

The Short-Lived Pony Express



On April 3, 1860, two horseback riders left simultaneously, one from St. Joseph, Missouri, heading west, and the other from Sacramento, California, heading east. After 10 days of relay-team riding and 1,800 miles, riders arrived at both locations bearing mail packets. The mail had never been so speedy, and the legend of the Pony Express was born.

The Pony Express debuted before the advent of radio or telephone, when California was cut off from the rest of the country. Any mail sent from the east arrived by ship or stagecoach several months later. In this world, the arrival of a letter in 10 days' time was lightning fast. The Pony Express was conceived by three owners of a freight business: William H. Russell, William Bradford Waddell, and Alexander Majors. They, along with route superintendent Benjamin Ficklin, devised a route of over 150 relay stations set up across the frontier through Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, Nevada, and California. Riders, who carried up to 20 pounds of mail, were changed every 100 miles, with their horses switched out every 10 to 15 miles. Over 400 horses were purchased and multiple relay stations built and staffed for the endeavor. Speed was the key to the success of the Pony Express, with their fastest delivery being news of the election of President Abraham Lincoln in a record five days' time. However, as telegraph lines began to move westward, the need for the Pony Express began to dissipate.

On October 24, 1861, a mere 18 months after its historic first run, the Pony Express was discontinued as the first transcontinental telegraph line was completed. Despite its brief existence, the Pony Express has long encapsulated the romance of the Wild West: speeding horses, attacks by American Indians, and famous cowboys who worked for the Pony Express, including "Wild Bill" Hickock and "Buffalo Bill" Cody. Perhaps this is why the Pony Express remains a vivid memory in America's history.

April Birthdays

In astrology, those born between April 1–19 are Aries' Rams. As the first sign of the zodiac, Aries are energetic and assertive initiators. With bravery, zeal, and speed, they jump headfirst into life, confident they can navigate any challenges. Those born between April 20–30 are Taurus' Bulls. Bulls are hardworking, ambitious, honest, and dedicated to finishing tasks with a dogged persistence. And once the work is done, a Taurus expects to enjoy the fruits of their labor.

Residents Birthdays

4/1 Jerry H.
4/2 Joan L.
4/13 Nancy Y.
4/15 Margaret J. & Maralyn S.
4/21 Bill D.
4/26 Audrey B.



The Almond Joy Award for March

The dedicated staff here at Almond Heights Senior Living are always striving to provide the best service to our residents and families. The Almond Joy Award is one way we reward those who have gone above and beyond.

The Almond Joy Award has been awarded to caregiver, Adrienne Lilley!

Almond Heights Post

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Celebrating April

Car Care Month

Jazz Appreciation Month

Physical Wellness Month

Easter
April 1

World Party Day
April 3

Barbershop Quartet Day
April 11

National Coin Week
April 15–21

Earth Day
April 22

Richter Scale Day
April 26

Frogs of the Amazon

Most people know that the Amazon is the world's largest rain forest. It covers 2.72 million square miles—almost the size of the 48 contiguous United States—and touches the countries of Brazil, Peru, Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, Guyana, Suriname, and French Guiana. The Amazon represents more than half of the world's remaining rain forest, home to an estimated 390 billion individual trees. It is within this magnificent forest that we find another of nature's marvelous animals: the frog. Scientists are not sure how many frog species inhabit the Amazon, but every year they are finding more. The latest estimate stands at 1,000 different frogs, toads, and tree frogs, which give us 1,000 reasons to celebrate April as Frog Month.

Perhaps the best recognized frog of the Amazon is the poison dart frog, the brilliant celebrity of the rain forest. These amphibians get their name from the indigenous tribes of the Amazon who dip their darts in the frog's poison to kill their prey. Another poisonous frog from the Peruvian Amazon is making headlines for its healing properties. Local tribespeople burn a small part of their skin and apply the toxin so that it is quickly absorbed into the bloodstream. After a few moments of serenity, the poison causes sensations of suffering, which leads to vomiting. Practitioners claim that the experience cures everything from depression to drug addiction and high blood pressure.

Researchers continue to add more frogs to this list of amazing creatures. Nearly one year ago, scientists discovered two new clown frog species, quite a surprise considering that only two species were known to exist. Researchers also found a new transparent *yaku* frog in Ecuador, named for its transparent abdominal skin, which reveals its heart. As recently as last November, researchers came upon the jaguar-snouted tree frog in the middle of an abandoned road, a new species that may already be endangered. This is some food for thought on April 28, Save the Frogs Day.

A Bell Cast into History



Big Ben, the famous bell housed in the Clock Tower of London's Palace of Westminster, is a British icon. Tourists flock to the place so they can hear it ring out. Big Ben has rung even during the worst of times, such as the Blitz, Germany's eight-month bombardment of London during World War II. On April 10, Big Ben will ring out still another milestone, for it will turn 160 years old.

The story of Big Ben begins on October 16, 1834, when fire destroyed the Palace of Westminster, the seat of Britain's government. While the palace was being rebuilt, it was decided that it needed a clock tower. The tower's design fell to George Airy, Astronomer Royal, and Edmund Beckett Denison, a lawyer and self-described expert on clocks and bells. Denison designed the first bell for the tower, including its unique shape and the metal with which it was cast. The 16-ton behemoth did not last long: it cracked under its first test. It was then that Denison turned to Whitechapel Bell Foundry to cast a new bell.

