

GOOD



665

Funny  
History  
Facts & Terrifying  
Truths About  
Yesteryear



OLD  
DAYS,

MY ASS



David A. Fryxell







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# GOOD OLD DAYS, MY ASS



by David A. Fryxell



FAMILY  
TREE  
BOOKS

CINCINNATI, OHIO

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## NOSTALGIA ISN'T WHAT IT USED TO BE

When the economy is in the dumps, wars rage on without end, partisanship reigns in politics, and you can't even catch a plane without having to take your shoes off to go through security, it's tempting to long for the "good old days." It's not just the headlines that make those halcyon days of yesteryear seem rosier: We have Bieber Fever, while they had Elvis. We pay an ever-escalating fortune to see a doctor for five brusque minutes, while back then, the friendly family physician made house calls. We sit fuming in commuter traffic, whereas in the good old days, the streetcars took you wherever you wanted to go while folks sang "Clang, clang, clang went the trolley."



Okay, maybe that last is a bit romanticized, but the Judy Garland movie about the 1904 World's Fair that gave us the trolley song, *Meet Me in St. Louis*, perfectly captures the idealized picture most of us have about the past. Back in those dreamy days gone by, our ancestors apparently had little more to worry about than which song to warble next while gathered in familial warmth around the piano. In the movie's world of the Smith family, the greatest crises arise over whether one daughter's boyfriend will finally get around to proposing and if Mr. Smith will move the family to New York, where he's gotten a better job. That would mean missing the fair! Even Katie the maid seems content, though she makes a mere twelve dollars a month.

The turn-of-the-century truth is a bit harsher. Those trolleys actually crawled along, despite the clanging of their bells, because good old-fashioned horse transportation wouldn't get out of their way. (The horses left behind smelly reminders of their passage—more than three million pounds a day in early-1900s New York City, where Mr. Smith wanted to relocate.) The gas lamps that give the world of *Meet Me in St. Louis* its warm glow were fountains of

soot that left a grimy residue everywhere, blackened ceilings, corroded metal, and killed houseplants. They also had a nasty tendency to explode. Before the advent of modern inspection, there's no telling what was actually in the corned beef and cabbage that Katie the maid cooked up for the Smith family. Many of little daughter "Tootie" Smith's peers were working in cramped and dangerous mills and factories instead of enjoying an idyllic childhood; if child laborers got maimed for life, their parents might be paid one dollar in compensation.

Not to mention the prospect of spending summer in sultry St. Louis without air conditioning.

But maybe the "good old days" weren't quite so long ago. Surely the middle of the twentieth century was a better time (if you can overlook the sixty million deaths in the Second World War) than these troubled first years of the twenty-first century? Another song, nicely, if ironically, expresses our contemporary longing for *those* "good old days"—the theme from Norman Lear's TV sit-com, *All in the Family*:



"Boy, the way Glenn Miller played. Songs that made the hit parade.

Guys like us, we had it made. Those were the days.

Didn't need no welfare state. Everybody pulled his weight.

Gee, our old LaSalle ran great. Those were the days.

And you know who you were then, girls were girls and men were men."

Of course, songwriters Lee Adams and Charles Strouse puncture Archie Bunker's gauzy reminiscence with the next line: "Mister, we could use a man like Herbert Hoover again. You mean the Herbert Hoover under whose presidency the Great Depression began? Well, maybe there were a few things wrong with the good old days, after all.

Indeed, when Archie was growing up in those "Hooverville" days, families like his were probably in bread lines. Even when the economy turned around, that old LaSalle had no airbags or seat belts, much less GPS navigation, and got less than ten miles a gallon. Automotive fatality rates per mile were at least five times what they are today. "Girls were girls," but women had little opportunity to do anything besides be a housewife in a "man's world." The song goes on, "People seemed to be content. Fifty dollars paid the rent"—but back in 1944, when the United States' average rent was in fact fifty dollars, the average



annual wage was just \$2,400 a year. And even people's "contentment" was no doubt tempered by the constant fear of contracting polio, which peaked at 58,000 cases in the United States in 1952—before the Salk polio vaccine was introduced in 1955.

Few of us would really want to back to the "good old days" of polio and typhoid fever, child labor, and adulterated food, much less a world without air-conditioning, color television, computers, and the Internet. But it's easy to forget or gloss over just how rough our ancestors had it in those often-terrifying days of yesteryear.

