकक्षयकृत्प्रवृद्धो  
 लोकान्समाहर्तुमिह प्रवृत्तः ।  
 ऋतेऽपि त्वां न भविष्यन्ति सर्वे  
 येऽवस्थिताः प्रत्यनीकेषु योधाः ॥३२॥

Here's another description of the event, where...

...two pages from the Bhagavad-Gita, the sacred Hindu poem, flashed through Oppenheimer's mind: "If the radiance of a thousand suns / were to burst into the sky / that would be like / the splendour of the Mighty One" and "I am become Death, the shatterer of worlds".

Current Biography Yearbook 1964

The first verse (rather than page...) mentioned is a part of the description of the cosmic form of Vishnu, and is found in verse 12 in the same chapter as "become Death". The citation from 1964 is the oldest I've found with it. The two verses are often erroneously combined into a single one.

If the splendour of a thousand suns were to blaze out at once (simultaneously) in the sky, that would be the splendour of that mighty Being (great soul).

Bhagavadgita 11:12 (Sivananda)

In one translation, there's a negation:

If the splendor of thousands of suns were to blaze forth all at once in the sky, even that would not resemble the splendor of that exalted being.

Bhagavadgita 11:12 (Prasad)

Since I haven't found any older descriptions with verse 12, and it isn't in Oppenheimer's own description, I draw the conclusion Oppenheimer didn't think of it when the bomb went off.

He grew tenser as the last seconds ticked off. He scarcely breathed. He held on to a post to steady himself . . . When the announcer shouted 'Now!' and there came this tremendous burst of light, followed ... by the deep-growling roar of the explosion, his face relaxed into an expression of tremendous relief.

The reaction of Oppenheimer, as described by Brigadier General Thomas F. Farrell.

"It worked!"

What J. Robert actually said after the detonation, according to his brother Frank Oppenheimer. Frank was also working within the Manhattan project, and was on location in Trinity.

Note 1: In *Full metal jacket*, the soldier Animal Mother has "I am become death" written on his helmet.

Note 2: The novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini does not derive it's title from the Bhagavad Gita, but from a poem about Kabul by Saib-e-Tabrizi, a Persian poet in the 17th century.

#### Sources:

Wikiquote: Interview with Robert Oppenheimer, from the *The Decision to Drop the Bomb*, 1965

A short clip from the interview can be found all over the net, like here or here

"Bomb Peril Cited by Oppenheimer", *New York Times* May 31 1955 - quotes an article from *Le Figaro*

Bhagavad Gita translated by Ramanand Prasad

Bhagavad Gita translated by Sri Swami Sivananda

Bhagavad Gita in original sanskrit [PDF]

Everything2.com: Now I am become death..., with 11:32 translated by Swami Tripurari

"The Eternal Apprentice", *Time*, November 8 1948

Current Biography Yearbook 1964, page 331



# factoids

## The Iron Cross

*Nazi symbol*

*The Maltese cross*

The Iron Cross is not only older than the NSDAP, but older than Germany itself. It is still in use as the symbol of the German *Bundeswehr*, which would be quite out of the question had it been a Nazi symbol.



In 1813, Friedrich Wilhelm III of Prussia established the decoration *Das Eiserne Kreuz*, to be awarded to soldiers during the war against Napoleon. The cross itself came from the medieval Teutonic Order, which had used variations of the Mantuan cross, **not** to be confused with the Maltese cross. The Iron Cross came into use again during the war with France 1870-71, during the First World War (when it was awarded to Hitler, Göring and a few million other German soldiers) and again during the Second World War.



The cross of the Teutonic Order



Iron cross, Mantuan cross



Maltese cross

It was awarded to soldiers during war - and will probably be again, should Germany find itself in another armed conflict. It was certainly no bling-bling to be worn by your average Nazi, not even in the party elite. Hitler was very proud over his crosses, and would never have allowed it to be awarded on political merits - and why should he, when it wasn't a political symbol? It was carried by many officers who were anything but national socialists (on aristocratic grounds though, rather than democratic). It was awarded to a number of Jews, and in 1914 Hugo Gutmann, Jew and immediate superior officer of Adolf Hitler, recommended the cross to be awarded to him.





March 21st, 1933: Reichskansler & Reichspräsident.  
Hindenburg would never, *ever*, wear Nazi paraphernalia.



Göring, Keitel, Himmler, Hitler.  
Three men with Iron Crosses, and one civilian.

In 1945, Nazi symbols were outlawed in Germany. One exception were Iron Crosses from WWII, but not because the crosses themselves were Nazi symbols, but because the 1939 version had been decorated with a small swastika. (Note: Hitler & co thus had no swastikas in their crosses.)



In 1957 these Iron Crosses were outlawed as well, or rather, the exception for the little swastika was removed. Instead, they were exchanged for Iron Crosses with oak leaves (which had been used on all Iron Crosses prior to the 1939 model). The year "1939" remained in place, though. These crosses are perfectly legal to wear since they aren't Nazi symbols.



Another de-Nazified decoration was the German Cross in Gold. The 1957 version to the right.



*Bundeswehr* of today

Had the Iron Cross been a Nazi symbol, the German *Bundeswehr* would have an illegal logotype.

It can be argued that the Iron Cross wasn't Nazi to start with, but was turned into a Nazi symbol in the same way as the ancient swastika. But unlike the swastika and the eagle, the Nazis never used the Iron Cross as a symbol for the party, national socialism, or anything such. When the cross did symbolise something, i.e. apart from its use as a military decoration, it was the German armed forces, neither more nor less. If post-war Germany can keep track of the difference, we should too.

That some less well informed racists have mixed up these facts as well shouldn't matter. (One might, though, ponder how Hitler would react, had he seen kids walk around with the military medal of bravery he risked his life for...)

## The Maltese Cross



This is a completely different cross, with no relation whatsoever to the Iron Cross. The Maltese Cross has a rich history indeed, is used in many countries and on Malta in particular. Above, the Swedish Order of the North Star. Below, some more.





Carl XVI Gustaf, king of Sweden:  
Proud wearer of at least four Maltese Crosses.

**Sources:**

Wikipedia: Iron Cross; Maltese Cross

Bundeswehr

Wehrmacht Awards: The Iron Cross (verbose)

Medals and badges of the "1,000 Year Reich"

Rev. Dr. Michael Foster: History of the Maltese Cross... (verbose)

Thanks to many helpful people on Skalman  
CvD and B Hellqvist in particular



# factoids

## The Iron Curtain

On **March 5 1946**, Winston Churchill held a speech in Westminster College, Fulton, Missouri (not to be confused with Westminster, London). He described eastern Europe as in a "Soviet sphere", being behind "an iron curtain". (Today the term is often used about the Berlin wall, which of course was a very small part of it, and deep within DDR as well.)

