

Marriage Proposals, and Gloves

Well, it comes around once in four years, and this is it: Today is Leap Day. And it is chock-full of customs and traditions.

But first, the science. *Wikipedia*, the online encyclopedia, explains it this way: “Although modern calendar years have 365 days, a complete revolution around the sun (one solar year) takes approximately 365 days and 6 hours. An extra 24 hours thus accumulates every four years, requiring that an extra calendar day be added to align the calendar with the sun’s apparent position. Without the added day, the seasons would move back in the calendar, leading to confusion about when to undertake activities dependent on weather, ecology or hours of daylight.”

Leap Years were first introduced more than 2,000 years ago when the transition from the Roman calendar to the Julian calendar was made.



Now for the folklore. According to an old Irish legend, or possibly history, St. Brigid complained to St. Patrick that women had to wait too long for their suitors to propose. She struck a deal with St. Patrick to allow women to propose to men – and not just the other way around – every four years. This is believed to have been introduced to balance the traditional roles of men and women in a similar way to how Leap Day balances the calendar.

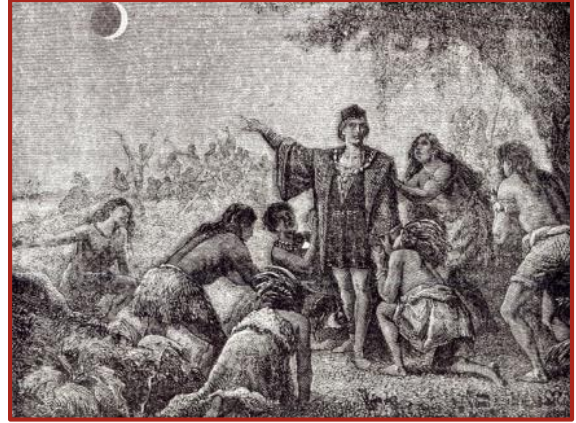
In some places, Leap Day has been known as Bachelors’ Day for the same reason. A man was expected to pay a penalty, such as a gown or money, if he refused a marriage proposal from a woman on Leap Day.

In many European countries, especially in the upper classes of society, tradition dictates that any man who refuses a woman’s proposal on Feb. 29 has to buy her 12 pairs of gloves. The intention is that the woman can wear the gloves to hide the embarrassment of not having an engagement ring. During the middle ages, there were laws governing the tradition.

Explorer Christopher Columbus used the lunar eclipse of Feb. 29, 1504, to his advantage during his final trip to the West Indies. After several months of being stranded with his crew on the island of Jamaica, relations with the indigenous population broke down and they refused to continue helping with food and provisions.

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Columbus, knowing a lunar eclipse was due, consulted his almanac and then gathered the native chiefs on Feb. 29. He told them that God was to punish them by painting the moon red. During the eclipse, he said that God would withdraw the punishment if they started cooperating again. The panicked chiefs agreed, and the moon began emerging from its shadow.



So what does all this mean for you on Leap Day 2016? Probably not much. Unless, that is, you are a single woman with a certain bachelor in your sights!

– Beecher Hunter