

## Crafty Columbus Plays a Leap Year Trick

Anyone born on February 29th would not consider themselves lucky. For a start, they have a real birthday only once every four years when it is a leap year, such as 2016. The list of famous people born on this day is short, if not almost non-existent.

Nevertheless, leap years are considered by some to be lucky and it is said that any enterprise started on February 29th is certain to succeed.

Italian explorer Christopher Columbus, the man who discovered America, certainly found this to be true in 1504. Nine months earlier he had become marooned on the island that we now know as Jamaica, his ship fatally damaged by a woodworm epidemic.



Christopher Columbus

Fortunately, the native people – Arawak Indians – were friendly and were happy to provide food and shelter for Columbus and his crew. At first.

But as the months went by the Arawaks grew tired of this one-sided arrangement and became annoyed, according to some historians, by the “arrogant and overbearing” attitude of Columbus himself. Things came to a head when some Arawaks were killed in a fight with the crew. So they stopped the supply of food to the castaways.

Facing starvation, the explorer came up with an ingenious plan. After consulting an almanac in his cabin, he learned that a total lunar eclipse would occur on Thursday, February 29, 1504 – in just three days’ time.

He then told the Arawaks that his Christian God was angry with them for stopping the food and that as a sign of His anger He would soon make the moon appear “*inflamed with wrath*” as a signal to them of the punishments He would inflict.

Sure enough, on the third night, the normally bright new moon appeared as a bloody and dim ball in the sky. According to Columbus’s son, Ferdinand, the Arawaks were terrified and “*with great howling and lamentation came running to the ship laden with provisions and beseeching the Admiral to intercede with his God on their behalf*”.

Columbus said he would have to think about it and went to his cabin. He did not emerge for nearly an hour – shortly before the end of the eclipse – and then told the Arawaks that his God had pardoned them.

And, just as Columbus told them it would, the moon – in reality emerging from the Earth’s shadow – slowly began to re-appear in its normal form and brightness. The awestruck Arawaks kept Columbus and his men well fed until a relief ship took them away four months later.

*A little "Light Reading"  
submitted by Joe Rodriguez*

*For the Parishioners of:  
The Catholic Parish of Our Lady of the Annunciation  
King's Lynn, Norfolk,*

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## Wonder of Woolworths Begins its Meteoric Rise

February 22, 1878 — The first “Woolworth’s Great Five Cent Store” was opened on this day in New York. But although the company would go on to become one of the greatest retail success stories of the 20th century, the original Big Apple business failed. It was not until a new store was opened in Pennsylvania the following year that the wonder of Woolworth began to take off.

The man behind it all was Frank Winfield Woolworth who, as a 15-year-old in 1852, gave up working on his father’s farm for a job in a shop. He was soon put in charge of display and stock management and set up a table on which everything cost five cents.

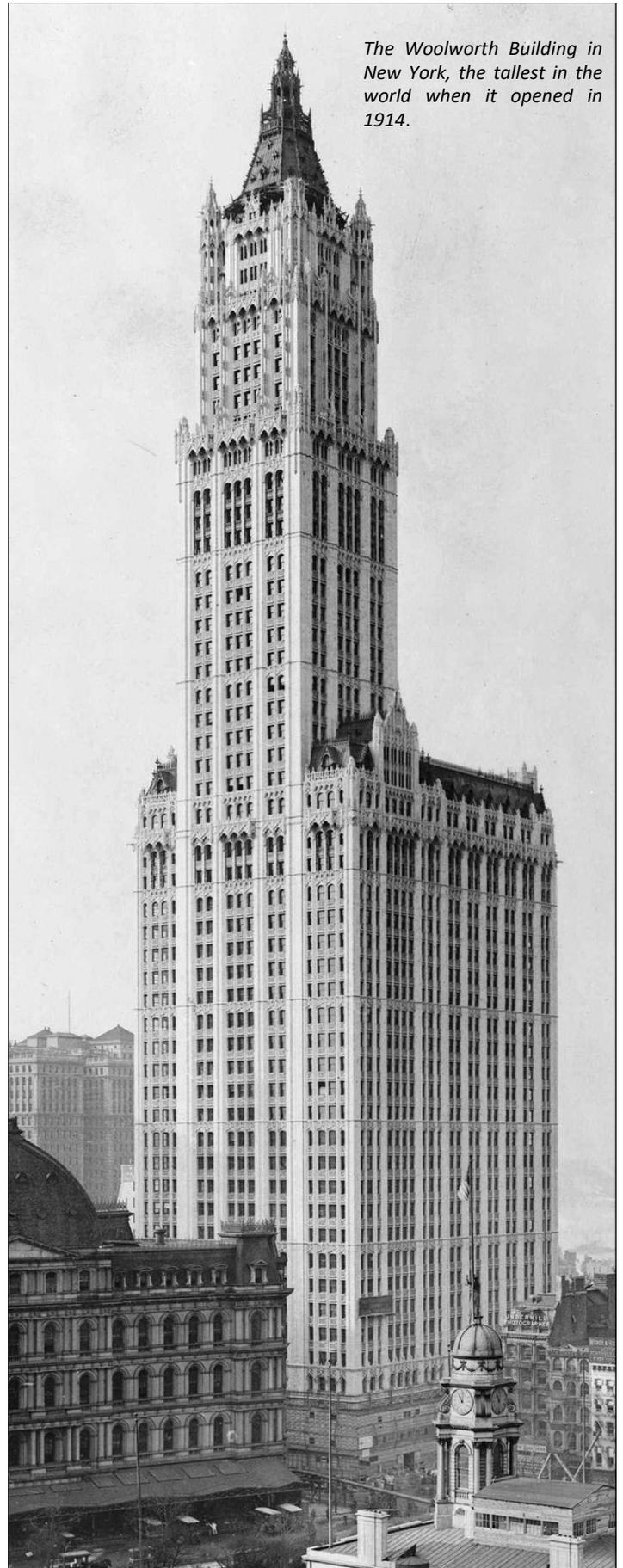
The idea proved so popular that he branched out on his own and the five-cent store was born. Ten cent lines were added in 1881, creating the first Five and Ten Cent store chain.