From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic an iron curtain has descended across the Continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe. Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia; all these famous cities and the populations around them lie in what I must call the Soviet sphere, and all are subject, in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence but to a very high and in some cases increasing measure of control from Moscow.

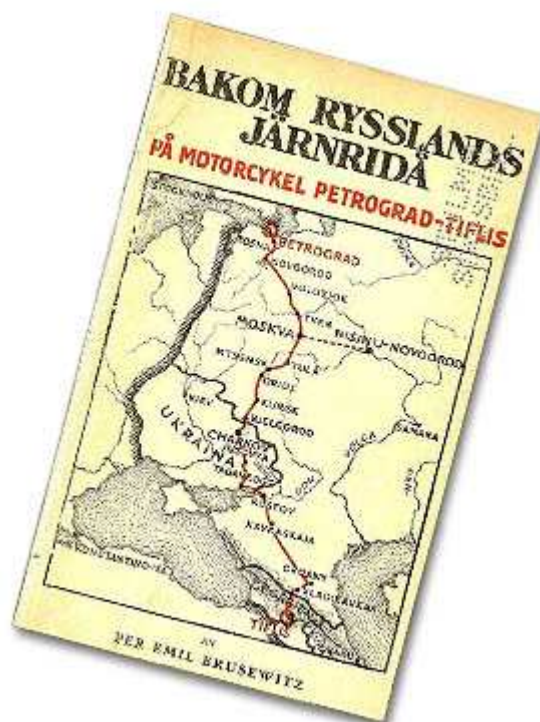
So, where's the factoid? Actually, he used the same phrase almost a year earlier, in a telegram sent **May 12 1945** to president Truman, where he warned him for the Russians with which he had just celebrated the victory over the Germans:

An iron curtain is drawn down upon their frontier. We do not know what is going on behind.

And a few months before, **25 February 1945**, this gentleman described the border to the reds as "an iron curtain":

If the German people lay down their weapons, the Soviets, according to the agreement between Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin, would occupy all of East and Southeast Europe along with the greater part of the Reich. An iron curtain would fall over this enormous territory controlled by the Soviet Union, behind which nations would be slaughtered.

Joseph Goebbels in *Das Jahr 2000* (Year 2000) in newspaper *Das Reich*, 25 February 1945



*Behind the Iron Curtain of Russia* (1923)

As early as **1923** the term is used in the title of a Swedish book. Per Emil Brusewitz was a social democrat who leaned quite heavily towards communism - I haven't found any actual quotes from this book, but people who have read it have told me it doesn't elaborate on the title; which would indicate such elaboration wasn't necessary. (The subtitle, *On motorcycle Petrograd-Tiflis*, indicates this could be some interesting reading indeed.)

The first use of the term in English has been found in a book published in **1920**. Ethel Snowden - suffragette, christian socialist, peace worker etc. - had spent some time in the country after the revolution, and wrote about it in *Through Bolshevik Russia*. She apparently disliked a lot of what she saw, but the curtain is *not* attributed to the Bolsheviks:

Through 1919 the Allies had maintained an 'iron curtain' around the country, making it virtually impossible to enter or leave.

Nicholas Griffin

The very first time a communist iron curtain is mentioned is, however, in a Russian text: Vasily Rozanov (1856-1919) wrote in **1918** (the year after the October Revolution in November 1917) in *The Apocalypse of Our Time, Apokalipsis nashego vremeni*:

Rattling, creaking and screeching, an iron curtain descends over the Russian history...

## Non-soviet iron curtains

Actual iron curtains were used in theaters to prevent fires from spreading (a very real danger, which several horrible incidents prove). These are often called "fire curtains" or "safety curtains" in USA, which has led some people to think that Churchills "iron curtain" is somehow another term; but in the UK they are indeed called "iron curtains". Asbestos was used as well.

The metaphorical curtain has quite a history.

That would be like confessing, and like an iron curtain something fell down between him and his friends.

August Strindberg (1898)

It became evident that Redwood had still imperfectly apprehended the fact that an iron curtain had dropped between him and the outer world.

H. G. Wells (1904)

During World War I the term was used for **concentrated artillery fire**:

The "rideau de fer" is simply the French method of converging artillery fire upon a single point where they intend to attack or where they are being attacked. [...] As I walked over this section after the curtain had been lifted, I was absolutely baffled for descriptive words. All the earth in that vicinity seemed battered out of shape. The dead needed no burial there.

Whyte Williams, New York Times, 2 June 1915

I don't know if this meaning of the term was indeed coined in France, but it was eventually used in the German press as well. The "iron curtain" was, thus, used for **borders and divisions in general** well before World War I, but - as far as I've found - more so after.

"What we Germans wish," continued Dr. Stresemann, "is that this iron curtain shall no longer hang between France and Germany [...]"

The German foreign minister in his *Reichstag* about the Rhineland,  
New York Times, 2 February 1928

Many of the expressions of the terror are certainly hidden behind the iron curtain, that closes off our connections with the world of oppression.

Richard Sandler (prime minister of Sweden 1925-26), 1928

The British press is an iron curtain hiding the real opinion and feelings of the British people, as well as their hopes and their fears.

Nazi newspaper *Völkischer Beobachter*  
quoted in New York Times, 23 July 1940

During the four years while I was interned in Croatia by the Germans I saw how the Partisans were lowering an iron curtain over Yugoslavia so that nobody could know what went on behind it.

Dr. Vladimir Matchek, New York Times 23 July 1945

Dr. Matchek was the leader of "The famous Yugoslav Croatian Peasant Party", the article's headline reads *Matchek predicts Tito dictatorship*.

These quotes is just a fraction of what I found, and I didn't dig very deep. The metaphor was obviously in use well before Churchill's speech, and only then got irrevocably associated with the Soviet "sphere".

### Sources:

TheFreeDictionary.com: Iron Curtain

German Propaganda Archive: Joseph Goebbels, *The Year 2000*

Wikipedia: Iron Curtain

Pelle Holm (Swe.), *Bevingade ord: järnridå*

Wikipedia (Germ.): Eiserner Vorhang

Nicholas Griffin (ed.), *The Selected Letters of Bertrand Russell, vol. 2* (Routledge 2002), page 200

August Strindberg, *Fagervik och Skamsund* (1898) [read (in swedish) at runeberg.org]

H. G. Wells, *The Food of the Gods* (1904) [download at [gutenberg.org](http://gutenberg.org)]



# factoids

## Kangaroo

Means "I don't know" or similar

It seems that an Englishman, in Australia during the days of colonizing, saw this creature hopping about and wondered what it was. At first opportunity he asked an Australian bushman, who answered "kan-ga-roo," meaning "I don't know." The Englishman thought that was the name of the animal, and kangaroo it is called to this day.

