# Surprising Historical Last Events

## Passing Of The Last Civil War Widow - 2020

Helen Viola Jackson married Civil War veteran James Bolin in 1936. Jackson was 17 when they wed, while James was 93 years old.

Their marriage, according to Jackson, was based on convenience and "respect," [noting her husband](https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/last-surviving-widow-civil-war-veteran-dies-101-180976702/) "really cared for me [and] wanted me to have a future." The two were living in Missouri at the time, with Jackson struggling to survive during the Great Depression. Bolin, who'd fought for the Union during the Civil War, wanted to help and promised to leave Jackson his pension when he passed.

Because Jackson was concerned she looked like an opportunist, she [never applied](https://allthatsinteresting.com/helen-viola-jackson) to receive Bolin's pension after his passing in 1939. She never remarried either, and only spoke about her relationship with Bolin in 2017.

At the age of 101, Jackson - the last widow of a Civil War veteran - passed [in December 2020](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/jan/08/last-civil-war-widow-dies-helen-viola-jackson).

## Last Native Speaker Of Manx, One Of The Defunct Celtic Languages - 1974

Cornish and [Manx](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/isle_of_man/7901763.stm" \l ":~:text=The Isle of Man's native,last three generations%2C said Unesco.) are two Celtic languages that, according to the [Endangered Language Alliance](https://elalliance.org/languages/celtic/), have "completely fallen out of everyday use." The last native speaker of Cornish, [Dolly Pentreath](https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Ancient_Language_and_the_Dialect_of/WOcj1PkRVmYC?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=Dolly+Pentreath&pg=PA331&printsec=frontcover), perished in 1777, while Manx continued in remote areas of Britain through 1974.

The final native speaker of Manx was [Edward "Ned" Maddrell](https://journal.fi/scf/article/view/60553/38319), a resident of the Isle of Man. Born in 1877 or 1878, Maddrell learned Manx as a boy, worked as a fisherman for much of his life, and passed in late 1974. [Recordings](http://www.endangeredlanguages.com/lang/8601/samples/8365) of Maddrell speaking Manx exist, as do books and [dictionaries](https://www.historytoday.com/history-matters/very-brief-history-manx-language), and there have been efforts to [bring the language back](https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-21242667) on the Isle of Man.

## Last Use Of The Guillotine - 1977

Often associated with the French Revolution, the guillotine has origins in the Middle Ages. It was a method of execution that was [purported to be more humane](https://www.history.com/news/8-things-you-may-not-know-about-the-guillotine" \l ":~:text=It was last used in,by the guillotine in 1977.) than other techniques, and found use well into the 20th century.

The last time the blade of a guillotine came down on a convicted criminal's neck, it was that of Hamida Djandoubi. The Tunisian immigrant lived in Marseilles, France, and was sentenced to execution after having slain his girlfriend. He was [executed on](https://www.wired.com/2007/09/dayintech-0910-2/) September 10, 1977.

## Last Telegram Ever Sent - 2013

[On January 27, 2006](https://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/06/technology/telegram-falls-silent-stop-era-ends-stop.html" \l ":~:text=Sometime on Friday%2C Jan.,beginnings in 1851 in Rochester), Western Union in the United States sent its final telegrams - a collection of messages that went out via their network of lines that began in 1851. It's difficult to pin down exactly when the very last message went out, but this wasn't the end of telegrams worldwide. That didn't happen until 2013.

In India, telegram messages came to an [end on July 14, 2013](https://www.foxnews.com/tech/telegrams-no-more-stop-india-to-send-worlds-last-message-july-14) - officially nixing the communication technique. The government-run Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited ended telegram service due to economic losses brought on by "SMS and smartphones... [rendering] this service redundant."

## Last Prisoner(s) Held At The Tower Of London - 1952

With a history that traces to the 11th century, [the Tower of London](https://www.hrp.org.uk/tower-of-london/history-and-stories/tower-of-london-prison/" \l "gs.uwsa3w) wasn't initially intended to be a prison - but it became one of the most famous places used for punitive confinement in the world. [Prisoners held](https://www.history.com/news/6-famous-prisoners-of-the-tower-of-london) at the Tower of London include then-princess Elizabeth Tudor in 1554, two of Henry VIII's wives - Anne Boleyn and Catherine Howard - and Guy Fawkes after the Gunpowder Plot of 1605.

The Tower continued to be used as a prison on and off through history, with a pair of brothers serving as its last prisoners. The [Kray twins](https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/features/legend-depth-look-violent-history-ronnie-and-reggie-kray-twins-10478174.html), Ronnie and Reggie, were members of an organized crime outfit in London's East End, but it was failing to report for [military duty](https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Krays_and_Me_Blood_Honour_and_Respec/MTetDwAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=kray+twins+tower+of+london&pg=PT185&printsec=frontcover) that landed them in the Tower in 1952.

