

# **A History of the New Year**

## **A move from March to January**

The celebration of the New Year on January 1st is a relatively new phenomenon. The earliest recording of a New Year celebration is believed to have been in Mesopotamia, c. 2000 B.C. and was celebrated around the time of the vernal equinox, in mid-March. A variety of other dates tied to the seasons were also used by various ancient cultures. The Egyptians, Phoenicians, and Persians began their new year with the fall equinox, and the Greeks celebrated it on the winter solstice.

## **Early Roman Calendar: March 1st Rings in the New Year**

The early Roman calendar designated March 1 as the New Year. The calendar had just ten months, beginning with March. That the New Year once began with the month of March is still reflected in some of the names of the months. September through December, our ninth through twelfth months, were originally positioned as the seventh through tenth months (septem is Latin for "seven," octo is "eight," novem is "nine," and decem is "ten.")

## **January Joins the Calendar**

The first time the New Year was celebrated on January 1st was in Rome in 153 B.C. (In fact, the month of January did not even exist until around 700 B.C., when the second king of Rome, Numa Pontilius, added the months of January and February.) The New Year was moved from March to January because that was the beginning of the civil year, the month that the two newly elected Roman consuls-the highest officials in the Roman republic-began their one-year tenure. But this New Year date was not always strictly and widely observed, and the New Year was still sometimes celebrated on March 1.

## **Julian Calendar: January 1st Officially Instituted as the New Year**

In 46 B.C. Julius Caesar introduced a new, solar-based calendar that was a vast improvement on the ancient Roman calendar, which was a lunar system that had become wildly inaccurate over the years. The Julian calendar decreed that the New Year would occur with January 1, and within the Roman world, January 1 became the consistently observed start of the New Year.

## **Middle Ages: January 1st Abolished**

In medieval Europe, however, the celebrations accompanying the New Year were considered pagan and unchristian like, and in 567 the Council of Tours abolished January 1 as the beginning of the year. At various times and in various places throughout medieval Christian Europe, the New Year was celebrated on Dec. 25, the birth of Jesus; March 1; March 25, the Feast of the Annunciation; and Easter.