Letter in New York Times, February 19, 1942

The hilarious etymology certainly makes a lovely story, as well as a good piece of advice against naïve anthropology, but it isn't true. (I've heard it about other things Australian, haven't researched them though.)

The word was introduced in the English language by Joseph Banks, an English botanist and science patron in general, on Cook's first voyage. At one time, he wrote about quadrupeds, and noted that "the largest was called by the natives *Kangooroo*". This is what the grey kangaroo is actually called in the aboriginal language Guugu Yimidhirr.

It is different from any European and indeed any animal I have heard or read of except the Gerbua of Egypt, which is not larger than a rat when this is as large as a midling Lamb; the largest we shot weighed 84 lb. It may however be easily known from all other animals by the singular property of running or rather hopping upon only its hinder legs carrying its fore bent close to its breast; in this manner however it hops so fast that in the rocky bad ground where it is commonly found it easily beat my grey hound, who tho he was fairly started at several kills only one and that quite a young one. Another was called by the natives *Je-Quoll*: it is about the size and something like a polecat, of a light brown spotted with white on the back and white under the belly. The third was of the Opossum kind and much resembling that called by De Buffon Phalanger. Of these two last I took only one individual of each.

Joseph Banks

("Je-Quoll", by the way, is the Guugu Yimidhirr word *dhigul*, which is the marsupial genus *Dasyurus*. In English it's called "native cat", or "quoll", just as Banks wrote it.)

### Sources:

Douglas Harper, Etymology online: kangaroo

Joseph Banks, Some account of that part of New Holland now called New South Wales, page 267





# factoids

## "Keep an open mind – but not so open that your brain falls out"

This excellent piece of advice is most often attributed to physicist Richard Feynman (1918-1988), but also a slew of other more or less famous people, most of them from the field of science: Richard Dawkins, Carl Sagan, James Oberg, Bertrand Russell, J. Robert Oppenheimer, Virginia Gildersleeve, Harold T. Stone ... To name but a few.

Here is the earliest example I have found (yet) of the quote. As it's written, it was apparently coined even earlier.

[Practical gentlemen] have a number of bitterly sarcastical comments on persons whose minds are so open that their brains fall out.

Max Radin (1937)

Here are some even older variants, but without the brain (so to speak): "Their minds are so open that nothing stays in" (1932), "a mind so 'open' that almost anything can blow through it without leaving a trace" (1928) or "a mind so open that it had nothing in it at all" (1908).

I suspect that the quote (like so many others) was not coined by someone famous, but by an anonymous talent who modified an existing phrase.

### Sources:

Max Radin, "On Legal Scholarship", *The Yale Law Journal* May 1937

*New York Times* November 13, 1932

*New York Times* February 4, 1928

Edward Clark, *Selected speeches* (1908), page 69



# factoids

## Mata Hari

*Incredibly beautiful belly dancer and master spy  
Javanese princess etc.*

Of the many, many myths that surround Mata Hari, only a fraction will be examined here. She would definitely have been all but forgotten today, had she not been shot for espionage. If she was indeed guilty, and in that case for what, is a complex issue, considerably more so than the factoids above.

Margaretha Geertruida Zelle was born in 1876 in Leeuwarden, the Netherlands. Under the artist name of Mata Hari she made a comet career as an "exotic dancer" in lavish settings with a less than genuine indian/oriental touch. She was said to be a javanese princess; the daughter of a Brahman priest; or something similar -- all make-believe promotional bullshit, made possible by her dark eyes, hair and complexion (though she wouldn't have fooled nearly as many in Jakarta or Bombay as in Paris, of course). She did, however, have a connection to Java (then part of the Dutch empire), having lived there 1897-1902. To spice up one's background in this manner was quite common for artists at the time. Despite this, a surprising number of newspapers of surprisingly high standards passed on these rumours, and more, as facts - sloppy journalism, too, was quite common at the time.



Margaretha (ca 1905)



Greta (1931)



Sylvia (1985)

What about the great looks and the dancing? First, let's do a numerical analysis: When Greta Garbo did her part (in the all but fictional movie which probably have contributed more than anything else to the general image of Mata Hari) she was 26 years old and looked like - well - like Greta Garbo. Sylvia Kristel, of *Emmanuelle* fame, was 33 in 1985. The gift of Margaretha Zelle never was great looks as much as charisma and sex appeal. At her execution in 1917 she was 41, and had her dancing well behind.



The last photograph of Margaretha (1917)

Most of the dancing took place in 1905-06, then the assignments gradually became fewer and worse paid, until 1915. She now lived on her lovers; "Although well past her prime, she remained a *name*" (Howe). Her living standards varied considerably despite her international fame; sometimes she spent months at the best *hôtels* of Paris, sometimes she survived on quite limited means - sometimes simultaneously. Downright prostitution did occur, though she never accepted any customers whatsoever. (Her preference of men in uniform - rather a poor officer than a rich banker, as she put it (Keay, page 124) - would contribute to her end.) In the genuine jet set, she was a temporary visitor.

As far as her dancing is concerned she was an autodidact, and her shows had really nothing to do with anything one can find in the Middle East, India or Southeast Asia. The point of marketing herself as a native woman of class who shared the ancient culture of the

Orient etc. was that the nobility (men and women alike) for the first time ever could sit and watch someone undress. That would also be her lasting (?) contribution; to make strip tease acceptable.

The words *mata hari* literally means "the eye of the day", compounded to *matahari* (she also spelt it "Mata-Hari") it means, literally, "sun" in Indonesian (similar meanings in related languages like Malayan); today it's also the name an Indonesian supermarket chain. Her first artist name was "Lady MacLeod" after a supposed lord father, and it didn't disappear from the posters until 1912, when the real MacLeod (her former husband) sued her.

## Mata Hari as a spy

What follows is, with necessity, a simplification.

In August 1916, Captain Ladoux, head of the French counterespionage, told her that the British considered her a German spy. He didn't believe them, he said, but wondered if she would like to work for the Republic? She eventually accepted; a single mission on the highest level, for the mind-boggling price of one million franc.