George Mears was the master bellfounder who undertook the re-casting of Big Ben. It took one week to break up the old bell and repurpose its metal. Three furnaces were used to melt the metal. It took 20 minutes to fill the mold and another 20 days for the metal to cool and harden. Mears tested the bell in every way possible before Denison allowed it to leave the foundry, and it left for the Palace of Westminster with great fanfare, pulled by 16 horses along decorated streets with cheering crowds. Big Ben would not ring out until a year later on May 31, 1859. Sir Benjamin Hall, known as "Big Ben," gave a long speech during a debate about what to call the bell. When at last he sat down, members shouted out that the bell be dubbed "Big Ben." Just two months later, Big Ben cracked, the result of a hammer more than twice the necessary weight designed by Denison. Big Ben was simply turned, and the sound we hear today is that distinct, less-than-perfect tone.

A Pocketful of Poetry

If you are unsure of how to celebrate Poetry Month in April, then just wait until April 26, Poem in Your Pocket Day. On this day, choose a poem and carry it with you all day to work, to school, out shopping, or anywhere you may go. You may choose to share it with others or keep it to yourself, but the power of the poem will be with you all day. Perhaps you will choose a celebration of life, such as Walt Whitman's *Full Of Life, Now*; a hymn to nature, such as John Clare's *All Nature Has a Feeling*; a poem about poetry like Archie MacLeish's *Ars Poetica*; or a unique take on love, such as *Heart to Heart* by Rita Dove. Perhaps you won't choose a poem at all but your favorite song lyrics, which you can sing to everyone you meet. Remember, poems, like songs, are meant to be heard, so do not shy away from the wonder of sharing your special poem with those around you.

Pampered and Purposeful



April 27 is Little Pampered Dog Day, but before you poo-poo the notion of honoring little lap dogs, bear in mind that humans lived with lap-sized canines 15,000 years ago. Scientists have traced our history with small dogs to France, where our cave-dwelling ancestors may have used the dogs to both keep them warm and assist them in the hunt. Wild canines called *dholes* grew to less than 17 inches tall, about the size of a beagle or cocker spaniel. Many small dog breeds today bear similarities to these ancient companions: they are tenacious hunters of small ground-dwelling prey animals, they are alert watchdogs that let out loud warnings when intruders are near, and yes, during the Renaissance, miniature poodles were used by nobility as handwarmers. The small dogs were put inside sleeves of shirts, becoming known as "sleeve dogs." Others were used to warm laps in damp castles or on chilly carriage rides. All of these are good reasons to pamper the little dog in your life.

The Son of Music



Mariachi music is an enduring musical tradition in Mexico, played wherever celebrations take place. There will certainly be plenty of mariachi music to enjoy at the Tuscon Mariachi Conference from April 25 to 28. Mariachi's roots go back hundreds of years, to the arrival of Spanish Conquistador Hernán Cortés in Mexico in 1519. Indigenous music, played as part of a religious ceremony, was played with rattles, drums, flutes, and conch shells. The Spanish brought with them harps, guitars, violins, and brass horns, instruments that were played during Catholic mass but quickly became popular outside of church services. Natives created a new type of music, incorporating the new instruments with local musical styles and African musical influences that arrived via the slave trade. Many identify the west Mexican state of Jalisco as the center of this new folk music style known simply as *son*, or *sound*. It was from the *son* of Jalisco that modern mariachi developed.

In the late 1800s and 1900s, the biggest form of entertainment was listening to radio and records. This is when the first modern mariachi bands formed. Violins and trumpets were added to musical orchestras featuring harps, guitars, and woodwinds. These bands became popular, and the music made its way into the rural countrysides. Mariachi was played at parties, on holidays, and in church, and the sound accompanied dances as varied as foxtrots, waltzes, pasodobles, fandangos, pokes, and jarabes. During the Mexican Revolution, many Spanish haciendas had to let workers go, including mariachi musicians. These mariachis wandered and played everywhere they could, and the new Mexican government, eager to promote a unified Mexican identity separate from their Spanish colonizers, presented mariachi as the national music for their young country. While Jalisco may be the "birthplace of mariachi," the reach of this music is now global, with mariachi bands playing as far away as Sweden, Egypt, and Croatia.

PB&J Day

Can you even imagine a world without peanut butter and jelly? April 2 is Peanut Butter and Jelly Day in honor of this ubiquitous sandwich staple. Before the average American finishes high school, they will have consumed 2,000 PB&Js. When did this sandwich achieve celebrity status? The first record of peanut butter and jelly on bread came in 1901, when Julia David Chandler mentioned the recipe in a book detailing the preparation of finger sandwiches for small parties. She wrote, "The combination is delicious, and, so far as I know, original." Then, in 1922, Joseph Rosefield transformed the peanut butter industry by devising a method to keep peanut butter from separating. He called his new peanut butter *Skippy*. At the same time, American manufacturing evolved to mass produce peanut butter and lower the cost, making it affordable to all. When sliced bread was invented in 1928, sandwiches became easier to make and, thanks to lobbying efforts by the peanut butter industry, the PB&J sandwich became standard fare in lunchboxes around the country. If peanut butter and jelly isn't your favorite sandwich, then just wait until April 12, Grilled Cheese Day.

Time for a Change



Times Square is one of New York City's most famous landmarks, but many don't know where it got its name. Before it was Times Square, the intersection was known as Longacre Square, named after London's Long Acre Square. Both places were hubs for horse carriages, brothels, and saloons. When Adolph Ochs acquired *The New York Times* newspaper in 1896, he sought a part of town far from City Hall and "Newspaper Row" for his growing news empire. He found his spot in Longacre Square, which the mayor renamed Times Square for the newspaper's offices on April 8, 1904.