

DID YOU KNOW...?

Did one part of the Confederacy not rejoin the Union until 1946?

By Jack Bagley

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The headline question this week needs a rather lengthy answer, so I'm going to be economical on the introduction this time. Just let me say thank you for reading this silly stuff every week and I hope you keep doing so!

Did you know ...

... the collective names for some animal groups make a lot of sense? Properly noted, a group of ferrets is called a business. As for hyenas, they're called a cackle. (And a group of silly people is called Congress.)

... some people deal with insomnia better than others? For example, look at reclusive billionaire Howard Hughes (1905-1976). While living in seclusion in Las Vegas, he was being kept awake at night by the bright neon sign at the nearby Silver Slipper casino. So Hughes bought the casino and dismantled the sign. (I suppose dark curtains never entered Mr. Hughes' mind.)

... one light-year is a pretty long stretch? Most of us know that a light-year is a measurement of the distance light travels in one year. But just how big a distance is it? Well, in miles, it's: 5,878,499,810,000. That's five trillion, eight hundred seventy eight billion, four hundred ninety nine million, eight hundred ten thousand miles for a beam of light moving at ... well ... at the speed of light. (Not just a jaunt to the corner store for candy, you know.)

... one part of the United States that seceded during the Civil War didn't rejoin until the 1940s? If that's surprising, you'll love this: the town that seceded wasn't in the South at all. In 1861, the men of the small community of Town Line, New York voted 85 to 40 to sever ties with the United States and become part of the Confederacy. Town Line is a little place with maybe 2,400 people in it today, and it's not far from the border with Canada. The vote to secede had nothing to do with the reasons the Southern states seceded; rather, the town's voting-age men said they didn't want to have to provide soldiers for the Union army draft, which would have decimated the population. But after the war was over in 1865, the town didn't vote to rejoin the Union. Oh, the people still paid their taxes, voted in national elections and did all the other stuff American citizens can do, they were just not a part of the United States – at least in their minds. In 1945, a reporter dug up the story (which most of the people in Town Line had long forgotten) and a vote was scheduled to formally rejoin the Union – a vote which, amazingly, failed when 29 of 30 voters said “no.” The town leaders decided to send a letter to President Harry S Truman (1884-1972) and ask him what they should do. Tongue firmly in cheek, Truman suggested holding a big town barbecue and, on January 24, 1946, the town did just that, officially taking down Confederate colors and running the U.S. flag up the flagpole once again. A subsequent vote turned out 90-23 in favor of rejoining the Union, and the last Confederate holdout was readmitted after 85 years. The residents of Town Line have made the most of their minor footnote in history, calling themselves the “Last of the Rebels” and, until 2011, using crossed U.S. and Confederate flags as their town police and fire department shoulder patches. (Stubbornness is generational!)

... you may know a “mouse potato”? In fact, you could even be one. A mouse potato is someone who spends an inordinate amount of time at a computer. It's the tech version of a couch potato. (What if the mouse potato does all his or her mousing from the couch? What then?)

... a year is not 365 days long? Sure, that's what the calendar says. But in actuality, the year is 365.25 days long. That's why we have Leap Year; the extra day added every four years makes up for the extra 25% of a day (six hours) that the actual year gives us. Without the addition of February 29 every four years, the calendar would be moving backward one full day every four years in relation to the seasons.

... memories aren't exactly what we think they are? Scientists who study the brain and how it works tell us that when you remember an event, you're actually recalling the last time you remembered it, not the actual event itself. That explains why things aren't exactly the way we recall them. (Heck, I thought it was just because I'm getting old.)

... a satellite orbiting Earth has a message for people of the future? The LAGEOS (Laser Geodynamic Satellite), launched on May 4, 1976, is in a very high orbit around Earth, and is expected to crash back down between eight and ten million years from now. It carries a message sealed inside it to the people of the planet at that far-distant time, telling them of our lives in this time frame. (That assumes, of course, that there will be anybody here then. Or that anybody can read by then.)

... one 75-watt light bulb actually gives off more light than three 25-watt bulbs? (Not only that, fitting three 25-watt bulbs into one light socket is no mean trick.)

... so-called “cavemen” had larger brains than modern humans have? Analysis of the fossilized skulls of Neanderthals, a race of humans which died out about 30,000 years ago, shows that their brain case was an average of 13% larger than those of Cro-Magnons, or modern humans. (But who used it better?)

... it is illegal to annoy pigeons in Massachusetts? (They remember, and they fly over you. I'm just saying.)

Now ... you know!



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