

Yankee Steve's Almanac
for the week of October 21, 2008

I bet after seeing us, George Washington would sue us for calling him "father."
Will Rogers 1879-1935

My men yonder are the Hessians. They were brought here for seven pounds and ten pence a man. Are you worth more? Prove it. Tonight, the American flag floats from yonder hill or Molly Stark sleeps a widow.
John Stark, Revolutionary general 1728-1822

A reasonable amount o' fleas is good for a dog - keeps him from broodin' about bein' a dog.
Edward Noyes Westcott, American banker and writer 1846-98

Who recalls when folks used to git along without something if it cost too much?
Kin Hubbard, American humorist (1868-1930)

Necessity never made a good bargain.
Benjamin Franklin 1706-90

Adapted from an unknown Internet source

The real reason that the Ten Commandments cannot be displayed in courthouses is this - You cannot post "Thou Shalt Not Steal," "Thou Shall Bear False Witness," and "Thou Shalt Not Commit Adultery," in a building full of lawyers, judges, and politicians. It creates a hostile work environment!

Ten Largest Heists of All Time (adapted from *The London Times*)

1. Scream

Edvard Munch's famous painting, "The Scream," was sensationally stolen twice from the National Gallery of Norway.

In 1994 two men took just 50 seconds to climb a ladder, smash through a window of the Gallery and cut the painting from the wall with wire cutters. A few months later the thieves offered the painting back in exchange for a \$1 million ransom, but the offer was refused. Luckily a sting operation successfully recovered the painting, and four men were convicted and sentenced for the theft in 1996.

Ten years later, the painting was stolen again, this time alongside Munch's "Madonna." Two armed, masked robbers burst into the Oslo museum in 2004, snatching the artworks from the walls as horrified tourists looked on. Police recovered the works in 2006, but found they had been scratched, torn, and showed signs of dampness. They have now been restored and are hanging back in the Gallery where visitors are subjected to tighter security checks.

2. Another art heist

The culprits of this 1990 heist are still at large today. Just a few hours after Boston's St. Patrick's Day festivities, two men dressed as police officers knocked on a side door at the Isabella Gardner Museum. The security guards admitted them only to then realise that they were not police, but thieves. The guards were handcuffed, gagged, and dragged into the basement while the thieves cut three Rembrandts from their frames as well as "The Concert" by Johannes Vermeer and "Landscape with an Obelisk" by Govert Flinck. In total they snatched 12 paintings worth an estimated £300 million. The paintings have never been found, and the museum was never reimbursed.

3. America's most notorious hijacker

"D. B. Cooper" is still at large after 35 years of supposedly being on the run. On November 24, 1971 Cooper hijacked Northwest Orient Airlines flight 305 with a briefcase "bomb." He handed a flight attendant a note saying, "I have a bomb in my briefcase. I will use it if necessary. I want you to sit next to me. You are being hijacked." The flight attendant alerted the pilot who was instructed by radio control to comply with Cooper's requests which included a parachute and \$200,000.

Passengers were dropped off at the Seattle-Tacoma airport in exchange for the parachute and cash. Loot in hand, Cooper instructed the pilot to take to the skies again, this time headed for Mexico. When Cooper jumped from the plane it was flying through a heavy rainstorm with no light source coming from the ground due to cloud coverage. Because of the poor visibility, his descent went unnoticed by the jet fighters tracking the airliner. He is believed to have landed around Ariel, Washington, although his precise landing zone remains unknown. The whereabouts of Cooper (or his remains) has been described as "one of the great crime mysteries of our time."

4. The Great Train Robbery

This notorious robbery involved a 15-member gang, led by Bruce Reynolds and including Ronnie Biggs, who took £2.6 million from a Royal Mail train in Buckinghamshire in 1963. The men brought the Glasgow to London mail train to a halt by tampering with the signals. They then swarmed onto the train, badly injuring the driver, and grabbed 120 mail bags containing used bank notes. Most of the gang members were caught after police discovered their fingerprints at their hideout at Leatherslade Farm, near Oakley, Buckinghamshire. The robbers were tried, sentenced and imprisoned.

Biggs escaped from prison 15 months into his sentence and fled to Brazil but he returned to the UK in 2001 to serve the remainder of his 30-year sentence. Charlie Wilson also escaped prison and lived in a quiet suburban street in Canada until his wife made the mistake of telephoning his parents in England enabling Scotland Yard to track him down.

5. Brinks Mat

In 1983 six robbers broke into the Brinks Mat warehouse at Heathrow Airport, England. They were going to steal £3 million in cash; but when they arrived they found ten tonnes of gold bullion, worth £26 million.

The gang got into the warehouse thanks to security guard Anthony Black, who was the brother-in-law of the raid's architect Brian Robinson. Scotland Yard quickly discovered the

family connection and Black confessed to aiding and abetting the raiders, providing them with a key to the main door and giving them details of security systems.

Robinson was sentenced to 25 years imprisonment for armed robbery; Black got six years, and served three.

Three tonnes of stolen gold has never been recovered. It is claimed that anyone wearing gold jewelry bought in the UK after 1983 is probably wearing Brinks Mat.

6. Shergar

“Shergar the Wonder-Horse”, who was worth around £10 million, was kidnapped from a stables owned by the Aga Khan in Ireland in 1983. The theft came just before the breeding season, where Derby winner Shergar was due to mate with up to 55 mares.

Shergar was never found and his kidnappers have never been officially identified but most evidence points to the involvement of the IRA. The thieves demanded a ransom of £2 million, but the horse’s shareholders refused to pay. Insurers also refused to pay without evidence of the horse’s death.

