

Strange American Facts

Giant Pond Lake Superior (bordered by Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan) is the largest lake in America—and the second largest in the world! (No. 1 is the Caspian “Sea,” actually a lake.)

Precious Prize Diamonds in your backyard? Quite likely, especially if you live out East or in the Midwest, where huge carat weights have been unearthed. In 1928 Virginia farmer William Honess was plowing his field when he spied a “shiny stone.” Kept as a conversation piece, it was identified 15 years later as a 30-carat diamond, among the largest ever found in the United States!

Rubber Checks Charles Goodyear (1800-1860), the first to commercially develop vulcanized rubber and namesake of the giant Goodyear Tire Co., began his first experiments in 1834 from a prison cell. He was jailed for not paying his bills!

Radio Daze Hot Springs, New Mexico, decided to change its town’s name—and its future—back in 1950. In that year Ralph Edwards promised to heap free publicity on any city or town that would rename itself after his famous radio show “Truth or Consequences.” The Hot Springs folks said okay. Good to his word, Edwards devoted many hours of broadcasting direct from the new namesake, and the resulting fame helped swell the population to over 6,000. Next time you’re in southwest New Mexico, drop in at Truth or Consequences. Along with the thermal springs, fiery hot chili, and Geronimo Days festival, you can relax a while in Ralph Edwards Park.

In the Red The U.S. was totally free of all debt for the first and last time back in 1835!

Kids Us Not Fondly referred to as the “Father of Our Country,” George Washington had no children of his own! (Martha had children from a previous marriage.)

Strange Occurrence While in his late teens, Robert Todd, Abraham Lincoln’s son, was returning home from Harvard University when he lost his balance and fell between two railway cars. A fellow passenger reacted quickly, pulling him from certain death. The helping hand was that of Edwin Booth, brother of John Wilkes, the man who would soon assassinate the young man’s father!

Sky High The final scenes of the film King Kong show that hapless ape holding onto a tall tower atop New York’s Empire State Building. Was this tower a handy prop conceived by Hollywood for Kong’s convenience? Not at all. The tower on the nation’s second tallest building was originally constructed as a docking device for dirigibles!

Food Firsts Upon returning from political service overseas in the late 1700s, Thomas Jefferson introduced Americans to both spaghetti and well-cooked pieces of potato from France, french fries.

American Know-How Chop suey and its companion fortune cookie were both 100 percent American ideas!

Cure All? Originally labeled as “Extract of Tomato,” catsup was sold throughout the U.S. in the early 1800s as a patent medicine!

Timely Tunes Before “The Star-Spangled Banner” became our official national anthem in 1931, our “unofficial” anthem was “Yankee Doodle.”

Land of Cotton The Confederate song “Dixie” was written in 1859 in only three hours by Daniel Emmett, a Northerner born in Ohio! Popular Park

What is our most visited national park? Yellowstone? Grand Canyon? Nope—it’s Great Smoky Mountains (Tennessee, North Carolina) with more than 10 million folks a year.

Squeezably Soft? The first commercially manufactured toilet paper appeared in New York City in 1857. As ‘Gayetty’s Medicated Paper,’ it sold at 50 cents for 500 individual sheets.

Sandy Surprise A desert smack-dab in the middle of Maine? You bet! It started showing up in the 1700s and it’s been spreading out ever since. Covering 1,000 acres just outside Freeport, the sandy stretch amidst surrounding green landscape is a showstopper for tourists. Meanwhile, up in northwest Alaska, one finds another unlikely desert with dunes 100 feet tall!

One ‘an a Two In 1928 a young accordionist from Strasburg, North Dakota, asked the local radio station in Yankton if his novelty band might perform. After feeding the cash-starved group, the station manager arranged to put them on the air. So great was listener reaction that the band was added to the station’s roster of regular entertainers. The one-night gig lasted nine years and launched the illustrious career of the legendary Lawrence Welk.

Toro, Toro! Bullfighting in America? Yep. In 1880 America’s first and last bullfight was held in New York City. So great was the public outcry over cruelty to animals that the “sport” was quickly outlawed.

Single Neighbor Maine is the only U.S. state that borders only one other state—New Hampshire.

Capital Cities Of our nation’s 50 state capitals, 33 of them are not the most populous city in the state.