On her way to Belgium and her supposed mission, she was arrested by the British who took her for another spy. After her release, she had to go to Madrid, and that's essentially where her entire career as a spy took place, during two weeks in December 1916. For a start, she contacted the German embassy to gain their trust - she was to turn into a double agent.

That the name of Mata Hari has become synonymous with a master spy is definitely a factoid, considering her very short career as well as her very limited skills in the craft (even when compared to her colleagues), not to say naivety. (Like when she attempted to discuss her mission in clear in ordinary mail or over a plain telephone, or when she refused to use invisible ink.) The German military attaché obviously found this out within minutes. Mata Hari apparently didn't understand she had been revealed, but returned to Paris, happy with the (worthless) intelligence she thought she had fooled out of the attaché.

During her stay in Madrid, the counterespionage in Paris intercepted German messages which contained enough information to identify their agent H 21 as Mata Hari. But this code showed that she had been a German agent well before arriving in Madrid! The British had apparently been right all the time.

But the H 21-messages were supposed to be read by the enemy - they were encrypted with a code the Germans knew had been broken. Since the French counterespionage initially failed to realize this, Mata Hari was arrested in February 1917. It was never revealed during the trial.

The problem was that Mata Hari *had* indeed accepted to work for the Germans. In May 1916 she accepted the payment of twenty thousand francs (for services delivered, as the prosecution would later claim) which at the time was a small fortune. She insisted that she wanted to fool Germany of the money as payment for some furs she earlier had lost due to the involvement of that nation, and that she never gathered any intelligence for them. If she actually got the money for nothing, it would explain why the Germans had aggressions toward a useless agent, instead of feeding her with desinformation. But was it true? In that case she must have realized the risk she took when she made contact with the Germans in Madrid - on the other hand, she couldn't possibly have told Ladoux why she didn't really qualify as a German double agent, and then there was this dream of a million franc... This is at least what Howe thinks, heavily condensed, and since his investigation is the most careful by far I've read it's hard to disagree. Whether Ladoux knew she was innocent or not is another question.

The court didn't believe her, in particular since they never got to see all the evidence, nor did they hear some key witnesses who could have defended Mata Hari. She was executed at October 15, 1917.

M. was a mythomaniac; if or in what degree she was a secret agent remains in doubt.

*Nationalencyklopedin*, the National Encyclopaedia of Sweden

It's worth noting that no German spies have claimed that Mata Hari was part of their organization (Howe, page 260) but actually denied it (Howe, page 284).

Whether she was a mythomaniac, PR-minded, naïve or simply had bad memory - or all of it - it's a fact that many of the myths that surround her were of her own fabrication. Other contributors include the investigation and the trial (Howe lists a myriad errors, from spelling to obviously faked H 21-messages), other biographers (even including her own father, who in 1906 wrote a completely unreliable biography), contributors of popular culture, and so on.

It is hard to conceive of a subject that has been so badly reported, despite the lady's enormous fame.

R. W. Howe, from the Author's Note

### References:

Russell Warren Howe, *Mata Hari - The True Story* (Dodd, Mead & Company 1986) - recommended  
 Julia Keay, *The Spy Who Never Was* (M. Joseph, 1987) [Swedish translation: Info Books, 1989]  
 Wikipedia (eng.): Mata Hari - read with care  
 Nationalencyklopedin (swe.): Mata Hari

Keay's book is slightly easier to read, but then again she's somewhat more sloppy than the utterly careful Howe. He often notes how hard even the officials had with some names, like Kroemer (who paid the twenty thousand francs) who is named Krämer and Krömer, just to name but a few variants. Keay calls him Kramer (possibly an anglicized "Krämer"), the Madrid attaché Arnold Kalle is called von Kalle, Georges Ladoux is called Pierre in one illustration text, and so on. She's also fond of telling us exactly what the people involved thought, even when the available evidence would make a more careful observer avoid this risky business. Even more serious is her accepting the faked (by Ladoux?) H 21-messages as the real ones. And so on. Despite those errors, she does arrive at the same conclusion as Howe, that Mata Hari was no spy, but naïve beyond excuse.

# factoids

## Nazi

### *National socialist*

Nazi is obviously a short form of National socialist, or *Nationalsozialist* to be precise, just as *Sozi* is a short form of *Sozialist*. But the word has a much more interesting story than that.

Long before the rise of the NSDAP in the 1920s, people in at least southern Germany could be called *Nazi* if they were named Ignatz, or came from Austria or Bohemia (where they apparently had lots of Ignatzes); it was supposedly also used as a generic name for soldiers of Austria-Hungary, like the German *Fritz* or Russian *Ivan*. It had to be used with caution between friends, though, since it could also mean "idiot" or "clumsy oaf". That's how it found it's way into politics; the fact that Adolf came from Austria (not Bohemia, though) could have made the pun even better. The Nazis supposedly made attempts to include the N-word in their own vocabulary in order to make it less derogatory, but unsuccessfully; since such a maneuver requires a sense of humor as well as irony, it was probably doomed to fail.



*Nazi*

"Nazi" was first used in English in 1930, as well as in Swedish, and probably some other languages as well; that's apparently the first year the Nazis made enough fuss to earn themselves the short form internationally. The double sense of the expression, as described above, was unfortunately lost in translation.



*Schusternazi*

An example of pre-hitlerian use of *Nazi* in southern Germany can be found in a "Bayerische Komödie in 4 Akten": *Der Schusternazi*, "the shoemaker nazi", by Ludwig Thoma in 1905. The title role is the shoemaker Ignatz Stanglmayer; without giving too much away, he receives a large inheritance, dumps his old friends in favor of some new ones, who turn out to have a piece of valuable russian land for sale, which they offer Ignatz for a friendship price... Und so weiter.

### **Sources:**

Etymology online: Nazi

Wikipedia: Nazi (German)

Der Komödienstadel: Der Schusternazi

# factoids

## Olympic

### The olympic truce

*In ancient Greece, a truce was held during the olympic games*

During the olympic games of Olympia, as well as the today far lesser known Pythian games of Delphi, Nemeic games of Nemea and Isthmian games of Corinth, the Greeks did indeed keep a kind of truce, *ekecheiria* - but this truce did not imply that all wars between Greeks everywhere took a break, just that people who were going to participate in the games (as athletes, administrators or spectators) were to be left alone. Wars were allowed, as long as they didn't interrupt the games in any way. Splendid as it is, it's nowhere near the panhellenic celebration of peace one might have in mind.

