



All Fool's Day, also known as April Fool's Day, is celebrated annually on the first day of April. It is a time for the traditional playing of pranks upon unsuspecting people...the victim of such a prank being called an April Fool.

The origins of this custom are somewhat uncertain, but may have initially been related to the arrival of Spring in late March, at which time Mother Nature is said to "fool" the human race with sudden and fickle changes in the weather...showers one minute and sunshine the next. The playing of practical jokes, however, dates back to Ancient Rome and such activities were an integral part of the Hilaria celebrations held on March 25, a celebration which would again appear to be associated with the coming of Spring and the Vernal Equinox, held to honor the resurrection of Attis, Roman God of Vegetation who was linked to the seasonal cycle. In England, an ancient legend states that April Fool's Day commemorates the fruitless mission of the Rook (or European Crow) which was sent out in search of land from Noah's flood-encircled ark.

It is generally accepted that the All Fool's Day tradition began in France during the Sixteenth Century, when the beginning of the New Year was observed on April 1 and was celebrated in much the same way as New Year is today with parties and dancing late into the night. At that time, the festivities ran for a week, beginning on

March 25, and included the exchanging of gifts. In 1582, however, during the reign of King Charles IX, Pope Gregory introduced a revised calendar for the Christian world wherein the New Year fell on January 1. Since it took some time, possibly even years, for many people to even hear word of the change (communications being what they were in the Sixteenth Century) and since others obstinately refused to accept such reform or simply forgot, New Year's Day continued to be celebrated on the first day of April in many areas. Individuals who had accepted the dates of the new calendar played tricks on those who had not and referred to the unfortunate victims of such pranks as "April Fools," sending them on a "fool's errand" (an invitation to a non-existent party, for example) or attempting to make them believe that something which was true was actually false. Over time, this practice evolved into an annual tradition of April 1 prank-playing, eventually migrating to England and Scotland during the Eighteenth Century and thus, introduced to the American colonies by British and French settlers.

In many cultures, tradition dictates that the pranking period must expire at noon on April 1 and any jokes attempted after that hour will bring back luck to the perpetrator. In addition, any who fail to respond with a good humor to tricks played upon them are said to attract bad luck unto themselves. Such victims are, however, entitled to "turn the tables" after the hour of noon with the retort: *"April Fool's gone past...and you're the biggest fool at last!"* It should be noted that not all April Fool superstitions are negative. Males who are fooled by a pretty female, for example, are said to be fated to marry the girl...or at least enjoy a healthy friendship with her.

The style of April Fool's pranks has changed over the years. Sending unsuspecting parties on pointless errands was a particularly prized practical joke in the early history of the celebrations. Today, however, it is often a time of initiation rites into a club or group, especially by the adult population, and it is the children who appear to truly celebrate the day complete with its original sense of abandon. Otherwise, modern pranks tend to center more around bogus telephone calls and media-driven foolery. In sum, All Fool's Day is a "for fun only" observance...a time when nobody is expected to buy gifts, receive cards or spend money and there are no vacations from work or school. The primary force behind April Fool's Day jokes and pranks are that they should not be harmful but able to be enjoyed by everyone...especially the person upon whom the joke is played.

