

Generations



Did you know? President's Day trivia

By Peg DeMarco - Special to The News Herald

According to www.factretriever.com, some of our past presidents had some pretty interesting, and some unusual, firsts. So, for all the trivia lovers, and taking the presidents in chronological order, here's a couple of facts and stories that may surprise you.

The only president to be unanimously elected was George Washington and he refused to accept his presidential salary, which was \$25,000 a year. George made the shortest inauguration speech on record—133 words and less than two minutes long. He almost didn't make it – he didn't have enough money to get to his own inauguration so he had to borrow \$600 from his neighbor.

Thomas Jefferson and John Adams once traveled to Stratford-upon-Avon to visit Shakespeare's birthplace. While there, they committed the first act of "presidential vandalism" by taking a knife to one of Shakespeare's chairs so they could take home some wood chips as souvenirs.

John Quincy Adams would often skinny dip in the Potomac River at 5 AM in an effort to deal with the stress of being president – difficult to do today without blowing up the Internet.

When Martin Van Buren wrote his autobiography after serving as president, he didn't mention his wife of 12 years. Not even once.

William Henry Harrison holds the record for the longest inauguration speech in history at 8,578 words long and one hour and 40 minutes. Unfortunately, he gave the speech during bad weather and a month later, he was dead from pneumonia, making his term in office the shortest.

The first attempt to assassinate a president was on Andrew Jackson by Richard Lawrence, a house painter. Both of his guns misfired, however—an event that statisticians say could occur only once in 125,000 times. Jackson then chased Lawrence with his walking stick.

Abraham Lincoln was the first president to ever be photographed at his inauguration. In the photo, he is standing near John Wilkes Booth, his future assassin. His son, Robert, is the only man in U.S. history known to have witnessed the assassinations of three different presidents: his father, James Garfield, and William McKinley. After he saw McKinley shot, he vowed he would never again appear in public with an incumbent president.

As a young man, Rutherford B. Hayes fought *lyssophobia*, or the fear of going insane. It didn't stop him from running for president.

James Garfield could write Latin with one hand and Greek with the other hand - simultaneously.

Grover Cleveland was the only president in history to hold the job of a hangman. He was once the sheriff of Erie County, New York, and twice had to spring the trap at a hanging. He was the only president to be elected to two nonconsecutive terms, the 22nd and 24th.

The youngest president was Teddy Roosevelt who became president at age 42 when McKinley was assassinated. JFK was the youngest president elected at the age of 43. "Teddy Bears" were so named when Roosevelt refused to shoot a small bear cub one day. The incident was reported in the news, which inspired a toy manufacture to come out with the cute stuffed animals. During his second run for presidency, Roosevelt was shot by a would-be assassin while giving a speech in Milwaukee. He continued to deliver his speech with the bullet in his chest.

Calvin Coolidge liked to have his head rubbed with petroleum jelly while eating his breakfast in bed. Every so often, he would press all the buttons on the president's desk and hide and watch his staff run in. He would then pop out from behind the door and say that he was just seeing if everyone was working.

Herbert Hoover gave his White House servants strict orders to hide from him whenever he passed by. Those who failed to do so were at risk of being fired. His first job was picking bugs off potato plants, for which he was paid a dollar per hundred bugs.

The "S" in Harry S Truman doesn't stand for anything; therefore, there is no period after his middle initial.

James Earl "Jimmy" Carter was the first president to be born in a hospital. He's also the first known president to go on record as seeing a UFO.

George Bush is the only recorded U.S. president in history to vomit on a foreign dignitary. After he vomited on the Japanese Prime Minister, a new word entered the Japanese language: Bushusuru, meaning "to do the Bush thing," or to publicly vomit.

Visit the website for the rest of some interesting trivia for President's Day!

Peg DeMarco can be reached at pegdemarco@earthlink.net.