Simon Hornblower makes an excellent description of the truce, consulting several good sources. The one I find particularly compelling is Thucydides; in his work on the peloponnesian war, during which several olympic games took place, a general olympic truce is never mentioned. Being a very careful author indeed, Thucydides couldn't possibly have overlooked such an event, by mistake or otherwise, in particular since he describes numerous other truces and armistices, of much lesser importance than the general idea of *ekecheiria*.

OK, on one single occasion it's mentioned; that's when the lakedaimonians of Sparta in the olympic year of 420 BC attacked two villages in or near the city state of Elis. That's where Olympia was, and the games thus occupied all citizens, which were thus protected by the *ekecheiria*. According to Hornblower, the villages were considered elean by the Eleans but not by the Lakedaimonians, thus making the protected status a question of geography.

Upon reading Thucydides, I find a slightly different picture, however. The Lakedaimonians who attacked Phycus and Lepreum stated that the attacks took place before the truce had been declared in their city; Thucydides simply writes that the Eleans, who were the responsible "truce-bearers", began with declaring the truce in their own city, before leaving for the rest of the country. It is thus a question of time, not of geography. But in any case, this is all Thucydides writes about the truce, which of course wouldn't have been the case had it worked the way that's generally assumed.

Hornblower also mentions his own favourite, Pindar, who specialized in writing songs for victorious athletes in the games (all four of them). The truce is all but left unmentioned; the single instance when it's there isn't even related to an olympic winner but an isthmian one, in which he mentions "the Elean truce-bearers of Kronos' son Zeus". This is another case of negative proof - the total, panhellenic truce would of course have been far more interesting to write about.

Hornblower pokes some fun at The International Olympic Truce Centre, an organization with goals that, however noble, are essentially based on a myth. There are of course quite a few people, within the IOC as well as outside, who honestly believe in the myth, and it's mentioned several times on their websites on the matter, but e.g. this definition is, upon closer examination, actually quite right:

Subsequently, all the other Greek cities ratified this "international agreement", thanks to which permanent, recognised immunity of the sanctuary of Olympia and the region of Elis became a reality. During the Truce period, the athletes, artists and their families, as well as ordinary pilgrims, could travel in total safety to participate in or attend the Olympic Games and return afterwards to their respective countries. As the opening of the Games approached, the sacred truce was proclaimed and announced by the Spondophoroi, citizens of Elis, who travelled throughout Greece to pass on the message. Proof that this Truce was respected is that, in Olympia, the Greeks never built walls to protect themselves, unlike all the other Greek cities.

IOC: The Olympic Truce

The first city walls of Olympia were erected about 260 AD, for protection against the non-hellenic heruls, so that part could be valid; but that Elis did not enjoy a permanent truce is proved by the events that Thucydides recorded, as well as several others. But the major problem with this definition is that, despite being written by someone who obviously knows that the truce was not such a major one as is generally assumed, it doesn't point that out, but instead describes it in a way which nobody who doesn't know the facts can't help but interpret as a confirmation of the general, nation-wide truce - which it isn't.

#### Sources:

Simon Hornblower, *Olympic Peace?*

Thucydides, available at [The Olympic Truce \[PDF\]](#)

## Olympos / Olympia

The olympic games were held in Olympia, not on Mount Olympos. There are actually several Mount Olympos in Greece, but the tallest (2917 m) and the one that's most likely the home of the gods is located in Thessalia, 250 km northwest of Athens. Olympia of the games is found on the west of the Peloponnes, 160 km southwest of Athens.





Mountain in the north,  
games in the south

## Olympic unity

Regarding the Olympic games as a symbol of panhellenic unity, neither Herodotos nor Pindar writes of anything like that (nor any other greek author of the time) - "significant silence", as Hornblower puts it. There is a hint of a hint in the *Lysistrata* of Aristophanes in 411 BC, where "the common panhellenic altar" is mentioned, and in 380 BC a certain Isokrates wrote that "after concluding truces with each other and putting an end to any current hostilities, we come together in one place" - which, great as it sounds, was purely aspirational.

(Note: The image of the ancient Greeks as a democratic people of philosophy and wisdom, unlike e.g. the brutal Romans, has nothing to do with reality. The Greeks spent quite a lot of time on wars, the one chronicled by Thucydides being one among many. The image of the peaceful games is equally false; athletes occasionally died. The winners certainly didn't object to monetary rewards, though the decorations given at the games were purely symbolic, including the famous wreaths of laurel (other materials were used in the other games).

### Sources:

Simon Hornblower, *Olympic Peace?*

Gutenberg with the works of Thucydides and Aristophanes, to name but a few  
Olympic Museum, Lausanne: *The Olympic Games in Ancient Greece*

## The olympic rings



### Ancient symbol

*Blue for Europe, yellow for Asia...*

This is not an ancient symbol of the games. The flag was first used in Alexandria in 1914 (not in an olympic year, that is), the rings being symbols of the five games that had been held up to that date, excluding the ones in Athens 1906. Since such a tradition would, in due time, yield a very complicated symbol indeed, it was soon changed. The rings now symbolize the five continents and nothing else.

The official definition does not, however, tell us which colour represents which continent. There are, of course, several such definitions, but that is another matter entirely. None is more correct than the other.

It includes the five interlaced rings, which represent the union of the five continents and the meeting of athletes from throughout the world at the Olympic Games.

From the Olympic Charter: the complete description of what the rings symbolize

The five continents usually mentioned are Europe, Asia, Africa, Oceania and America. Whether this is according to the original intentions is an open question; my personal guess is that Coubertin considered North America and South America two distinct continents, and never once thought about Oceania.

During the Berlin games in 1936 Leni Riefenstahl, the famous director of *Triumph des Willens*, directed the documentary *Olympische Spiele*, or *Olympia* in english. There's a scene in Delphi where a man carrying the torch runs past a stone with the famous five rings. The fact that such a stone is apparently still present at the stadion of Delphi has fooled quite a few people into believing the rings were used in ancient times, but the stone was made for the film.



The idea that the rings on the flag came from Delphi, and not the other way round, was first brought forward by Lynn and Gray Poole

in 1963, in *History of Ancient Olympic Games*. Completely wrong as it is, it has still managed to survive, somehow. That's how factoids work.  
(Why the Delphians would have their stadion feature a symbol of the Olympic games rather than their own Pythian ones is anybody's guess.)

**Sources:**

IOC: Olympic Charter [PDF]

Harvey Abrams, Olympic Historian: Questions & Answers

David C. Young, Myths about the Olympic Games, Ancient Olympics Guide

Robert Knight Barney, This Great Symbol: Tricks of history [PDF] from *Olympic Review* 301, 1992

## The olympic fire

*Another ancient symbol*

Some assume that the olympic fire was carried around by torch-bearers in ancient times. It wasn't; there probably was a fire present during the games, to symbolize the olympic truce (...) but the torch-running didn't show up in the modern games until Amsterdam 1928. The first time it was lit in Olympia in Greece to be carried to the arena? Berlin 1936.





