

Factoids and the Blue Moon

Howard L. Cohen

Repeat inaccurate information long enough and it may become accepted as true, a *factoid*.

A calendrical goof by *Sky & Telescope* in 1946 told us the second full moon in a calendar month is called a *blue moon*. And this became the rule.

However, many years before this, the *Maine Farmer's Almanac* defined a blue moon as the third full moon in a season of four. This definition is now finally becoming better known through news media.

Or is it?

As mentioned in a previous article, many are still getting it wrong! For example, recently *Fox News*, *the Christian Science Monitor*, *Enstarz*, *Inquisitr*, *Huffingtonpost*, *Livescience*, *Yahoo! News*, *CBS News*, and *ABC News* web sites all recited the “Maine Rule” as the fourth full moon in a three-month season.

And even today's comic strip, *Frazz*, by Jef Mallett tells us the original definition of a blue moon is the fourth full moon in a quarter (*Gainesville Sun*, 2012 August 31).

Not so.

It's the **third full moon** not the fourth in the quarter. This was done to keep names of other moons in proper order according to the season.

So, will the “Maine Rule” be corrupted again? Time will tell. If so, we will have invented another *factoid*.

In fact, the word *factoid* itself has become a “factoid.” Many believe this word is the same as a fact. It is not. Instead, it is an “invented fact”!



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