



Measuring systems in the United States

Since the colonialists brought with them the measuring methods of their homelands, confusing and contradictory measuring systems came to America. For instance, the imperial gallon used in England did not come to America. The U.S. gallon is a smaller one, and was called the Queen Anne wine gallon by the British. Today this difference in size between the Imperial gallon and the U.S. gallon causes confusion when converting to the metric system.

The law of 1792, under the new Constitution of the United States, provided for fractional coinage and for the decimal system. The adoption of the decimal system for coins shows that the American leaders recognised the advantages of the simple decimal system. In 1795, France tried to convince the United States to use the metric system, but Congress did nothing. In 1821 John Quincy Adams wrote a comprehensive report for Congress based on a four-year investigation. An excerpt of the report follows:

Weights and Measures may be ranked among the necessities of life to every individual of human so-

ciety. They enter into the economical arrangements and daily concerns of every family. They are necessary to every occupation of human industry; to the distribution and security of every species of property; to every transaction of trade and commerce; to the ingenuity of the artificer; to the studies of the philosopher; to the researches of the antiquarian; to the navigation of the mariner; and the marches of the soldier; to all the exchanges of peace, and all the operations of war. The knowledge of them, as in established use, is among the first elements of education, and is often learned by those who learn nothing else, not even to read and write.

Although three decades earlier, Thomas Jefferson also had written a report for the Congress, the metric system was no more than a conception at that time, and his report was considered only as an alternative and not to be entertained seriously by the newly founded United States of America.

(Taken from <http://www.cftech.com/BrainBank/OTHERREFERENCE/WEIGHTSandMEASURES/MetricHistory.html>)

EXERCISES

1 True or false?

- a. The Imperial and the American gallon represent the same quantity. T F
- b. The decimal system was introduced in the U.S. in 1972. T F
- c. John Quincy Adams thought that measures were to be considered as a necessity for every individual in the human society. T F
- d. Abraham Lincoln also wrote a report for the Congress about the importance of the decimal system. T F

2 Complete.

In 1792, with the new U.S., the decimal system with began to be used for American coins. By making this, American leaders officially the simplicity and the consequent advantage of the system. Although they not to use the system for measuring

distances • fractions • recognized • metric • constitution • decimal • decided • choice

3 Match questions and answers.

QUESTIONS		ANSWERS	
A	What is the difference between a Queen Ann and a U.S. gallon?	1	In 1792 U.S. adopted the decimal system for coins.
B	What happened in 1792 when the U.S. introduced a new Constitution?	2	It is a necessity for every individual of human society, it affects their everyday life.
C	According to John Quincy Adams' speech, to whom was the use of a system for measures and weights a necessity?	3	There is no difference, it is the same quantity called by two different names.
A		B	
		C	