

Tax trivia

Segment 1

During feudal times a vassal (tenant) paid a type of tax called feudal aids or aids to his Lord. In England the aids were paid only when the Lord's eldest son was knighted or his eldest daughter was getting married. In France aids continued as a tax for the royal family until the French Revolution in 1789. Also, during feudal times, English men who did not want to join the army or go to war had to pay a tax known as scutage.

Segment 2

During the medieval era, the English imposed a land tax known as danegeld to raise funds to pay for their military expenditures. The tax rate at that time was two shillings for every hide of land, which was about 100 to 120 acres. If the land was ploughed for farming, another tax called carucate was collected. A shilling then would have the purchasing power of about £3.40 today.

Segment 3

The narrowest house in Amsterdam is approximately 180 cm wide, which was actually less than the height of the average Dutch person. Historically, property in Amsterdam was taxed based on the width, which is why many houses are so narrow and deep.

Segment 4

In 1800, the British began what later became the income tax system that we know today. The tax was imposed to pay for the war with Napoleon. Sixteen years later, opponents of the tax law forced it to be abolished and demanded the destruction of all documents that made reference to the law. However, we know about it because a copy of the tax law was saved in the basement of the British Tax Court.

Segment 5

In ancient Egypt, the Pharaohs imposed taxes on cooking oil and appointed tax collectors, known as scribes, to oversee the collection of these taxes.

Segment 6

The Athenians of Greece charged a tax referred to as eisphora during times of war. Every Athenian had to pay this tax which was used to pay for spears, arrows, crossbows, shields and armour that the soldiers needed for war. This tax was considered an emergency tax and was stopped once the war was over. If soldiers returned victorious from the war with riches acquired from their defeated foes, the taxes collected were refunded to the citizens. The Greeks were also noted for charging a tax on all residents who did not have both an Athenian mother and father. The tax was referred to as metoikion.

Segment 7

During the 18th century owning a hat was expensive in England. A tax was imposed on hats to protect the beaver fur industry that was developing in the North American plantations. The duty was collected by means of a stamped ticket fixed to the lining of the hat. Shops had to specify the price of the hat and taxes paid on the purchaser's receipt. It was supposed that the rich would have a large number of expensive hats whereas the poor would have only one inexpensive hat (or none at all). There was a heavy fine for not paying the hat tax. It was a happy moment for all hat wearers when the tax was repealed in 1811.

Segment 8

In England you need a licence to watch or record live television program on any device. A colour TV licence costs about £145 and must be renewed every year. TV licensing fees support public broadcasting and are imposed in many European countries.

Segment 9

A "Jock" tax was first levied in California in 1991 when a tax official realized that the winning team in the NBA finals was not from California and each of the winning players was to be given a huge amount of money as a bonus. He felt that since those players had earned that money in California, it should be taxed there. Many states also decided this was a good idea and applied it to celebrities who earned money in states other than their home state.

Segment 10

Tax farming was an ancient principle of granting the authority for tax collection to private citizens or groups. It was common in Egypt, Rome, Great Britain and Greece. Prospective tax farmers bid at auction for the contract rights to collect a particular tax and were held responsible for any loss. Tax farmers were very abusive towards the people from whom they collected taxes. The scribes of Rome were tax farmers.

Segment 11

Centuries ago when the Papal State dominated Tuscany, the rulers imposed an extremely high tax on salt. As a form of protest, Tuscan bakers began to make their bread without salt. To this day, Tuscan bread is saltless.

Segment 12

In the 1700's, Peter the Great of Russia taxed beards, boots, beehives, basements, chimneys, food, clothing, birth, marriage and burial.

Segment 13

All wild blueberries processed in the state of Maine, or unprocessed and shipped out of the state, are taxed at 1½ cents per pound. The blueberry tax is used to support research and other activities that help the wild blueberry industry in Maine stay competitive.