The factoids and historical nuggets in this book aim to entertainingly remind readers how distorted our rose-tinted view of the past really is. While occasionally offering examples from ancient times, its focus is mostly on more recent "good old days," especially in America. Since most people are at least dimly aware of the big-picture shortcomings of life back when—world wars, slavery, mass slaughter, subjugation of indigenous peoples—this book emphasizes instead the day-to-day horrors and inconveniences of ordinary life. That's not to diminish the awfulness of wars and other atrocities, but rather to remind us that even when our forebears weren't killing or enslaving each other, life was no picnic. Just getting by from breakfast to bedtime was a challenge through most of human history. The "good old days" for most people were a filthy, dangerous, exhausting slog simply to survive.

Admittedly, that's not exactly the stuff of popular songs. But the next time you feel like griping about doffing your shoes in airline security, maybe it will help to remember that people haven't always *had* airplanes—and that the railroads whose era we romanticize were a rolling death trap that claimed more lives than some wars. Or, if you're frustrated about the long wait in your doctor's office, try passing the time by listing all the diseases you no longer have to worry about being diagnosed with. Even when it comes to entertainment, as you channel-surf for something diverting, keep in mind that for every Elvis and Glenn Miller there enjoyed back when, there were also flea circuses and theater fires. Our ancestors would have been thrilled at the chance to choose from five hundred channels, even with "nothing" on.

So sit back in your house with central heat and air-conditioning, flick on a lightbulb without fear of fire or electrocution, perhaps sip a cool beverage untainted by toxic chemicals or human waste, and let's journey back into the real "good old days." I promise, the terrifying truths about yesteryear will leave you breathing a sigh of relief that you live in the twenty-first century.

# 1 PATENTS THAT SHOULD STILL BE PENDING

Failed and foolish inventions, and the rocky road to progress



## 1 ➤ For your eyes only

Shy about how you look in a swimsuit? Maybe you need a “bathing machine,” invented by a Quaker in 1753. It consisted of a horse drawn half-carriage containing a “**modesty tunnel**” that allowed swimmers (fully clothed, mind you) to wade into the ocean in complete privacy.

## 2 ➤ They knew it like the backs of their hands

Before the invention of the blackboard in 1809 (or 1801 or 1823, depending on the account) teachers had no way to present information to all students at once. The dilemma was epitomized by Olive M. Isbell, who opened the first school in California in 1846—after the blackboard’s invention, but before its arrival in the Golden State. Lacking not only a blackboard but also slates or paper, she resorted to **writing the alphabet on the backs of her pupils’ hands.**



### **3** ➤ **If he'd died, we might have been spared *Xanadu***

John Joseph Merlin, the inventor of roller skates, discovered his creation's limitations the hard way in his spectacular debut at a London masquerade party in 1760: Making a grand entrance, he rolled into the ballroom atop two pairs of iron wheels, playing a violin. But according to a contemporary account, **Merlin's skates lacked "the means of retarding his velocity or commanding its direction."** So "he impelled himself against a mirror of more than five hundred pounds value, dashed it to atoms, broke his instrument to pieces, and wounded himself most severely."

### **4** ➤ **It's still faster than post**

The laying of the first trans-Atlantic communications cable in 1858 was hailed by President Buchanan, in a cable to Queen Victoria, as "a triumph more glorious, because far more useful to mankind, than was ever won by conqueror on the field of battle." It wasn't exactly a speedy triumph, however: **The first trans-Atlantic telegram took more than seventeen hours to transmit.**

### **5** ➤ **Short-circuit at 20,000 leagues under the sea**

The "glorious" triumph of the trans-Atlantic cable would last only one month. Beneath the waves, the cable's insulation began to deteriorate. An excess of voltage, applied in hopes of speeding transmission **fried the already-vulnerable wires.** Transatlantic telegraphy would not be permanently restored for eight years.

### **6** ➤ **If only he hadn't been so meticulous**

Johann Philipp Reis, a German schoolteacher, actually beat Alexander Graham Bell in inventing the telephone by fifteen years. But Reis's invention **worked only when the electrical contacts were dusty**—and Reis ordinarily kept his equipment spotless. He died thinking his telephone was a failure.