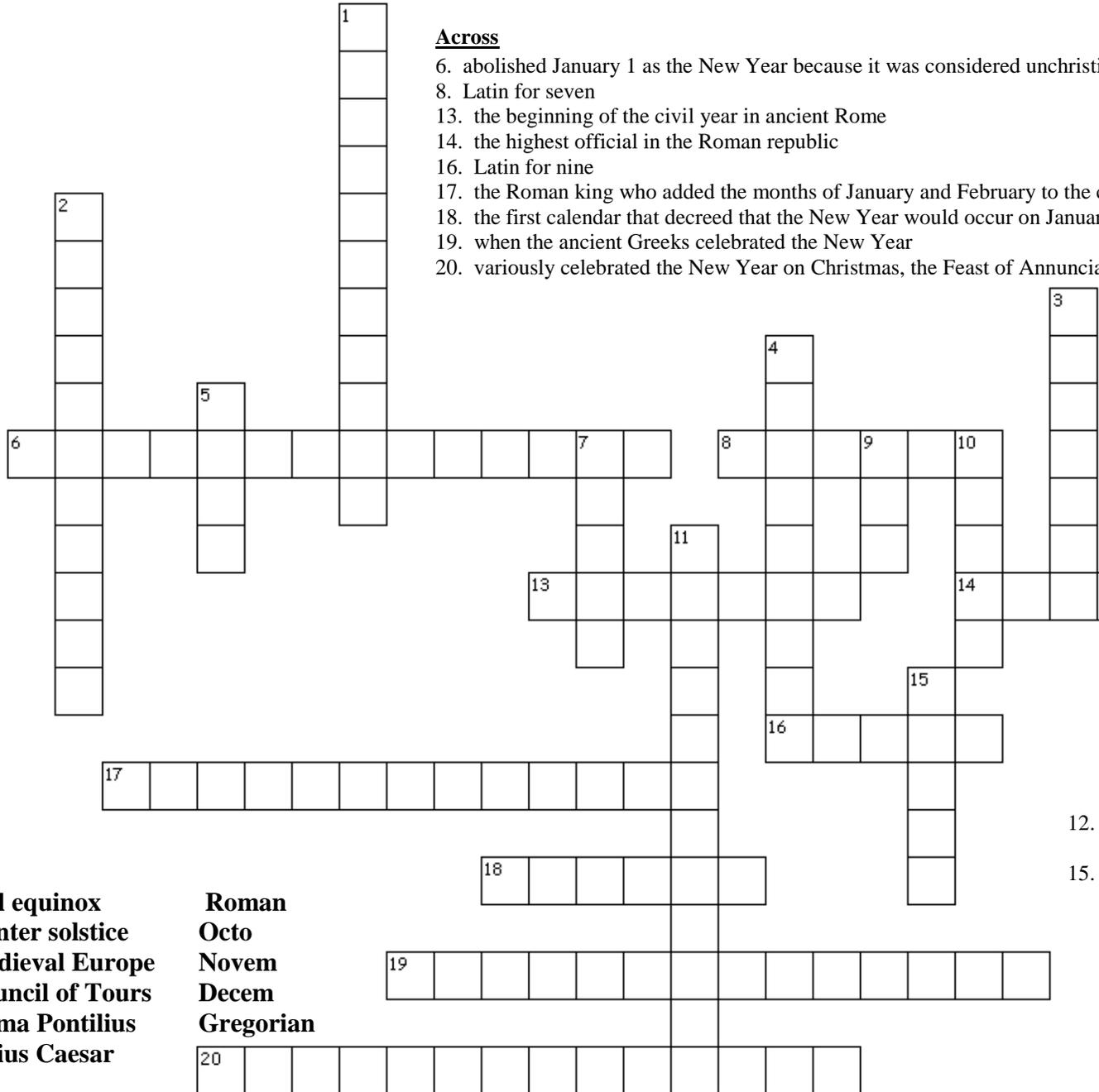
## **Gregorian Calendar: January 1st Restored**

In 1582, the Gregorian calendar reform restored January 1 as New Year 's day. Although most Catholic countries adopted the Gregorian calendar almost immediately, it was only gradually adopted among Protestant countries. The British, for example, did not adopt the reformed calendar until 1752. Until then, the British Empire -and their American colonies- still celebrated the New Year in March.



Solve the crossword puzzle using the information from the reading selection.

Name \_\_\_\_\_



**Across**

- 6. abolished January 1 as the New Year because it was considered unchristianlike
- 8. Latin for seven
- 13. the beginning of the civil year in ancient Rome
- 14. the highest official in the Roman republic
- 16. Latin for nine
- 17. the Roman king who added the months of January and February to the calendar
- 18. the first calendar that decreed that the New Year would occur on January 1
- 19. when the ancient Greeks celebrated the New Year
- 20. variously celebrated the New Year on Christmas, the Feast of Annunciation, and Easter

**Down**

- 1. when the ancient Egyptians, Phoenicians, and Persians celebrated the New Year
- 2. where the earliest recorded history of a New Year's celebration is
- 3. the country that did not adopt the reformed calendar until 1752
- 4. the calendar that finally restored January 1 as the New Year
- 5. Latin for eight
- 7. this early calendar designated March 1 as the New Year
- 9. the number of months the early Roman calendar had
- 10. the month in which the New Year was most often celebrated throughout history
- 11. introduced a solar-based calendar
- 12. the inaccurate type of calendar used by the ancient Romans
- 15. Latin for ten

Fall equinox  
 Winter solstice  
 Medieval Europe  
 Council of Tours  
 Numa Pontilius  
 Julius Caesar

Roman  
 Octo  
 Novem  
 Decem  
 Gregorian

Mesopotamia  
 Consul  
 March  
 Lunar  
 January

Septem  
 Julian  
 Britain  
 Ten