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# Introduction

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In *1066 And All That* two Oxford University professors set out to describe what English history seems like to the average Briton who retains in mind only a confused jumble of names, dates, and places. The result is an incomparably funny book that went through six printings the first month of publication alone. “History,” the authors explained in the preface, “is not what you thought. It is what you remember.”

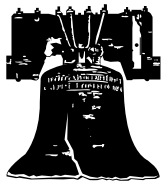
In other words, history that isn’t remembered isn’t history at all. It is like the old conundrum of the tree that fell in the forest: Did the falling of the tree make a sound if there was no one there to hear it? I don’t know the answer to that question, but don’t worry—I have not attempted any Big Explanations in this book. I am, like Barbara Tuchman, “a seeker of the small facts . . . a narrator, not a philosopher.”

I like to learn history not by the pound, but by the ounce. For me, it is detail that makes history interesting, even fascinating, and corroborative detail that makes it memorable. I look especially for the significant little things, such as finding that the friendship between the Pilgrims and Massasoit began to bloom after the newcomers cured the chief of severe constipation. Or that Richard Nixon had a small presidential seal on each tee of his private golf course at San Clemente. Without Massasoit’s friendship the Plymouth Colony might not have survived, while the presidential seal on the golf tees tells more about the character of Richard Nixon—and why his presidency went down the drain—than all the memoirs penned by those trapped in the Watergate mess.

I fill *Fascinating Facts From American History* with details in hopes that teachers can use them to help students remember more about their country’s past than 1776, the Civil War, and Watergate. It is also for older or more advanced students, as well as for any adult, to read themselves.

It took me seventeen months and a heart attack to finish this book, so please use it with care.

—Bill Lawrence



## Chapter 1

# The First Americans

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## Hollywood vs. Reality

**N**ATIVE AMERICANS used to be called “red,” though many are not that color. Their complexions range from almost black to almost white, with most of them having a bronze cast. Thanks to Hollywood movies and the novels of James Fenimore Cooper, Native Americans are thought of as tall, muscular, and brave. Though many did have exceptionally well-developed bodies, some were short and pudgy and some were cowards.

Natives of the East had muscular legs because of so much walking. Those living near streams and lakes had tremendous arms and shoulders caused by rowing. In the Northwest they grew bowlegged from sitting in dugout canoes.

Thanks to countless movies, it seems as if all American natives rode horses and lived in tepees. Those east of the Mississippi River never had horses<sup>1</sup> and only Plains Indians used tepees. Those in the Northeast lived in “long houses,” large structures covered with bark and tree branches and held in place by long tree branches. Several families lived together in one long house.

Forest tribes in many areas lived in wigwams, frameworks of bent poles covered with bark or rush mats. Southeastern natives had thatched huts with grass roofs. In the Northern Plains there were earth lodges, round dwellings made of strong poles and covered with large chunks of sod. In the Southwest there were the famous pueblos of sunbaked clay, some built one on top of another so that when the ladders were pulled up they became forts. One pueblo has been found with 800 rooms.

Native Americans were not impressed by the houses European settlers built, but they were fascinated by the doors. Some might spend hours just opening and closing one.