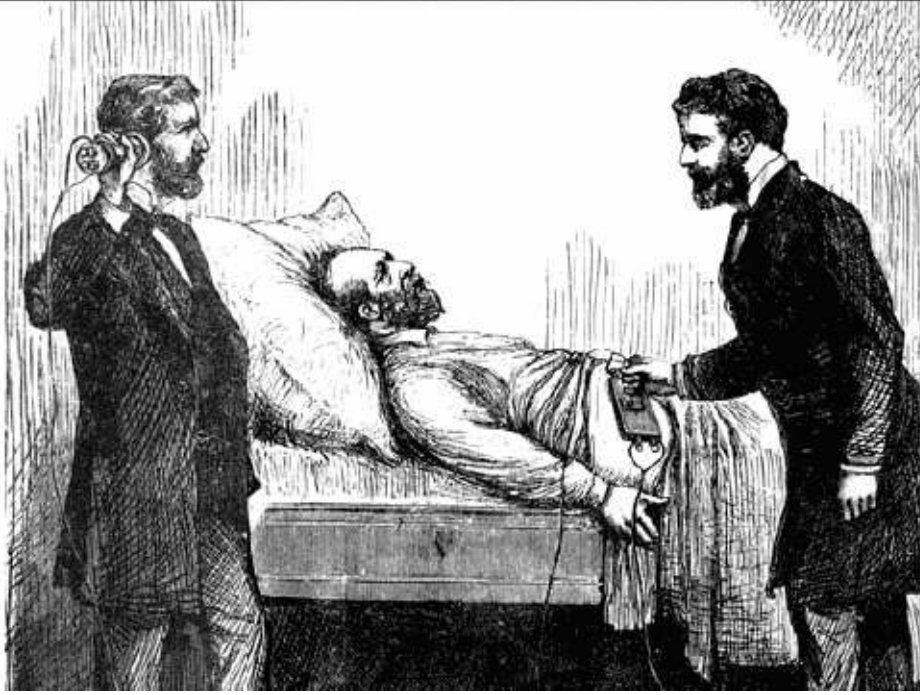
### **7** ➤ **Telegraphing the punch**

**A Western Union internal memo in 1876 dismissed the telephone** as having "too many shortcomings to be seriously considered as a means of communication."

### **8** ➤ **These are the bounciest bullets I've ever seen!**

The multitasking Alexander Graham Bell also came up with a metal detector, part of his exhaustive, if mostly wrongheaded efforts, to save the life of President James Garfield.

wounded by an assassin. Bell's detector, designed to locate the bullets still within the dying president's body, worked like a charm in the lab but mysteriously failed in Garfield's sickroom. Only when it was much too late was it discovered that Bell's invention had been detecting the metal springs in Garfield's bed instead of the assassin's bullets.



## 9 ➤ Wind the alarm!

An 1870s burglar alarm design relied on a clockwork mechanism. You wound it up, then set a triggering lever and placed the wedge-shaped booby trap at the foot of a door, securing it with a spike pushed into the floor. An unwitting burglar opening the door would depress the lever and set off a loud alarm bell.

## 10 ➤ For whom the bell tolls

Responding to Victorians' fixation with the fear of being buried alive, inventor George Bateson marketed the Bateson Revival Device, advertised as "a most economical, ingenious and trustworthy mechanism, superior to any other method, and promoting peace of mind amongst the bereaved in all stations of life. A device of proven efficacy, in countless instances in this country and abroad." Popularly known as a "Bateson's Belfry," the device, patented in 1852, used an iron bell attached to a cord placed in the hand of the (maybe) deceased. The least bit of subterranean motion, it was said, would ring the bell. Though the invention made Bateson wealthy, his own obsession with premature burial led him to take the drastic step of dousing himself with linseed oil and committing suicide by setting himself on fire in 1886.

## 11 ➤ It's right under your nose!

Moustaches were a constant dinner time challenge for men in the nineteenth century. Among the many inventions designed to keep facial hair out of your soup (and vice versa) was the **moustache shield** patented in 1876 by Virgil A. Gates. The moustache-sized band was held in place by straps around the ears.