The Kray twins were [in and out of prison](https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/article/kray-twins-legend-tom-hardy) for the rest of their lives, but the Tower of London became more of a repository of documents and royal artifacts, as well as a tourist attraction, thereafter.

## Last Duel Using Fencing Swords - 1967

In 1967, tempers flared during a debate at the National Assembly in Paris, France, and Gaston Defferre resorted to [calling his rival an "idiot"](https://www.google.com/books/edition/Newsweek/5QIfAQAAMAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&bsq=Marseilles+mayor+Gaston+Defferre++Rene+Ribière&dq=Marseilles+mayor+Gaston+Defferre++Rene+Ribière&printsec=frontcover) (or something comparable). In response to Defferre, politician Rene Ribière (then the mayor of Marseilles) demanded an apology. When Defferre refused, Ribière challenged him to a duel.

Defferre accepted, even after reportedly calling a duel "grotesque and ridiculous." He even threatened Ribière's manhood - indicating he'd make sure to render him "unfit" to be married the following day.

The two men met on April 21, [each armed](https://www.google.com/books/edition/Masculinity_and_Male_Codes_of_Honor_in_M/IuOLvnUnwsMC?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=Marseilles+mayor+Gaston+Defferre++Rene+Ribière&pg=PA216&printsec=frontcover) with an épée sword designed for fencing. The duel took place outside of Paris at Neuilly-sur-Seine, overseen by [Jean de Lipkowski](https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Cold_War_and_After/dldTEErZbZgC?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=Jean+de+Lipkowskiin&pg=PA207&printsec=frontcover), the secretary of state for Foreign Affairs. Defferre and Ribière [exchanged jabs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e68nuAcSuWQ), with Ribière declared the loser after being struck twice in four minutes.

## Last Pope To Be Married While Holding Office - 872 AD

The issue of [clerical celibacy](https://www.google.com/books/edition/Old_Christianity_Against_Papal_Novelties/RJc4AQAAMAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=married+pope&pg=PA319&printsec=frontcover) dates back to at least [the fifth century](https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Origins_and_Role_of_Same_Sex_Relatio/1ha9GgWNmy0C?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=papal+marriage+forbid+5th+century&pg=PA370&printsec=frontcover), but the Catholic Church didn't forbid marriage among the clergy until the 12th century. This isn't to say that men weren't married before taking holy orders, nor that they gave up wives and families easily.

Popes, too, were part of the conversation about marriage and celibacy, although most were [either widowers](https://www.google.com/books/edition/Macmillan_s_Magazine/oZBHAAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=widowed+popes&pg=PA334&printsec=frontcover) or renounced their married lives when they became pontiff.

Pope Adrian II (also called Hadrian II) was unique in his position as pope because he refused to give up his wife and daughter. He was 75 years old when he was [elected in 867 AD](https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01156a.htm) and didn't want the role, having declined it on two previous occasions. At some point during his pontificate, [his daughter](https://www.google.com/books/edition/Rome_Ravenna_and_Venice_750_1000/gxT0DwAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=hadrian+ii+wife+daughter&pg=PA166&printsec=frontcover) was kidnapped and assaulted by a rival bishop's son (or nephew), [Eleutherius](https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_History_of_the_Christian_Church_Acco/uq3oDwAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=hadrian+ii+wife+daughter&pg=PT2225&printsec=frontcover). Eleutherius later took the lives of both Adrian II's wife and daughter.

Four years later, Adrian perished in 872.

## Last Major Hollywood Movie Released On VHS - 2006

[A History of Violence](https://books.google.com/books?id=zxgfEAAAQBAJ&newbks=0&printsec=frontcover&pg=PA117&dq=last+vhs+history+of+violence&hl=en&source=newbks_fb" \l "v=onepage&q=last vhs history of violence&f=false), directed by David Cronenberg and [starring Viggo Mortensen](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0399146/), was released to theaters in 2005 and on DVD and VHS the following year. Its release on VHS marked the last time a major Hollywood movie would be made available on tape.

Since their invention in the 1970s, VHS tapes had dominated the home movie market, but the [growth of DVD technology](https://www.forbes.com/sites/brittanyhodak/2016/07/23/rip-vhs-worlds-last-vcr-to-be-made-this-month/?sh=a96321523da1) during the late 1990s quickly signaled a [shift in the marketplace](https://books.google.com/books?id=uBMEAAAAMBAJ&pg=PA94&dq=last+vhs&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjdls7Jj5DvAhXDrZ4KHatzC0UQ6AEwAHoECAMQAg" \l "v=onepage&q=last vhs&f=false). By 2001, DVD sales topped VHS buys, and in 2003, DVD rentals outnumbered their VHS counterparts.

