**INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT STATES OF AMERICA**

1. The United States of America, popularly called “The States”, “U.S.A”, “The Land of Liberty” and “The Land of the Free”, is a country stretching across the middle of North America. This country which at one inhabited by Red Indians, is now the home of a “nation of nations”, as people from every part of the world have gone to live in this land of wealth and promise. These settlers met, mingled and worked with great enterprise and, as a result of their efforts, the United States has become one of the most important countries in the world.

2. In 1620 the Pilgrim Fathers, a band of Puritans in England who sought freedom of worship, set forth for America in the sailing-ship Mayflower. Three months after leaving Plymouth Harbour, they reached the shores of what is now called New England, and founded the America township of Plymouth. Although they often had difficult times with the native Red Indian tribes, the colony soon prospered and more and more settlers joined them. The Indians used a new kind of grain, which the settlers called “Indian corn” (now termed maize) and they ate strange birds called turkeys. on the fourth Thursday of November the Americans celebrate Thanksgiving Day with a feast of turkey and Indian corn.

3. A great many emigrants went from European countries to America and thirteen colonies were formed, all of them under English rule. The government in England, however, took little interest in the American colonies, except from the point of view of trade. When certain taxes and laws were ordered by the English Parliament, the colonists opposed them and it gradually led to war. At first the colonists fared badly, but later they rallied and eventually won final victory, under the able leadership of George Washington.

4. The American Declaration of Independence was signed on the 4th of July, 1776. This day is still celebrated as the “birthday” of this great nation and is called Independence Day. The leaders of the new country decided they would form a republic, which would have no king but would have a President, chosen every four years by a vote of all the people. George Washington, who had led them so successfully in the war, became the first President and was called “The Father of the United States”.

5. The Americans’ dwelt in the eastern part of country, but many of them decided to explore further inland, and settle on the rich farming land there. These pioneers travelled in covered wagons or prairie schooners, which rocked and rolled their way westward over the open, flat country.

6. Shortly after the discovery of the New World by Columbus, many Spaniards travelled northward from Mexico and settled along the western coast of America. That is why many places in this such as San Francisco, Los Angeles, Sacramento and Santa Barbara have Spanish names. In 1849 the chance discovery of gold brought many people to California and numerous mining towns sprang up in a very short time. “The Golden Gate” ( the channel connecting the harbour of San Francisco with the Pacific Ocean) was so called because many of the seekers of the precious yellow metal passed this way to and from the rich gold fields.

7. In the lower basin of the Missouri-Mississippi (the longest river in the U.S.A.) stretch the great cotton plantations, once tilled by black slavers taken forcibly from Africa, and still cultivated by negro labour. The northern states of America did not use negroes as slaves like cotton states of the south, and they tried to stop this evil. In 1861, while Abraham Lincoln was President, a dreadful Civil War broke out. After four years of bitter fighting, the southern states were defeated and slavery was abolished.

8. In American cities men have built huge buildings (skyscrapers), some as many as fifty flats high. the national capital of the United States is Washington and White House is home of the president. The Famous table gives a rough idea of the value of the money used in America: a cent (1c.), a nickel (5c.), a dime (10 c.), a quarter (25 c.), a half (50 c.), a dollar ($ 1.00).

9. While English is the national language of the country, some immigrants have continued the manners, customs and even tongue of their homeland, and newspapers in all languages may be seen in the book-stalls. Here are some common English words for which the Americans have different names: sweet-candies; shop-store; motor-car-automobile; motor-lorry truck; tram-car – street-car; pavement – sidewalk; petrol – gas; lift – elevator; dust – bin; garbage – can; holiday – vacation; trousers – pants; waistcoat – vest; laces – shoe-ties; tin – can; a jug – pitcher. There are also differences in the spelling of certain words: colour – color; honour – honor; programme – program.

10. The national banner of the United States of America, commonly knows as “The Stars and Stripes” or “Old Glory”, is a flag bearing 50 stars and 13 stripes. Each star represents a present-day state and each stripe stands for one of the original colonies. The national anthem is the “Star Spangled Banner”, and the national emblems are the eagle and the buffalo. The national sport may be said to be baseball.