## 12 ➤ The truth comes to light

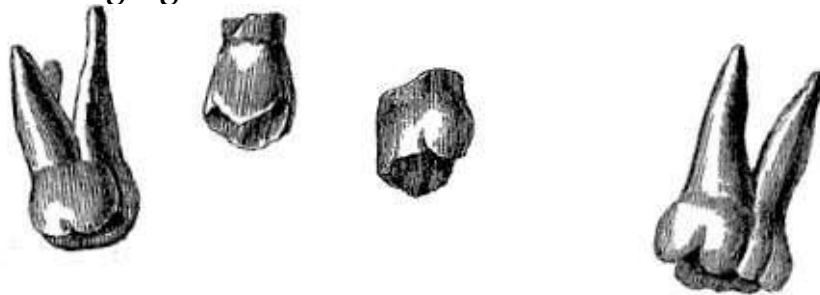
The great Thomas Edison's first major demonstration of incandescent electric lights at his Menlo Park laboratory in 1879, in which two buildings glowed with lights, was **mostly fake**. His overworked glass blowers had been able to make only thirty-four light bulbs, so the balance was made up by old-fashioned gas lamps.

## 13 ➤ Whoa, Nellie!

A subsequent, grander Edison demonstration, set to debut in September 1882, involved lighting an entire section of lower Manhattan. Horses behaved skittishly around the district that was being wired for electricity—a mystery that was solved when it was found that **leaking electricity was zapping their metal horseshoes**.

## 14 ➤ Nothing to smile about

Edison's great Wall Street demonstration also ran into problems back at the lab. **Several of his assistants' teeth fell out because of mercury poisoning** from overexposure to the mercury pump used in making light bulbs.



## 15 ➤ Don't touch that wire!

But it wasn't just the "Wizard of Menlo Park" and his crew that occasionally ran afoul of the eccentricities of electricity. In 1896, Edison's former partner, Franklin Pope, **electrocuted himself while fiddling with the wiring of his own house**. The news convinced many that this newfangled electricity would never prove safe.

## 16 ➤ Think of it as a private fireworks display

Even after electrical sockets became common on the walls of houses—at first they were

installed only overhead, as part of light fixtures—it required some courage to use them. Wall sockets commonly emitted smoke and ominous crackling sounds, and **sometimes even shot sparks out into the room.**

## **17** ➤ **Some dense ideas**

Not everything Thomas Edison touched proved so, well, electric—he had 1,093 patents, after all. Among his more half-baked ideas was an obsession with making things from cement—not just buildings, but **cement pianos and phonograph cabinets.** Although he formed the Edison Portland Cement Company to pursue his dream of cement products, it never lived up to his hopes.

## **18** ➤ **Turning their weapons against them**

Thomas Edison also developed plans to construct gigantic electromagnets for the battlefield so powerful that not only could the magnets stop bullets in-flight, but would **send them whizzing back to shoot the enemy that had fired them.**

## **19** ➤ **You're getting sleepy**

Edison also envisioned “electrically charged atomizers” that would be able to **put enemy armies into mass comas.**

## **20** ➤ **Write this way**

The first ballpoint pen was patented in 1888 by Massachusetts tanner John Loud. His complete pen used four tiny balls, ink made from lampblack and castor oil, and **had to be held straight up and down to write.** Designed to mark on leather and other rough surfaces, Loud's pioneering pen, not surprisingly, never found true commercial application.

## **21** ➤ **Life before programmable appliances**

Tea lovers had to go to pretty convoluted lengths in the early 1900s to wake up to a piping hot cup of their favorite beverage. One elaborate solution was to attach an alarm clock to a teakettle. **When the alarm went off, it struck a match against moving sandpaper which lit a small burner underneath the kettle of water.** When the water boiled, the pressure of the steam would lift a hinged flap, tilting the kettle to fill a teapot waiting underneath.

## 22 ➤ Apparently chicken blindness was a real problem

Eye-glasses for chickens? The spectacles patented in 1902 by Andrew Jackson Jr. (no relation to the seventh president) were **designed to protect hens' eyes from being pecked by rival birds**—not (we're pretty sure) to improve their view of the barnyard.



## 23 ➤ That had to suck

Early vacuum cleaners were not exactly convenient. Patented in 1901, Hubert Cecil Booth's "Puffing Billy" was so big that it **required a horse-drawn cart to reach a customer's home**. With the oil-fueled engine parked outside, a cleaning crew hauled hoses into the house through doors and windows. Nonetheless, wealthy society ladies threw "vacuum cleaning parties," where guests sipped tea and lifted their feet for Booth's uniformed crew.

## 24 ➤ Vacuum and home gym all in one

Sometimes mechanized cleaning also involved a workout: The Kotten vacuum cleaner, produced in 1910, required the operator to **stand on a platform and "rock from side to side like a teeter-totter,"** working twin bellows.

