

April Fools Day – Real or Hoaxe

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Is April Fools Day A Holiday? What does it mean? What are we suppose to do on the most recognized Day in all of April? And most importantly, what was the genesis behind this most peculiar day of celebration?

When ask, most noble citizens equate April Fools to its most enjoyable past time, executing the perfectly disguised practicable joke that ends in a roar of laughter and a most certain promise of “I’ll Get You Back” by the unfortunate victim of the Joke.

Fun, Jokes, Laughter, Mischief.....have become the hallmarks of April Fools all over the world, but how did it get started.

April is the fourth month of the year in the Gregorian Calendar, and one of four months with a length of 30 days. April was originally the second month of the Roman calendar, before January and February were added by King Numa Pompilius around 700 BC . It became the fourth month of the calendar year around 450 BC, when it was also given 29 days. Since most Roman months were named in honor of divinities, and April was sacred to Venus, it has been suggested that aprilis was originally her month. The traditional meaning of the name interpreted in Latin is “To Open”, in allusion to its being the season when trees and flowers begin to open.

To us April means many other things.....For those born in April, the birthstone is Diamond or Sapphire, the official flower is either the Daisy or Sweet Pea, although many sources still cite the Tulip. April is National Poetry month, National Sexual Assault Awareness Month and during the month of April we recognize,

- **World Health Day – 7th**
- **Arbor Day**
- **Earth Day – 22nd**
- **Patriots’ Day – 21st**
- **Tax Day – 15th**

However none of these recent observances rise to the level of popularity and mystery as the 1st day of the Month.

By definition a Fool is described as a Stupid person, an idiot, blockhead, bonehead, simpleton, nitwit, dummy, imbecile, moron, nimcompoop, numskull , ignoramus, dunce, oaf, clod, chump, klutz, goose, or airhead. By comparison, when by our actions or lack of actions we are considered to have behaved foolishly then we are relegated to the ranks of the

Unwise	Imprudent	Ill-considered	Indiscreet	Ill-advised	Short-
Sighted	Absurd	Irresponsible	unintelligent	insane	
Witless	Brainless	Silly	Senseless	Preposterous	
Ridiculous	Ludicrous	and just plain	Simpleminded		

So at first blush one could safely conclude that April 1st is given to the Crazies and unpredictables in our society or perhaps we all share a common destiny to laugh and have fun especially when its at the other guys expense.

April Fool's Day

References to Arpril Fool's Day can be found as early as the 1500's. However the early references were infrequent and tended to be vague and ambiguous. William Shakespeare, writing in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, made no mention of April Fool's day, despite being, as Charles Dickens Jr. put it, a writer who delighths in fools in general.

Many theories have been put forward about how the tradition began. Unfortunately, none of them are very compelling. So the origin of the "Custom of Making April Fools" remains as much a mystery to us as it was back in the 1500s.

The Calendar Change Theory

The most popular theory about the origin of April Fool's Day involves the French calendar reform of the sixteenth century.

The theory goes like this: In 1564 France reformed its calendar, moving the start of the year from the end of March to January 1. Those who failed to keep up with the change, or who stubbornly clung to the old calendar system and continued to celebrate the New Year during the week that fell between March 25th and April 1st, had jokes played on them. Pranksters would secretly stick paper fish to their backs. The victims of this prank were thus called "Poisson D'Avril, or April Fish-which, to this day, remains the French term for April Fools----Thus the Tradition was Born.

The calendar-change hypothesis seems, on the surface, like a logical explanation for the origin of April Fools. However, the hypothesis becomes less plausible when you examine the history of calendar reforms in more detail.

Julian Calendar

The Julian Calendar, established by Julius Caesar in 46 BC, made January 1 the first day of the year. But as Christianity spread throughout Europe, efforts were made to christianize the calendar by moving New Year's Day to dates of greater theological significance, such as Christmas or Easter. Some countries continued to use January 1, justifying this as the date of Christ's circumcision. As a consequence, by the 1500s the European calendar system was a mess and many countries were beginning the year on different dates.