At the height of its success, the company owned 3,000 stores across the world generating a vast fortune for Frank Woolworth who was able, in 1914, to pay cash for the 792-foot tall Woolworth Building in New York, then the highest building in the world.

Frank said that he could trace his roots back to Cambridgeshire in England and was very keen to expand his retail empire into the old country. This he did in 1909, opening his first store in Liverpool, later to become famous as the home of the Beatles. The UK operation proved to be even more successful and profitable than the US parent and by the mid-1920s a new Woolworths store was opening in Britain every 17 days.

But the emergence and growth of self-service supermarkets after the Second World War and a management decision to move away from the five-and-ten-cent philosophy proved to be the ultimate death-knell for the chain. By the 1960s, the new retailers were eating into its market share and the decline continued until the 1990s when the US stores were either sold off or shut down. The UK operation outlived its US parent but its collapse in 2008 was far more dramatic. It went from normal trading in 800 stores to complete shutdown in just 41 days.

The latest hit records were always one of the popular products available at any Woolworths store and it is noteworthy that as Frank Woolworth chose the 22nd February to make his mark on the world, so did another legend. On that day in 1956 Elvis Presley’s Heartbreak Hotel entered the charts and began its rise to the top.



*The Woolworth Building in New York, the tallest in the world when it opened in 1914.*

## Last Adventure of Captain Cook

February 14, 1779 — Captain James Cook, the legendary British explorer, was savagely murdered on this day after a confrontation with islanders at Hawaii who had mistaken him for a god.

Cook discovered and charted New Zealand and Australia's Great Barrier Reef – since noted as one of the world's most dangerous areas to navigate.

His voyages around the world helped guide other explorers for generations. He provided the first accurate map of the Pacific and many believe that he did more to fill the map of the world than any other explorer in history.

The son of a Scottish farm worker, Cook was born in 1728 and worked on the land alongside his father until he was 18, when he was offered an apprenticeship by a Quaker shipowner.

With seafaring blood soon coursing through his veins, he joined the Royal Navy and became ship's master at the age of 29. In 1768, he took command of the first scientific expedition to the Pacific aboard his ship, the Endeavour, leading to the discovery of New Zealand and the Great Barrier Reef.

During Cook's third major voyage, he became the first European to set foot on Hawaii, landing his ship Discovery at Kealahou Bay. His arrival coincided with an annual festival in honour of the fertility god Lono.

The Hawaiian people had never seen white men before, nor anything like the huge sailing ship in which they arrived. The only explanation was that Captain Cook must be Lono himself and as a result he and his men were lavished with feasts and gifts.

Soon, however, one of Cook's sailors died from a stroke, possibly brought on by over-indulgence. Whatever the cause, the Hawaiians realised that their guests were not immortal after all and relationships became strained.

Any doubts were removed for the Hawaiians after Cook set sail but had to return for repairs when his mast was broken in a storm. Such setbacks do not happen to gods.

While anchored offshore on this day, Cook was furious when told that one of his cutter boats had been stolen. He went ashore to confront the Hawaiian king.

Unfortunately, crew aboard the Discovery fired its cannons at another group of Hawaiians, which caused Cook to panic and flee to a waiting boat.

He didn't make it. Staggering after being pelted by stones and struck by a club, the explorer was then stabbed in the back by a warrior brandishing a knife that had been a gift from Cook himself. When he fell into the surf he was repeatedly stabbed and pounded with rocks.

Ironically, the Hawaiians ritualistically prepared Cook's corpse as they would that of a king. They preserved his hands in sea salt, then roasted the rest of his body in a pit before cleansing his bones.