## 25 ➤ Quite a stretch

So challenging were the musical compositions of Stravinsky, Debussy, and other composers of the age that pianists were encouraged to stretch their fingers—using a **special finger stretching device invented in 1910**. Careful, though: It was said that Igor Stravinsky damaged his hands by employing the gizmo too vigorously.

## 26 ➤ A leap of faith

The newfangled era of air travel soon brought its own ancillary inventions, not all of them as successful as the Wright Brothers'. Take, for example, the ill-fated **parachute jacket** invented by Franz Reichert in 1912. The idea was simple: Why bother with a separate parachute when

you could incorporate one into your jacket? Reichert planned a headline-grabbing demonstration of the parachute jacket in which he would leap off the Eiffel Tower. He leaped. The parachute failed to deploy. He died.

## **27** ➤ **What am I, a mind-reader?**

A 1919 article envisioned **machines in every office that would read executives' minds, doing away with the need for dictation**; stenographers, however, would still be required to transcribe the CEOs' thoughts.

## **28** ➤ **You won't want to hit "snooze"**

In 1919, J.D. Humphrey patented a design for an "alarm clock" that **woke you up with a blow to the forehead**. The clock mechanism triggered a bedside baton on a pivot to drop, bonking the sleeper on the head.

## **29** ➤ **Tomorrow's forecast is coming up ... in six months**

The first attempts to use mathematical calculations to predict the weather weren't much help with whether to take an umbrella today. An early attempt at "numerical weather prediction" by mathematician Lewis Fry Richardson took **several months to calculate a six-hour forecast near Munich**—which proved wildly inaccurate. Undaunted, in a 1922 book Richardson envisioned 64,000 mathematicians performing the necessary calculations simultaneously.

## **30** ➤ **Why do it yourself?**

Henry Ford imagined a future in which everything would be done by machines, where a man would "press a button by the side of the bed and find himself **automatically clad, fed, exercised, amused, and put to bed again.**"

## **31** ➤ **You are here**

A 1920s version of today's GPS navigation devices, lacking modern computers and satellites, relied instead on paper maps: **The wristwatch-sized gizmo used a series of tiny maps that owners could scroll through** using little knobs at top and bottom.

## **32** ➤ **A lesson in stick-to-it-iveness**

Masking tape, invented by Richard Drew in 1925, launched a whole industry for the



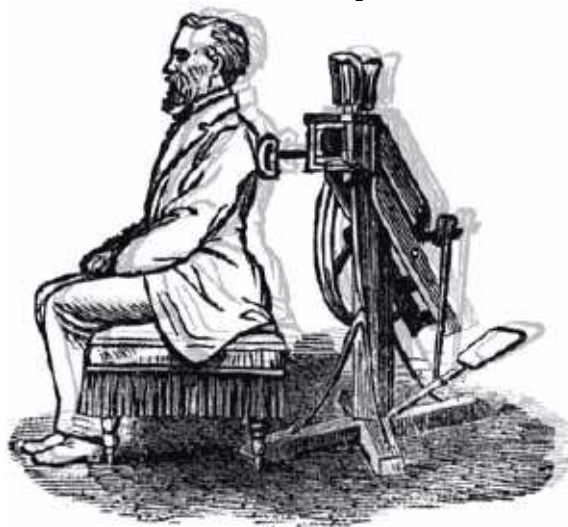
Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Co. (3M)—but it almost didn't happen. At the time, the company was focused on sandpaper. Drew visited an auto body shop in St. Paul, Minnesota to test a new batch of sandpaper, and observed the tribulations of a crew painting the then-popular two-tone cars. Drew went back to his lab and experimented with backings and adhesives for masking tape, until company President William McKnight told him to quit fooling around and get back to sandpaper. Undeterred, Drew kept at it, **financing the tape project by writing a series of \$99 purchase orders**—since he was authorized to make purchases under \$100.

### **33** ➤ **Putting the “Scotch” in tape**

The first tape made by 3M was a failure, however, because it used adhesive only along the edges, which caused it to fall off. One annoyed customer told inventor Richard Drew to “take this tape back to those Scotch bosses of yours and tell them to **put more adhesive on it**”—and thus Scotch Tape was born.

### **34** ➤ **Call for Charlie McCarthy**

Ventriloquists would love the **Laryngaphone**, introduced in 1929 to help in noisy situations where background noise might compete with the caller's voice: The microphone part of the telephone handset was pressed against the throat instead of held at the mouth, so speech vibrations from the larynx were transferred directly rather than through the air.