Most regions in France had been using Easter as the start of the year since at least the fourteenth century. This caused particular confusion since the date of Easter was tied to the lunar cycle and changed from one year to the next.

Consequently around 1500 many people in France began to use January 1 as the start of the calendar year. In 1563 King Charles IX decreed January 1 to be first day of the year, thus aligning legal convention with what had become the popular practice. The edict became law by the French Parliament on Dec. 22, 1564.

In 1582, Pope Gregory issued a papal decree with sweeping calendar reform. Which included moving the start of the year to January 1, as well as creating a leap-year and eliminating 10 days from the month of October 1582 in order to correct the drift of the calendar. The Pope had no formal power to make governments accept this reform, but he urged Christian nations to do so. France immediately accepted the reform, although it had already changed the start of the year in 1564.

With this history in mind, it becomes clear that the calendar-change hypothesis is a problematic explanation for the origin of April Fool's Day.

Early References

Pre-eighteenth century references to April Fool's Day provide clues about where the custom originated. Unfortunately, many of these references are ambiguous, and their significance is difficult to determine.

What is possibly the first reference to April Fool's Day can be found in the work of Chaucer. In "Nun's Priest's Tale", written around 1392 he makes reference to a foolish Cock and a Sly Fox and tricks that take place on what has been calculated to be April 1st.

Whatever Chaucer may have meant, it is suggestive that he may have been aware of a custom of playing pranks on April 1st.

The next possible reference to April Fool's Day is found in a 1508 poem written by a French Choirmaster and composer who in the poem makes clear reference to the phrase "poisson d'avril" which in French means April Fool.

In 1539 the Flemish writer Eduard De Dene published a comical poem about a nobleman who hatches a plan to send his servant back and forth on absurd errands on April 1st. The servant eventually recognizes that what's being done to him is an April 1st Joke.

So we have very clear references to a custom of playing practical jokes on April 1st. Therefore we can definitely say that April Fool's Day dates back at least to the sixteenth century.

Four Countries, France, Great Britain, Germany and the Netherlands have laid claims to the origin of April Fool's Day.

The French origin theory (the calendar-change hypothesis) was discussed above. Alleges that the custom originated when King Charles IX reformed the calendar, moving the start of the year from April 1 to January 1.

British folklore links April Fool's Day to the town of Gotham, the legendary town of fools located in Nottinghamshire. Legend holds, it was traditional in the 13th century for any road that the King placed his foot upon to become public property. So when the citizens of Gotham heard that King John planned to travel through their town, they refused him entry, not wishing to lose their main road. When the King heard this, he sent soldiers to the town. But when the soldiers arrived in Gotham, they found the town full of lunatics engaged in foolish activities such as drowning fish or attempting to cage birds in roofless fences. Their foolery was all an act, but the king fell for the ruse and declared the town too foolish to warrant punishment. Every since then, according to legend, April Fool's day has commemorated their trickery.

In Germany on April 1, 1530 a meeting of lawmakers was supposed to occur in Augsburg in order to consider various financial matters. Because of time considerations, the meeting did not take place. But numerous speculators, who had bet on the meeting occurring, lost their money and were ridiculed. This is said to have been the origin of the German tradition of playing pranks on April 1st.

On April 1, 1572 Dutch rebels captured the town of Den Briel from Spanish troops led by Lord Alva. This military success eventually led to the independence of the Netherlands from Spain. It is claimed that the Dutch tradition of Pranks on April 1st arose to commemorate the victory over the spanish commander.

Notwithstanding the claims made by the French, The British, The Germans or the Dutch April's Fool Day belongs to everybody. April 1st is recognized and celebrated around the world in every Hemisphere and in every language.

One common characteristic that is shared by all mankind regardless of National origin, Gender, Ethnicity, Age, Language, Religion or political affiliation is our love of laughter and to be amused by jokes and uncanny pranks that exploit humor.

If it is true that Laughter is the Best Medicine then April 1st is the acceptable Haven for Practical Jokers and Pranks.

The Museum of Hoaxes maintains a website of what is considered to be the Top 100 April Fool's Day Hoaxes of all Time. The list is updated each year as new Fools compete to make the Top 100.

