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Gifts That Made History

New York (NAPS) - Many historical figures were gifted as gift-givers-so much so that we still remember their extravagant tokens of esteem.

Take King Nebuchadnezzar. He built the Hanging Gardens of Babylon-one of the seven wonders of the ancient world-for his Median bride who longed for the green hills of her former home.

Also in the ancient world, the Roman Emperor Nero was one of the biggest donors of all times: at parties he'd throw numbered balls into the air, then present cash, jewels and mansions to the lucky people who caught them.

Charlemagne rewarded his conquering generals with all the land they could walk around from sunrise to sunset. Another ruler, Charles V, once gave his banker the entire country of Venezuela!

A former slave girl was the recipient of still another spectacular gift. In the Brazilian mountains, some 200 years ago, a diamond merchant, Joao Fernandes de Oliveira, lost his heart to captivating Chica de Silva. He bought her freedom and made her mistress of a great country house which was surrounded by gardens. But Chica longed to live by the water's edge and sail in a vessel. So to make her even happier de Oliveira built a whole lake in the highest town of Brazil, launched a small ship, and put it at her disposal with a crew of ten men!

Modern history is also being written in terms of the present. Hotel baron George Bolt, for example, tried to recapture his own youth by means of a sensational gift to his wife. He bought one of the Thousand Islands in the St. Lawrence River, then had it carved in the shape of a heart. On Heart Island, Bolt then began constructing an ornate castle similar to those on the German Rhine where he had lived as a boy. After he spent several years and several million dollars to make this the perfect gift, Bolt's wife died. Heartbroken, he abandoned the project, and Bolt's Castle stands today as a reminder of one unrepresented present.

History's greatest gifts were so valuable that they



The people that wire flowers anywhere in the States, FTD, have uncovered this unusual historical fact about gifts: when Nero gave a party, baskets on the ceiling would release hundreds of precious jewels for his guests-finders keepers!

now seem outside the realm of reason. Such legendary largess is beyond the wildest dreams of most kings and rulers today-let alone mere men. But down-to-earth, time-honored surprises such as flowers need be neither expensive nor extensive to be treasured by the recipient. And it's now easier than ever to send flowers through the Florists' Transworld Delivery Association at local (FTD) flower shops. They're one modern way within the means of most to express fragrant affection for a dear one, across town, across the country or overseas.

Less lavish than flowers was the gift of another plant particularly appreciated in ancient Persia-a potato! For this, the emperor-on the receiving end-expressed great gratitude. Persia was then suffering from a famine, and from one potato enough seed potatoes could be grown to feed a nation.

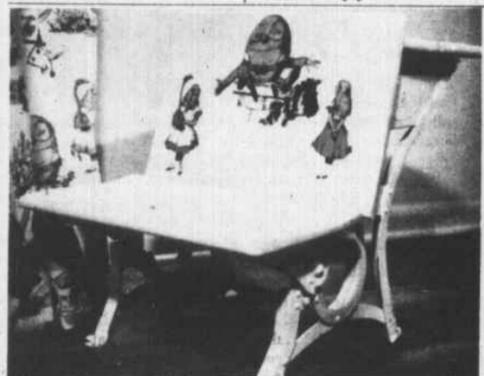
Later, Napoleon set a shining example when he gave Josephine a tiara blazine with 880 diamonds. But another diamond-one of the world's most famous-was a gift to the people of the United States. In 1958, the legendary

Hope diamond, appraised at \$176,920, was presented to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D. C., by diamond merchant Harry Winston.

Gratitude has more latitude in the Fiji Islands where the person receiving a gift on certain festive days is entitled to anything he wants. And, taking stock of silk stockings, it is interesting to note that

the first silk stockings ever made went to an English queen.

But while monarchs and other wealthy individuals have given and taken some of history's greatest gifts, one statistic should make modern Americans take heart. Collectively, the greatest philanthropists of all time may be the American people, who give charities about \$8 billion every year!



CONVERSATION PIECE-An old school desk bought from a secondhand store comes to life with cotton decoupage. Given an antique white finish, the desk is decorated with Alice in Wonderland and Humpty Dumpty characters cut from a cotton decorator print. The same fabric is used for draperies.

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