### **35** ➤ **Hurts so good**

The “Electro Massager” of the 1930s attempted to cash in on the era's fad for body massage as a stimulant to health and good skin. The “Electro Massager” tried to go the competitive one better, however, by **applying small electrical shocks as it massaged**.

## **36** ➤ **We're glad no thumbs are involved**

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Not just the body was thought to benefit from a hearty massage. Hence the **Eye Massage** invented in the 1920s. You pressed the binoculars-like device against your face and operated small rubber bellows, which puffed air into your eyes to “massage” your eyeballs.

## **37** ➤ **Couldn't you just take a walk in the park?**

The 1937 Baby Cage sought to revolutionize early child care by **suspending an infant in a wire cage that could be hung outside a window, dangling over an alley or busy street**. The idea was that city-dwelling families lacking a garden or other outdoor space could give their baby a breath of fresh air—at least until the 1930s version of Child Protective Services showed up.

## **38** ➤ **Does it come with a matching umbrella hat?**

Smoking seems to have been the inspiration for a number of questionable inventions. In 1954, for instance, Robert L. Stern of Zeus Corporation designed the **Rainy Day Cigarette Holder**. In case of rain, **a tiny umbrella popped up to shield the cigarette from the elements**. The smoker might get wet, but not his smoke!

## **39** ➤ **Can't Bogart this smoke!**

No need to pass a smoke back and forth with the handy “Double Ender” pipe, introduced in the late 1940s, which sported **two stems attached to a single bowl**. The manufacturer targeted pipe smokers down on their luck, who could thus split a pipeful of tobacco, and baseball fans who might want to share a smoke at a ball game.



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## 40 ➤ One just isn't enough?

Just the opposite was the intent of a double-cigarette holder, supposedly inspired by one of the detective novels starring Bulldog Drummond: **The Y-shaped device let you smoke two cigarettes at once.** The fictional Drummond liked to smoke a Turkish cigarette and a Virginia one simultaneously.

## 41 ➤ Smoke 'em if you got 'em

Then there was the Cigarette Pack Holder, rolled out in 1955, which outdid the double-holder by a long stretch: **It held an entire pack of cigarettes in two V-shaped rows.** Presumably, the idea was to chain-smoke them one after another, rather than all at once.

## 42 ➤ Putting the Marlboro man out work

In 1909, Daniel Brown invented a cigarette-smoking automaton. The **chain-smoking robot** was designed as a promotional gimmick, appearing to smoke as it moved its arm; the actual smoke was “exhaled” from a canister beneath the automaton's chair.

## 43 ➤ No more ring around the collar

In the late 1940s, the Los Angeles Brush Manufacturing Corporation invented a “dry cleaner”

for youngsters' necks. The plastic collar brush was supposed to **clean a child's neck without the use of soap and water while the child played**. The idea, the company said, came from a mother.

## **44** ➤ **I'll snap the tar outta ya!**

Another late-1940s Los Angeles Brush Manufacturing Corporation innovation was the **rubber-band spanking brush**. Instead of walloping a misbehaving child with a regular bristled brush, this invention replaced bristles with rubber bands, to let softhearted dads give Junior a softer spanking. This idea the company credited to a Montana father who hated using an ordinary hairbrush for discipline.

## **45** ➤ **You're going to need a bigger desk**

The first digital computer, ENIAC, completed in 1945, **weighed thirty tons and stood two stories tall**. Programming it required setting 3,000 switches and wiring cable connections, all by hand. ENIAC used 19,000 vacuum tubes, which rapidly burned out.

## **46** ➤ **Out of sight, out of mind**

If Venetian blinds work on windows, why not sunglasses? That was the idea behind **Venetian Blind Sunglasses**, introduced in 1950. One problem: When the teensy "blinds" attached to the glasses were closed, the wearer couldn't see out at all.