#1 The Swiss Spaghetti Harvest

In 1957 the respected BBC News Show Panorama Announced that thanks to a very mild winter the virtual elimination of the dreaded Spaghetti Weevil, Swiss farmers were enjoying a bumper spaghetti harvest. It accompanied this announcement with footage of Swiss peasants pulling strands of Spaghetti down from trees. The station was flooded with calls from people wanting to know how they could grow

their very own spaghetti trees. The BBC could not resist and diplomatically replied that they should “Place a sprig of Spaghetti in a tin of tomato sauce and hope for the best”

#6 Nixon for President

On April 1, 1992 National Public Radio's *Talk of the Nation* program announced that Richard Nixon, in a surprise move, was running for President again. His new campaign slogan was, “I didn't do anything Wrong” and “I won't do it again”. Accompanying this announcement were audio clips of Nixon delivering his candidacy speech, with comedian Rich Little impersonating Nixon's voice. Needless to say, listeners responded immediately and with shock and outrage to the announcement. Talk show host John Hockenberry quickly revealed that it was only a practical joke.

#45 Daylight Savings

On April 1, 1984 the Eldorado Daily Journal, based in Illinois, announced a contest to see who could save the most daylight for daylight savings time. The rules of the contest were simple: beginning with the first day of the daylight savings time, contestants would be required to save daylight. Whoever succeeded in saving the most daylight would win. Only pure daylight would be allowed—no dawn or twilight, thought light from cloudy days would be allowed. Moonlight was strictly forbidden. Light could be stored in any container.

The contest received hugh, nationwide response. The paper's editor was interviewed by correspondents from CBS and NBC and was featured in papers throughout the country. However, for some reason, to this date, no winner has been announced.

#49 Mount Milton Erupts

On April 1, 1980 Channel 7 news in Boston ended with a special bulletin announcing that a 635 Foot hill in Milton, Massachusetts, known as Great Blue Hill, had erupted, and that lava and ash were raining down on nearby homes. Footage was shown of Lava pouring down a hillside. The announcer explained that the eruption had been triggered by a geological chain reaction set off by the recent eruption of Mount St. Helens in Washington State. An audio tape was played of President Carter and the Governor of Mass. Declaring the eruption to be a “serious situation”. At the end of the segment the reporter held up a sign that read “April Fool.” However it was too late, by that time local authorities had already been flooded with frantic phone calls from Milton residents. One resident believing that his home would soon be engulfed by lava, had carried his sick wife outside in an effort to escape. The TV Station was so embarrassed by the Panicked reaction that they apologized for the confusion and the executive producer responsible for the Prank was fired.

#73 The Origin of April Fool's Day Revealed

In 1983 The Associated press was proud to be the first to report that the mystery of the origin of April Fool's Day had finally been solved. Joseph Boskin, A history professor at Boston university had discovered that the celebration had began during the Roman empire when a court jester had boasted to emperor Constantine that the fools and jesters of the court could rule the kingdom better than the Emperor could. In response, Constantine had decreed that the court fools would be given a chance to prove this boast, and he set aside one day of the year upon which a fool would rule the kingdom. The first year Constantine appointed a jester named Kugel as ruler, and Kugel immediately decreed that only the Absurd would be allowed in the Kingdom on that day. Therefore the tradition of April Fools was Born. News media throughout the country reprinted Professor Boskin's story with the enthusiasm of a Christmas Story. Only to learn a few weeks later that Professor Boskins was lying and not a single word of the story was true.

Boston U. apologized profusely, and Professor Boskin became Ex-Professor Boskin.

Whether you are partial to the French version, or the British, or the German or the Dutch or perhaps good olde Professor Boskin it really does not matter how it all started to the average practical jokester because on the First Day of the fourth month each year April and Fools become synonymous. And as one notorious Pransker described; it is far better to be the Jokester rather than the Jokee.

If it is true that Laughter is the Best Medicine then April 1st is our Universal Pharmacy. Is it possible we all harbor a Little Fool??