## Last Cigarette Ad On TV In The US - 1971

[Aired on January 1, 1971,](https://mztv.com/2017/06/27/last-cigarette-commercial-in-the-us/) the last cigarette advertisement on American television came months after President Richard Nixon signed legislation ending the practice.

During the 1960s, there were repeated calls to lower smoking rates in the US by medical professionals and public health officials. With ever-growing evidence indicating that smoking caused serious health problems, the Federal Trade Commission decided advertisers needed to warn consumers of the [dangers in 1964](https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/nixon-signs-legislation-banning-cigarette-ads-on-tv-and-radio). When the surgeon general of the US issued a report in 1969 that connected low birth rates and smoking, Congress passed the [Cigarette Labeling and Advertising Act](https://www.ftc.gov/enforcement/statutes/federal-cigarette-labeling-advertising-act).

The act, signed in April 1970, mandated cigarette companies to include warnings on their packaging. It also set January 2, 1971, as the last day a television or radio ad would run for cigarettes. The date was a compromise, one that allowed Virginia Slims to advertise on New Year's Day.

## The Arrival Of The Last Transatlantic Slave Ship In The United States - 1860

The Clotilda was the last known slave ship to have arrived in the United States, [illegally bringing](https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/clotilda-last-known-slave-ship-arrive-us-found-180972177/) roughly 110 enslaved Africans to Alabama in 1860. Congress had banned the importation of slaves into the United States more than 50 years earlier, an act that went into effect [on January 1, 1808.](https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/congress-abolishes-the-african-slave-trade)

Transported aboard the Clotilda, [Matilda McCrear](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0144039X.2020.1741833?scroll=top&needAccess=true&journalCode=fsla20) has been identified as the last survivor from that transatlantic journey. McCrear was, according to researcher Hannah Durkin, a member of the Yoruba peoples and was just 2 years old at the time.

[McCrear, who passed in 1940](https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/researcher-discovers-last-known-survivor-transatlantic-slave-trade-180974530/), accompanied her mother and three sisters. McCrear was able to stay with her mother, Grace, and one of her sisters, Sallie, but never saw her two other siblings again after they were sold.

## Last Time Alcatraz Was A Functional Prison - 1963

Located on the island of the same name, Alcatraz went from military facility to federal penitentiary [in 1934](https://www.nps.gov/alca/learn/historyculture/us-penitentiary-alcatraz.htm). For the next 29 years, Alcatraz was home to some of the most dangerous criminals in the United States.

Al Capone spent time in a cell at Alcatraz, as did Robert Stroud (the so-called "Birdman of Alcatraz"), and the high security prison was the site of repeated, unsuccessful escape attempts. By the [end of the 1950s](https://www.bop.gov/about/history/alcatraz.jsp), Alcatraz had proven too expensive to maintain and operate. As a result, the government decided to close it, and in 1963, the final inmates were removed.

The [last of the 1,576](https://www.history.com/topics/crime/alcatraz) men held at Alcatraz Penitentiary, convicted robber Frank Weatherman, climbed aboard a boat with guards. He reportedly [said upon his exit,](https://www.google.com/books/edition/National_Parks_Conservation_Magazine/IMIuAQAAIAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&bsq=Frank+C.+Weatherman&dq=Frank+C.+Weatherman&printsec=frontcover) "Alcatraz never was good for anybody."

## Last Flight Of The Concorde - 2003

The first prototype of the Concorde flew in 1969, with the airliner introduced for cross-Atlantic travel in 1976. Developed through the cooperation of British and French entities, the Concorde was designed to fly at [1,350 miles per hour](https://www.cnn.com/travel/article/concorde-flying-what-was-it-like/index.html) (Mach 2) and shorten the trip from Europe to the United States to about three and a half hours.

Between 1976 and 2003, Concordes flew from [London to New York](https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/the-concorde-makes-its-final-flight), as well as into airports in places like Paris and Edinburgh. Only 20 Concordes were ever built; they required a hefty price tag to climb aboard, and passengers were treated to the [most luxurious service](https://www.cnn.com/style/article/concorde-supersonic-design-lifestyle/index.html) the friendly skies had to offer.

A crash in July 2000 halted Concorde travel, but the supersonic airliners continued to be in service until October 2003. By that time, the age, expense, and [decline in popularity](https://www.museumofflight.org/aircraft/concorde) of Concorde planes made their use untenable.