## Sandwich

### *Invented at the card table*

John Montagu (not Montague) was Earl of Sandwich (Kent, England) och the dish definitely got it's name from him - according to Morton it wasn't called anything in particular before that. But he didn't invent it.

... People had been wrapping slices of bread around bits of food for thousands of years before the earl came along.

Mark Morton

Another piece of supposed fact in this case is considerably more subtle: that the sandwich was invented at the gaming table, allowing the earl to keep playing without interrupting for a cooked meal.

The oldest found source for the word *sandwich* is from 1762. The wide-spread tale about it's coinage comes from a diary written by a Frenchman who visited London in 1765:

A minister of state passed four and twenty hours at a public gaming-table, so absorpt in play that, during the whole time, he had no subsistence but a bit of beef, between two slices of toasted bread, which he eat without ever quitting the game. This new dish grew highly in vogue, during my residence in London: it was called by the name of the minister who invented it.

P. J. Grosley

Which one historian has commented upon as follows (never mind the authorship of the dish, which disagrees with Morton's quote above):

Grosley's book is a piece of travel literature. There is no supporting evidence for this piece of gossip, and it does not seem very likely that it has any foundation, especially as it refers to 1765, when Sandwich was a Cabinet minister and very busy. There is no doubt, however, that he was the real author of the sandwich, in its original form using salt beef, of which he was very fond. The alternative explanation is that he invented it to sustain himself at his desk, which seems plausible since we have ample evidence of the long hours he worked from an early start, in an age when dinner was the only substantial meal of the day, and the fashionable hour to dine was four o'clock.

N. A. M. Rodger

This would, then, be a rumour, created to put Sandwich in a bad manner; if that is so, it would probably not have been the only one (true or not), since he was indeed involved in several scandals of various kinds. In the 1770's, by the way, he became First Lord of the Admiralty, and was responsible for the Royal Navy during the American War of Independence. But this was well after the sandwich.

Slightly related: Cook thought of John when he coined the name *Sandwich Islands*. It would eventually be replaced with the native Hawaii.

### **Sources:**

Douglas Harper, Online Etymology Dictionary: sandwich

Mark Morton, *Cupboard Love* (Insomniac Press 2004), page 266

Pierre Jean Grosley, *Tour to London* (1766-7, translated from French in 1772)

Prof. N. A. M. Rodger, *The Insatiable Earl - A Life of John Montagu, 4th Earl of Sandwich* (W. W. Norton, 1994)

Wikipedia: John Montagu, 4th Earl of Sandwich



# factoids

## Santa's reindeers

The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow  
Gave the lustre of mid-day to objects below,  
When, what to my wondering eyes should appear,  
But a miniature sleigh, and eight tiny reindeer,  
With a little old driver, so lively and quick,  
I knew in a moment it must be St. Nick.

*The Night Before Christmas*  
Clement Clark Moore (1823)

The means of transport for St. Nick (or Saint Nicolaus, or Santa Claus as he's better known today) had, it appears, been given little thought until Moores'<sup>1</sup> poem. But then this fact, among several, was established; today everybody knows that Santa has a flying sleigh drawn by reindeers (though rather full scale than miniature).

Reindeer or caribou<sup>2</sup> are easily recognized, in particular from the characteristically curved antlers and the head that's held low when traveling:



*Rangifer tarandus*

One might, then, wonder what kinds of animals people have chosen to associate with Santa. Some are obviously deers, some less obviously so, and then there are some strange cross-breeds that doesn't resemble anything really, even as cartoons:





Now, I'd happily rate this as nitpicking, had it been just a little easier to find actual reindeers among the myriads of decidedly non-reindeer creatures-with-antlers that abound.

## Santa's cows

I don't know what difference it would make for anyone, but since the reindeers are always portrayed with antlers, you can tell they are probably female, since the bulls usually shed their antlers well before Christmas. There appears to be some differences between Scandinavian reindeer and American caribou, but on the other hand:

[...] it's not *impossible* that a male reindeer could retain his antlers as late as December 24, just not necessarily the norm. And that's not nearly as unusual as a fellow who lives at the North Pole, spends the year making toys for millions of children all over the world, and manages to deliver all of them in a single evening.

snopes.com

## Rudolph

The red-nosed reindeer is not in the 1823 poem.

More rapid than eagles his coursers they came,  
And he whistled, and shouted, and called them by name;  
"Now, Dasher! now, Dancer! now, Prancer and Vixen!  
On, Comet! on, Cupid! on, Donner and Blitzen!  
To the top of the porch! to the top of the wall!  
Now dash away! dash away! dash away all!"

*The Night Before Christmas*

Rudolph was created in 1938 (published in 1939). The song, without which he might have been all but forgotten, was written some years later.

You know Dasher and Dancer  
And Prancer and Vixen,  
Comet and Cupid  
And Donner and Blitzen,  
But do you recall  
The most famous reindeer of all?

Jonny Marks (1949?)

<sup>1</sup> The authorship has been questioned, though Moore is generally acknowledged.

<sup>2</sup> Regarding the reindeer/caribou-question, I quote Marie Gilbert: "Although the similarities between reindeer and caribou are numerous, the differences are enough that they are classified as two subspecies. [...] Domestication is the biggest difference between reindeer and caribou.

### References:

The Night Before Christmas, also known as "Twas the Night Before Christmas"  
Wikipedia: Reindeer; A Visit from St. Nicholas  
snopes.com: Reindeer Games; Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer  
Marie Gilbert, University of Alaska: Reindeer... Caribou... What's the Difference?



# factoids

## Spa

*Sanitas per aquam / Salus per aquas / Solus per aqua / Sana per aqua / Solus par aqua...*

Some folk etymologies are more common than others, but I have yet to see one half as fervently marketed as this one.



The word is not an acronym but an eponym, that is a name turned into a word. The name is Spa, site of the famous hot springs near Liège, Belgium. It has been used as a health resort since the middle ages and in particular during the 18th and 19th centuries. (The main attraction was often not the water but the opportunity to party with the rich and famous.) It got additional fame during World War I when the German HQ was located there.

Today Spa is possibly most well known (in Belgium at least) as a brand of mineral water, and (worldwide) for it's Formula One racing track, *Circuit de Spa-Francorchamps*. A particularly exciting part is called Eau Rouge Corner, "red water", which isn't a case of bad humour but an apt name for a stream that got it's name for it's iron-rich water.