## **47** ➤ **Not a straight shooter**

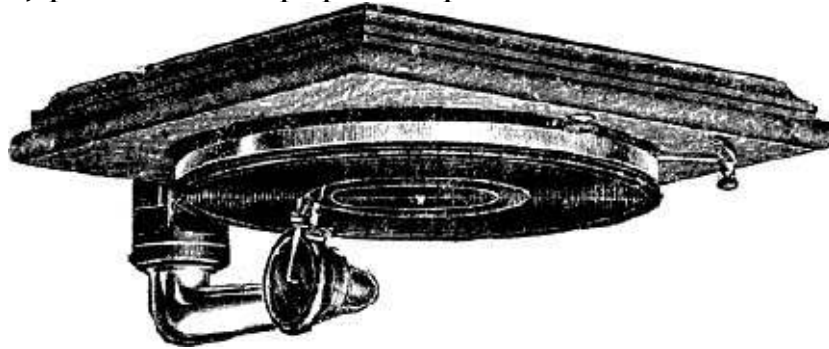
No waiting until you see the whites of their eyes with **the curved-barrel machine gun** introduced in 1953—in fact, you couldn't see your target at all. But that wouldn't stop you from blasting away around a corner with this M3 submachine gun whose barrel took a bend just before its business end. No need for special mind training like in *The Matrix* movie—just pull the trigger and hope!

## **48** ➤ **You'll never want to stop mowing**

Why the **Power Mower of the Future**, introduced in 1957, never caught on is a mystery. The rider sat on a foam seat atop a five-foot-diameter plastic sphere, from which you could not only mow the lawn but fertilize it, spray for bugs, and even plow snow. The mower had its own electric generating system, which also powered lights, a radio telephone, air conditioning, and a water cooler for a refreshing drink.

## 49 ➤ For your listening pleasure

Before the automobile tape deck and the CD player, there was **the automobile record player**. The 1959 “Auto Minion” could be attached to your car’s dashboard and played automatically when you inserted a 45 rpm record. The eight-track tape, which could hold the entire contents of an LP, proved more popular upon its introduction in the mid-1960s.



## 50 ➤ You'll flip for this

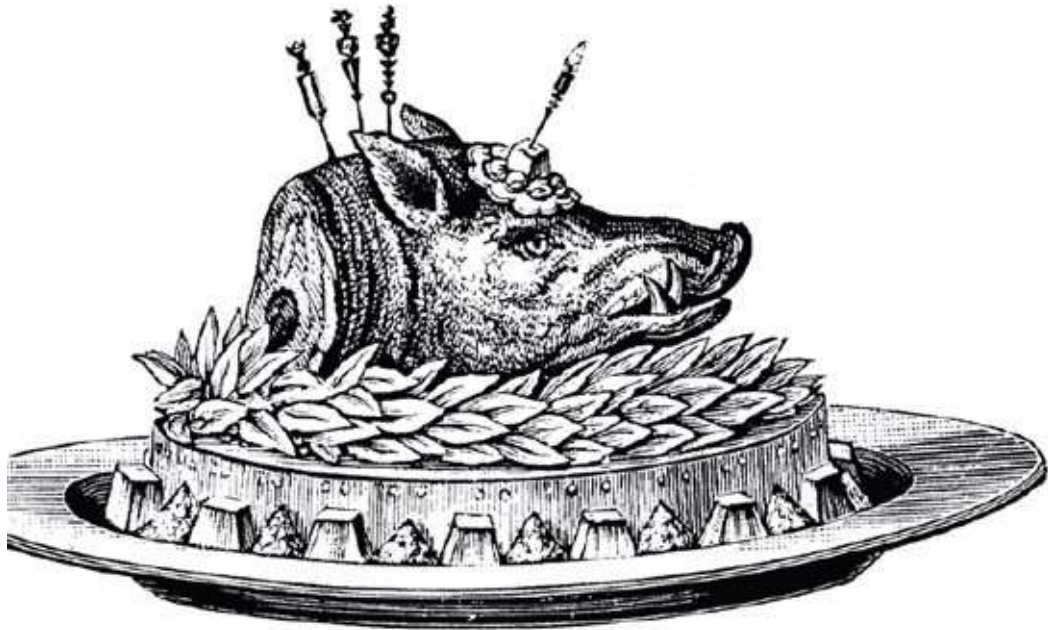
The 1960 New York High Fidelity Show displayed a stereo turntable that could play records even when operated upside down. The upside-down turntable never really took off, however, perhaps because of **the difficulty of reaching it on the ceiling**.

## 51 ➤ The magical, mystery inventor

Among the more recent failed inventors of note was Alex Mardas, better known as “Magic Alex,” the name given him by the Beatles in the mid-1960s. In the days of the eight-track tape player, Mardas bragged that he could build a 72-track player, so the Fab Four set him up at the Apple Studio. In addition to the 72-track tape machine, Magic Alex also failed to deliver on his promises to make **wallpaper loudspeakers, a “sonic force field,” a flying saucer, and electric paint**.

