History 101

Cavaliers vs. Roundheads!

"Off with their heads! Off with their heads!" Ah, those were the days...
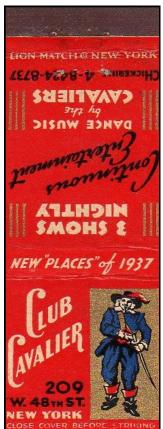
We're talking about the English civil war between King Charles I and the nobles on one side, and Oliver Cromwell, Parliament, and the bulk of the English people on the other. 1642-1651.

Charles I's side was referred to as the 'Cavaliers', due to the swashbuckling fashions of the nobles (all those silks, ruffles, and feathers, don'tcha know), while Cromwell's side was deemed the 'Roundheads' because Cromwell and Parliament were Puritans, and the Puritans of the time had a rather distinctive bowl-shaped haircut (much like Moe of the Three Stooges).

Well, to cut to the chase, the Roundheads won; Charles I, as a potential absolute ruler, lost his head; and little Charles II was exiled to the French court. Cromwell and the Puritan Parliament ruled England without a king for the next ten years (the "Commonwealth").

In that civil war, the Cavaliers suffered 50,000 casualties; the Roundheads lost 34,000; and there were 127,000 noncombatant deaths, including 40,000 civilians. *[wikipedia]*

While Cromwell had proved to be an effective leader, the Puritan Parliament had spent much of its time trying to ram Puritanism down the throats of the rest of the English population. When Cromwell died, the English people (being Anglicans) decided they had had enough of Puritans. It was pay-back time when the Puritans were finally ousted from power.

Thus it was that some 'persecuted' Puritans decided life might be better in the New World. Hence the establishment of Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New Hampshire. There was even a short-lived Puritan colony established in Nicaragua.

Today, Cromwell remains one of the most controversial figures in British history. Considered a regicidal dictator by some, a military dictator by others, a hero of liberty by still others, and a classic revolutionary by yet others, he was selected as one of the ten greatest Britons of all time in a 2002 BB poll.

When Charles II eventually regained the English throne, Cromwell's body was exhumed on January 30, 1661 (the 12 anniversary of the execution of Charles I), and posthumously executed. His body was then hanged in chains and then thrown into a pit. His severed head was displayed on a pole outside Westminster Hall until 1685.