The municipality of Spa (Spau, Spaw) is mentioned in English sources since 1565, and in the early 17th century the word was generalized to a common substantive meaning "health spring".

Arne Olofsson, professor in English

Repeat: It is definitively *not* an abbreviation for *Sanitas Per Aquam*, "health through water", or some other more or less grammatical and/or misspelt variation (one source suggested it was Greek). Neither is the name of the place an abbreviation. It is sometimes stated that the Romans wrote S P A on the walls of their baths, but there seems to be no records of such graffiti, nor anything resembling the term in their vocabulary. The Romans certainly indulged into bathing - the British Bath being a well-known example - but not in Spa.

The expressions *salus/sanitas per aquam/aquas* are grammatically and lexically acceptable for the sense "health through water" (*salus* and *sanitas* being synonymous and in nominative singular, *aquam* and *aquas* being direct objects in singular and plural, respectively).

Arne Olofsson

The following list of "spacronyms" I've found - there are plenty more - begins with the acknowledged four. The others may be more or less correct, but none of them has anything to do with the etymology of spa. The sources are given as found.

Sanitas per aquam	France Guide
Sanitas per aquas	The Spas Directory
Salus per aquam	Carlsberg
Salus per aquas	Schwefelbad Steinbeck (Germany)
Salus par aqua	Camping en Espagne
Salus per aqua	Gran Hotel Benahavis (Spain)
Salus per aqua	The Farm (Philippines)
Salut per aqua	about.com: Spa Evolution, A Brief History of Spas
Salut per aquam	Balneario Urbano Ana Benitez (Spain)
Sana per aqua	Tabacón Grand Spa (has five alternatives)
Sana per aqua	Sport og Helseferie (Norway)
Sana per aquam	Hotel Westfalenhaus (Paraguay)
Sanitas par aquam	Terra Nova (Russia)
Sanitas per aqua	Wellington Day Spa (New Zealand)
Sanum per aquam	www.sanum-per-aqua.de (Germany)
Sanus par aqua	Hotel The Northolme Hotel & Spa (Seychelles)
Sanus per aguam	Prometey Club (Russia)
Sanus per aquam	<i>What is a Spa?</i> , Thornton and Brutscher
Senare per aqua	The British Spas Federation
Soles per aqua	Rondane Spa (Norway)
Solus par aqua	<i>The Spa Source Book</i> , Lazarus
Solus per aqua	about.com: Spa Evolution, A Brief History of Spas



Spa 1921



Spa 2006

Many sources claims the name Spa comes from Latin *spargere*, "pour" or "spill", which supposedly was a description of the hot springs. This etymology doesn't hold:

The verb *spargere*, which means "spread" rather than "pour", has no such form and an abbreviation to spa of any existing form would have been incomprehensible.

Arne Olofsson

The place name is from Walloon *espa* "spring, fountain."

Doug Harper

#### Sources:

Doug Harper, Online etymology dictionary: spa

Wikipedia: Spa; Spa, Belgium

Spa, the brand of Spadel Group

GrandPrix.com: Circuits: Spa-Francorchamps

Arne Olofsson, professor in English at the University of Gothenburg, *Makten över etymologin - Några fallstudier* [PDF] (Swedish)

I keep the links to the S.P.A.-pages



# factoids

## The Teddy Bear



Clifford K. Berryman (1902):  
"Drawing the line in Mississippi"

*On a hunt, president Theodore "Teddy" Roosevelt came across a lone cub he didn't want to shoot. Thanks to a cartoonist, the little episode became known nation-wide. Then someone in the toy business got what turned out to be one truly great idea: He asked Roosevelt for permission to use his (albeit standard) nickname on a toy bear, got it - and the rest is history.*

There are some slightly different versions of this story. In one (the correct one), the bear that got to live wasn't a cub but an adult that was tied to a tree. In another (less than true), the toy bears were a joke by the staff at the hotel where the hunters slept. In yet another, the bears were introduced at the wedding of Roosevelt's daughter.

Never mind those urban legends, the hunting episode still appears to have quite little to do with the birth of the Teddy Bear.

Still, both versions (cub and adult) appear to have some truth in them. Late in 1900 or early in 1901, Roosevelt (vice president at the time) captured a cub and gave it to the Bronx Zoo:

About six months ago, when Vice President Roosevelt presented the Bronx Park Zoo with a tiny black bear that he had caught alive on his last mountain-lion hunt, the little fellow was a very well behaved youngster, very shy, afraid that everything would eat him, much afraid of the other bears, more afraid of Keeper Hoey, and most of all afraid of the crowds that surrounded the bears' den and ogled him and pointed him out as the "real thing bear." [...]

Since those days, "Teddy Roosevelt," as the bear is called, has grown into quite a big boy.

New York Times, July 21, 1901

The famous episode took place in 1902. President Roosevelt was in Mississippi, trying to settle some border people didn't agree about. During a hunt, he refused to shoot a bear. (It appears the version with the adult bear tied to a tree is the correct one, but that is not the main topic here.) Anyway, cartoonist Clifford Berryman got the opportunity to make the cartoon above, with the clever headline "Drawing the line in Mississippi". The cartoon was published in the *Washington Post* on November 16, 1902. (Some sources mention the *Washington Star*, which is wrong - Berryman joined the *Star* in 1907.) Several sources claim the original cartoon featured an adult bear that was later modified into a cub for increased cuteness.





None of these bears were immortalized as toys. At least not *the* "Teddy Bear". What they did was to firmly associate Roosevelt with bears, especially since Berryman kept the cub as a presidential sidekick in his cartoons.

In 1905, Seymour Campbell Eaton (using the pen-name Paul Piper in the newspaper) began writing (in verse) about two bears from Colorado, *The Roosevelt Bears*. They got their names, Teddy--B and Teddy--G (for "black" and "grey", and always with "--"), from stuff left by hunters - one can easily imagine who. In January 1906, the *New York Times* began publishing their first adventure, the voyage from Colorado to New York, in the Sunday supplement, with nice illustrations by V. Floyd Campbell. (Compare the hat at the bears' feet with the one carried by Teddy in several of the cartoons above - a memory of his time as a *Rough Rider* in the Spanish-American war of 1898.)

### Wholesome Fun for Old and Young



### "The Roosevelt Bears"

The "Teddy" part is a name they found  
 On hat and tree and leggings round,  
 On belt and boot, and plates of tin,  
 And scraps of paper and biscuits thin,  
 And other things that hunters drop  
 When they chase a bear to a mountain top.