Sean O’Callaghan, a convicted murderer who turned into a “supergrass” against the IRA, wrote a book called *The Informer* in which he claims the horse died because its IRA captors could not handle the animal.

“To handle Shergar, the IRA recruited a man who had once ‘worked with horses.’ But working with horses is one thing: dealing with a thoroughbred stallion, which can be a difficult, highly-strung creature at the best of times, is another story altogether,” he said. He went on to claim that the horse got out of control in its horsebox, injured itself and died within days.

7. Bull semen . . .

From prize horses to bull semen! It may be unsavoury, but it is worth a lot of money. In 2005, a farmer at Stonewood Acres in Smithburg, Maryland, returned to his farm to discover that a 70-pound tank filled with bull semen had been opened up, with sixty-five "straws" containing the sperm of nearly 50 bulls missing.

The missing straws were worth about \$75,000. The farmer, who had taken years to build up his supply, was planning on selling the semen at a cattle show. “Frozen bull semen is big business because it saves on the transportation cost of putting a bull and a cow into the same pen to breed. Frozen semen can also last for many years, outliving the bull who produced it,” according to the *Washington Post*.

The number of potential suspects was limited because of the specialized knowledge and equipment required to keep and sell the semen, yet the culprit was never found.

8. Oscar jewelry theft

Recently thieves broke into the showroom of an Italian jeweler and stole £10 million worth of diamonds while its owners were in Los Angeles hosting a party to celebrate the Oscars. The heist took place at the Damiani showroom in Milan’s fashion district as celebrities such as Tilda Swinton were sporting Damiani jewelry at the Academy Award ceremony.

The thieves had spent more than a month digging a tunnel from a disused cellar in an adjoining building. Police said that the drilling had been heard for weeks but was presumed to be part of continuing building works next door.

The four, disguised as policemen, overpowered the staff and tied them up with electrical cable, sealed their mouths with tape, and locked them in the washroom. They then helped themselves to jewelry from the safe-deposit boxes and left the way they had come.

Police said that the entire operation had taken little more than 40 minutes. The employees managed to free themselves and raise the alarm, but by then the gang was long gone. The thieves whom police suspect may have had “inside assistance” have still not been caught.

9. Bank tunnel robbery

Thieves in Brazil netted \$65 million after digging a 200m tunnel into a bank from a nearby house. The heist, which occurred in 2005, is Brazil’s largest ever bank robbery. About ten men are thought to have spent three months digging a hole from the house leased under the name of a fake gardening business.

The theft happened over the weekend, but was not discovered until Monday morning because the bank closure. Neighbours saw vanloads of material being removed each day but never reported it. Only two suspects have been caught and only \$500,000 has been recovered.

10. Castle tourist theft

In 2003 a painting worth up to £50 million, “Madonna with the Yarnwinder,” was snatched from the Duke of Buccleuch's home at Drumlanrig Castle in Scotland. The painting was stolen by two men who joined a public tour and overpowered a guide.

Julian Radcliffe, Chairman of the Art Loss Register, said such a heist “would probably be easier to do it when it was open to the public rather than at night when all the alarms were set.” The painting is still missing despite the offer of a substantial reward for information leading to the arrest of the thieves.

Adapted e-mail from an unknown source

One day a teacher asked her students to list the names of the other students in the room on two sheets of paper, leaving a space in between each name.

Then she told them to think of the nicest thing they could say about each of their classmates and to write it down next to their names.

It took the remainder of the class period to finish their assignment, and as the students left the room, each one handed in their paper.

That Saturday the teacher wrote down the name of each student on a separate sheet of paper, and listed what everyone had said about their fellow student.

On Monday she gave each student his or her list. Before long, the entire class was smiling. “Really?” she heard whispered. “I never knew that I meant anything to anyone!” and, “I didn't know others liked me so much,” were most of the comments.

No one ever mentioned those papers in class again. She never knew if they discussed them after class or with their parents, but it didn't matter. The exercise had accomplished its purpose. The students were happy with themselves and one another. Then in May those students were promoted to the next grade.

Years later one of those students was killed in Vietnam, and his teacher attended the funeral. Never before had she had seen a serviceman in a military coffin. He looked so handsome and mature.

The church was crowded with his friends. One by one those who loved him took a last walk by the coffin. The teacher was the last one to bless him. And as she stood there, one of the soldiers who acted as a pallbearer came up to her. "Were you Mark's math teacher?" he asked. She nodded, "Yes." Then he said, "Mark talked about you alot."

After the funeral, most of Mark's former classmates went together to a luncheon. Mark's mother and father were there, obviously waiting to speak with his teacher. "We want to show you something," his father said, taking a wallet out of his pocket. "They found this on Mark when he was killed. We thought you might recognize it."

Opening the billfold, he carefully removed two worn pieces of notebook paper that had obviously been folded, taped, and refolded many times. The teacher knew without looking that these pages were the ones on which she had listed all the good things each of Mark's classmates had said about him.

"Thank you so much for doing that," Mark's mother said. "As you can see, Mark treasured it."

Then all of Mark's former gathered around. Charlie smiled rather sheepishly and said, "I still have my list. It's in the top drawer of my desk at home."

One wife said, "Steve asked me to put his in our wedding album."

"I have mine, too," Marilyn said. "It's in my diary."

Then Wendy, another classmate, reached into her purse and took out her wallet and showed her worn and frayed list to the group. "I carry this with me at all times," she declared without batting an eyelash. She continued, "I think we all saved our lists."

That's when the teacher finally sat down and cried. She wept for Mark and for all his friends who would never see him again.

In our rush to do things, sometimes we forget to tell our loved ones how we feel. So please let them know that they are special and important to you before it's too late.

If you can read this, thank a teacher!

If you can read this in English, thank a soldier!!