I. Answer the questions:

1. What is a popular name for the United States of America?
2. Who were the original natives; the first white settlers?
3. What is “Indian corn”?
4. Who led the victorious forces of the colonists against the British?
5. When was the American Declaration of Independence signed?
6. What is a Republic?
7. What was a “covered wagon”?
8. What are some American coast towns with Spanish names?
9. Which is the longest river in the world?
10. Who was the President when the American Civil War broke out?
11. What is the national capital of the United States?
12. What famous monuments stands at the entrance of New York harbour? What are the American coins?
13. do you know more common English words for which the Americans have different names (spelling)?
14. What is the national banner (emblem) of the United States?

II. Read the text:

***Discovery of America***

Mystery surrounds the early history of the North American continent. The original settlers, the Indians, are believed to have migrated from northern Asia to Alaska, and from there down into warmer climates. The physical appearance of the American Indians, with their black hair, copper tint and high cheekbones, suggests their Oriental origin. Some scientists think that some 20 000 years ago, during the most recent glacial period, North America and Asia were linked at the Bering Strait.

Probably the first white men to see American shores were Scandinavians who in their round trading ships travelled in Arctic seas to make their way to Greenland in about the year 985 A.D. From this vast island their ships went still farther westward and there is some evidence that about the year 1 000 Leif Ericson and his crew landed in what is now the United States.

The Scandinavians left almost no documents describing their voyages. So it was Christopher Columbus who came, saw, described and helped to colonize the West Indies in 1490’s (1492) and is the discoverer of America. Columbus was mistaken in thinking he had reached India, that is why he called the first people he saw “Indians”. It is not known how they called Columbus.

The discovery of America was a pure accident. Vast, fast growing empire of Turkey of the 15th century was blocking Western Europe’s trade with Asia, a trade that had started in the days of Marco Polo1 (1254-1324). So the Western European countries decided to get to Asia another way. If the world was really round, as most geographers believed, why wouldn’t it be possible to sail westward from Spain and keep going till land was reached. And surely that would be Asia. Neither Columbus nor his contemporaries knew about North and South America were standing on the way of reaching Asia by sailing westward.

So Columbus and other explorers found the Bahamas, Panama and South America and thought they had reached Asia. Columbus himself did not live to know that he had reached only America not India. The error was not discovered until 1519-22 when an expedition under Ferdinand Magellan of Spain2 sailed around the tip of South America and on across the Pacific Ocean to Asia. Magellan was killed by the natives in the Philippines but his men carried on. They sailed down around Africa and back to Spain and proved not only that the earth was round but also that there were more of it than the geographers had supposed.

America gets its name from Amerigo Vespucci3 (1451?-1512), an Italian who explored the coast of Brazil in 1501. On his return to Europe he wrote so much of his travels that his reputation became more famous than Columbus’. Map-makers, seeking a name for the New World, chose to honor Vespucci (an irony of history) considering how much greater were the achievements of Columbus.

References:

1. Marco Polo (1254-1324) - famous Venetian explorer and traveller, who made through China, India and other eastern countries and published the record of his various wanderings, recounting the many marvels and wonders he had seen - a record which seemed for the most part beyond credence to his contemporaries but now largely confirmed;
2. Ferdinand Magellan (1480?-1521) - famous Portuguese navigator and commander of the first expedition (1519) to sail round the world. Since 1517 he was in the service of Spain;
3. Amerigo Vespucci - famous Italian navigator. The accounts of his voyages were published in 1507 by Martin Waldseemuller, a German geographer, who suggested the new lands be named “America”.

III. Answer the following questions:

1. When was the North American continent settled?

2. Who were the original settlers?

3. What proofs are there of the Oriental origin of the American Indians?

4. Who were the first white men to see American shores?

5. Who received credit for discovering America and why?

6. What important fact did the Magellan expedition establish?

IV. Explain why, according to the author, “mystery surrounds the early history of the North American continent”. Pick out the words and constructions used by the author in making his point.

V. Mention the factors that caused the discovery of America.

VI. Make out a list of arguments used by the author to prove that the discovery of America was a pure accident. Express your opinion.

VII. Support or challenge the following statement:

“Map-makers, seeking a name for the New World, chose to honor Vespucci (an irony of history) considering how much greater were the achievements of Columbus”.

VIII. Write a summary of the text II, using the words:

Mystery - тайна

to link - связывать

settler - поселенец

origin - происхождение

shore - берег

evidence - свидетельство

vast - обширный

to sail - плавать (на корабле, под парусом)

explorer - исследователь

to discover - открывать, обнаруживать

to reach - достигать

error - ошибка

service - служба

to prove - доказывать

achievement - достижение