The *Roosevelt Bears* became immensely popular. It was syndicated in 20 newspapers and ran for 29 weeks.

That very year, two real bear cubs arrived at the Bronx Zoo.





*The New York Times* June 1, 1906

Two cubs being more than twice as cute as a single one, from Colorado or not, they became as popular as their namesakes. It didn't take long for people to buy or make toy bears in pairs, their names being obvious.

Many of the girls and women here [Asbury Park, a popular resort in New Jersey] started a new fad to-night. More than twenty of them were on the boardwalk, carrying miniature bears made of "ice wool," fuzzy, and as white as snow. [...]

Two women carrying small woolly bears met each other on the boardwalk last night, and with a laugh stood their polar pets face to face.

"Allow me to present Teddy B," said the first, bowing with mock politeness.

"Happy to meet you, I'm sure," replied the other, bowing in return. "This is Teddy G."

Then they both laughed. Thus started the use of "The Roosevelt Bears" as a name for all the white pets, large and small.

*New York Times*, July 14, 1906

Though the toy business apparently didn't come up with the idea, they soon supplied the market with what it desired - possibly naming the popular Steiff jointed bears (and similar designs, which appear to be the technical definition of a Teddy Bear) after the famous Roosevelt Bears.

After the two little bears - real live bears - arrived at the Zoological Park in Bronx and attracted such crowds of children to see them, some shrewd dealer in toys saw possibilities in the bear business. He had models made of Teddy-B and Teddy-G and sent them to Germany with an order for two or three thousand like them. From the moment the bears arrived here they sold like hotcakes. Now every steamer from Germany is bringing in fresh consignments of Roosevelt Bears, not only for the originator of the toy bears, but for others who have followed their example.

*New York Times*, October 13, 1906

## The Michtoms & Ideal Toy Company



Original (?) Ideal Toy Teddy Bear, Smithsonian.

According to innumeral sources, the Teddy Bear was created in 1902 or 1903, by Rose and Morris Michtom of Brooklyn, New York, an enterprise that eventually grew into Ideal Novelty and Toy Company/Ideal Toy Company. But the supposedly original Ideal bear (pictured above) was presented as a gift in 1963 by Benjamin Michtom to Kermit Roosevelt, Teddy's son, who in turn gave it to the Smithsonian. If it was indeed made in 1902-03, it wasn't marketed as a "Teddy Bear" at the time. The story of Mr. Michtom asking for Theodore's permission to use his name on the bear in 1902 simply doesn't fit in with the facts. As noted above, the jointed design was created by the Steiffs in about 1902 (it first appeared in a Leipzig fair in 1903), and the term "Teddy Bear" wasn't established until the fall

of 1906. It thus appears the Michtoms neither came up with the design nor the name. Rather, they jumped on the bandwagon like many other manufacturers and importers - **the claim that they created it is inaccurate.**

Another piece of unconfirmed information is that the republicans used bears as an unofficial symbol during the elections of 1904. If so, they would have far more to do with the Berryman cartoons than any toys. That the song *The Teddy Bears' Picnic* was used in 1904 is definitely false, since neither the music nor the lyrics had been written by then.

The speaker rapped: "Attention, now! Stand still, each lad and maid!  
Those 'Teddy Bears' are one year old - of them we're not afraid!"  
By this time they had reached the stand, the Captain now drew nigh.  
He laid one hand upon his heart and heaved a dreadful sigh.

Then spake the bear, "Oh, ladies fair, think not we're come to stay.  
You have it best, for you can rest until we've had our day.  
The fad will die [he winked his eye] with Teddy R., no doubt,  
The moment he leaves Washington we bears are down and out.

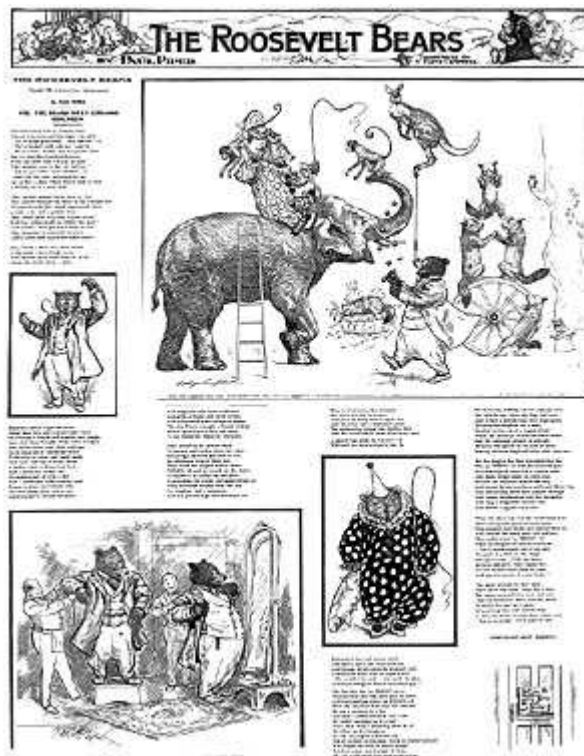
New York Times, December 16, 1906

The poem *The Passing of the Doll* describes the conflict between the dolls and the oh-so-popular bears. As you can see, it manages to establish the age of the bears as well as a (somewhat irrelevant) connection with Teddy R.



Plush bear from Ideal Novelty Company.

The Smithsonian dates the bear above to "circa 1903". Since it's obviously Teddy--B, it cannot be earlier than 1906 (providing the clothes are original).



A sample from February 25, 1906:

## The Roosevelt Bears in Chicago



*'Twould make you laugh  
To see the signature of TEDDY-G:  
A great big paw for the letter T  
And the rest like tracks across the snow,  
And for the G, a bear's big toe.*

**Sources:**

The *New York Times*:

July 21, 1901 - The Teddy-cub

January 26, 1906 - Paw signature

February 1, 1906 - Two live bears

February 25, 1906 - The Chicago episode

July 14, 1906 - "The new fad"

October 13, 1906 - The toys dealer

December 16, 1906 - *The Passing*-poem

Etymology online: teddy bear

\*Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery: Teddy Roosevelt

\*Smithsonian Press: Teddy bear, about 1903

Theodore Roosevelt National Wildlife Refuge: The Teddy Bear incident

Matt Schultz: Seymour Eaton (1859-1916)

Wikipedia: Washington Star; Richard Steiff; Teddy bear's picnic

\*Jewish Virtual Library: Rose and Morris Michtom and the Invention of the Teddy Bear