# 2 ARE YOU REALLY GOING TO EAT THAT?

## Food, not-so-glorious food



## 52 ➤ Kentucky fried eagle, anyone?

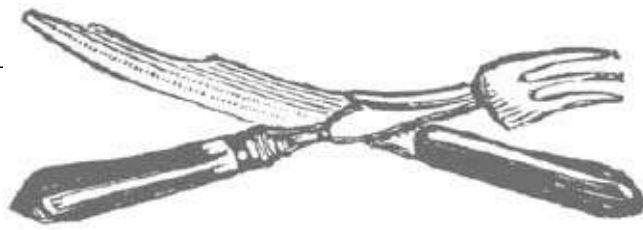
Among the “delicacies” consumed in olden days besides more familiar poultry, such as chickens, ducks and geese, were **swans, herons, peacocks, and even eagles**. No bird was too small to wind up on the dinner table, including larks, finches, and sparrows.

## 53 ➤ No wonder they invented fish sticks

Giving up meat on Fridays or during Lent is nothing compared to the explosion of “lean” days on the calendar when the Catholic church was at its peak of influence. At one point, eating anything meatier than fish was **forbidden on nearly half the days of the year**.

## 54 ➤ Don't leave home without them

Silverware wasn't something our ancestors took for granted. In medieval times, knives and spoons both were part of a traveler's kit; hosts were not expected to provide either for dinner guests. Common people still ate with their hands, using **four-day-old pieces of bread called “trenchers” to push their food**.



## 55 ➤ Dinner time dueling

Forks became popular in part because of the problem of **knife fights at dinner time**. In 1699, French King Louis XIV banned pointed knives at meals. Since blunted knives were useless for spearing food in the old two-knife dining style, forks replaced the knife held in the left hand.

## 56 ➤ A fork in the road of mealtime history

Americans departed from the “Continental” style of dining, in which the knife and fork are grasped in separate hands rather than switching back and forth, because of the newfangled blunt knives. When the change reached the American colonies in the early 1700s, few forks were available on this side of the Atlantic. Americans were forced to **use spoons, upside down, to steady food for cutting**. They would then switch the spoon to the right hand, flipping it to use as a scoop. Even after forks became everyday utensils, this “zigzag” style persisted.

## 57 ➤ Think of it as extra texture

Before the advent of pure-food laws and food inspectors, greedy producers adulterated their products with anything they could get their hands on that was remotely similar to the real thing. (Being edible was not a requirement.) Makers of sugar and flour padded out their products with “daft,” as such fillers were called, including **dirt, sand, plaster of Paris, and gypsum**.

## 58 ➤ Earl Grey or Earl of Sandbox?

Tea was commonly adulterated, too. One Victorian-era shipment of tea, when inspected by a suspicious buyer, turned out to be almost **half dirt and sand**.

## 59 ➤ Not exactly the best part of waking up

Coffee, too, was seldom entirely what it was purported to be. In the 1870s, it was common for what was sold as coffee to contain **mostly roasted peas and beans (not coffee beans) flavored with chicory**.

## 60 ➤ His success was clear

Food purity was important to the success of Henry J. Heinz, of “57 Varieties” fame. Heinz’s very first variety, in 1869, was his mother’s grated horseradish. The secret to his success: Heinz sold the horseradish in a clear glass jar to show that, unlike his competitors, his product contained no turnip filler, leaves, or wood pulp.

## 61 ➤ This bread really sticks to your ribs

An anonymous book published in 1757, *Poison Detected: Or Frightful Truths*, claimed that, to save on flour, bakers sometimes added “sacks of old bones” to their bread: “The charnel houses of the dead are raked to add filthiness to the food of the living.” Other “additives” in bread supposedly included chalk, white lead, ash, and slaked lime.



## 62 ➤ No wonder the cupboard was bare

Not that bread was cheap, despite such, er, cost-saving moves. In the nineteenth century, as much as 80 percent of an average family’s household budget was spent on food, and 80 percent of that expenditure went for bread.

## 63 ➤ Now with extra lead!

How to make those bakery products fly off the shelves? Before pesky laws intervened, some bakers gave their goods a lovely wash of lead chromate, said to give breads and pies a golden glow.

## 64 ➤ You’ve heard of spit and polish?

Even fruit got spiffed up, if you can call it that, to look more attractive to customers. Or



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