

AUGUST - BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. William Clark (of the Lewis and Clark Expedition)

William Clark was born on August 1, 1770, in Caroline County, Virginia. He served in the United States militia from 1789 to 1796 but is probably most well known for being an explorer. In 1801, President Thomas Jefferson chose his White House Secretary, Captain Meriwether Lewis, to lead an expedition up the Missouri River and across the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Ocean. Meriwether selected his old army buddy William Clark to go along as second in command. They formed one of the most successful partnerships in the nation's history and led the Lewis and Clark Expedition from 1804 to 1806. They explored many previously uncharted territories.

2. Lincoln Penny First Issued

The Lincoln penny was first released to the public on August 2, 1809. It was designed by sculptor Victor David Brenner and engraved for production by United States Mint Chief Engraver Charles Barber. At that time in America's history, it was considered unseemly to place the image of a real person on a circulating coin. However, when President Theodore Roosevelt saw a bronze plaque featuring the image of Abraham Lincoln created by sculptor Brenner, he thought it would be the perfect design for the U. S. cent coin. Since the slain Lincoln was so revered, the idea was generally accepted and the old taboo ignored. The American public excitedly waited to receive the new coin because it had been highly publicized. To meet the expected demand, the Mint struck more than 25 million Lincoln pennies for its first issue.

3. National Catfish Month

August was designated as National Catfish Month in the late 1980s. Annually, The National Catfish Institute promotes this observance to honor the hard-working catfish farmers in the United States and to highlight the nutritional value of this fish and the wide variety of ways it can be prepared and served. United States catfish are raised in pure freshwater ponds and fed a nutrient-rich diet of floating grain pellets. This is an extremely eco-friendly farming technique that eliminates the "fishy" taste found in many other varieties of fish. Most of the United States catfish farms are found in Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas, and Louisiana. These farms have been family owned and operated for generations, providing a significant source of employment and revenue to those rural areas.

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4. National Kids Day

You know about Mother's Day and Father's Day, but did you know there is also a National Kids Day? It was created in 1994 by an organization called KidsPeace, which is a 128-year-old national children's charity and advocacy group. National Kids day is celebrated on the first Sunday of August. The purpose of the holiday is to promote the value of parents spending more quality time with their children. Families are encouraged to plan meaningful activities that foster closer relationships and stronger parent/child bonds.

5. International Friendship Day

In 1919, Joyce Hall, the founder of Hallmark Cards, created the original idea for Friendship Day. Its purpose was for people to celebrate their friendships by sending greeting cards. In 1935, the United States Congress declared the first Sunday of August as National Friendship Day. Since then, it has been an annual event. In honor of Friendship Day in 1998, Nane Annan, wife of the United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, named Winnie the Pooh as the world's Ambassador of Friendship. According to the Friendship Day declaration, the UN Member States and the civil society are invited to observe this day appropriately, following the culture and other appropriate circumstances or customs of their local, national, and regional communities, including education and public awareness-raising activities. Today, International Friendship Day is celebrated enthusiastically by many nations.

6. Smithsonian Institution Founded

We have the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C. today because a British scientist named James Smithson (1765-1829) left his entire estate to the United States to create such an establishment for "the increase and diffusion of knowledge." It is unclear why Mr. Smithson chose the United States as his beneficiary for this purpose, but our nation gratefully accepted the bequest. On August 10, 1846, an Act of Congress signed by President James K. Polk founded the Smithsonian Institution. Since then, it has grown into the world's largest museum, research complex and includes 19 museums and galleries and the National Zoological Park.

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7. First IBM Personal Computer Introduced

In July of 1980, representatives from IBM met with Microsoft's Bill Gates to discuss the possibility of writing an operating system for IBM's new "personal" computer. IBM had observed the growing personal computer market for some time and decided the company should create its own line of personal computers and develop a brand new operating system to go with it. Twelve engineers, led by William C. Lowe, met in Boca Raton, Florida, to design and build this computer. On August 12, 1981, IBM released its new computer and named it the IBM PC. The "PC" stood for personal computer. Thus, IBM was responsible for making the term "PC" popular.

8. National Peach Month

The peach is a member of the rose family and grows on trees and shrubs. Peaches originated in China and are part of Chinese culture, where they believe peaches bring good luck, abundance, and protection. This sweet and juicy summertime fruit is a good source of vitamins A, B, and C, and a medium-sized one contains only 37 calories. The pleasing qualities of the peach have led to the use of its name in English idiomatic expressions. For example, a person may say he's feeling "peachy" when he is having a good day and things are going very well. The phrase "you're a real peach" came from the tradition of giving a peach to a special friend. The United States consumes about 25% of the world's peaches. Most of those grown in this country come from Georgia and California. Georgia is known as the Peach State. In 1982, former President Ronald Reagan proclaimed August as National Peach Month because of the fruit's nutritional value and its monetary contribution to the nation's economy.

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9. Davy Crockett

Davy Crockett was born on August 17, 1786, in Hawkins County, Tennessee. He grew up on the American frontier, and his father put him to work driving cattle to Virginia when he was only twelve years old. Later, his knowledge of the frontier proved very beneficial when serving as a scout and hunter for the military. He went on to have a successful political career at the local, state, and national levels. Crockett was elected to the Tennessee Legislature in 1823 and the United States Congress in 1827, 1829, and 1833. He is perhaps most famous for his death at the Battle of the Alamo in San Antonio, Texas, on March 6, 1836. Davy Crockett had gone to Texas looking for new land. While there, he joined the Texas Volunteers. They fought bravely to defend the Alamo. All of the defenders died during the siege, however, and the fort fell to Mexican troops. This famous battle became a rallying point for Americans, and many folk heroes were born in its wake. Among them was Davy Crockett.

10. Hawaii Becomes 50th State

Hawaii became the 50th state of the United States of America on August 21, 1959. It is one of the smallest states in the union and the only one made up entirely of islands. There are eight main islands in all, which are the tops of volcanoes. Some of these volcanoes are still active. Among many other things, Hawaii is known for its pineapple industry and its numerous beautiful beaches. It is a popular vacation destination, and tourism provides a large share of the state's revenue.