**Happenin’s ‘Round the House**

***Rachel Barnes, Education and Volunteer Coordinator***

**Birthday Parties: Some History, Some Coming Up**

In the book of Genesis, it is written, “Thus it came about on the third day, which was Pharaoh’s birthday, that he made a feast for all his servants,” (Genesis, 40:20). Right there, sandwiched in between Pharaoh’s decisions to execute some of his staff based on Joseph’s dreams, is the first reference to “birthday party” in written history.

Is this where the concept of birthday begins? The baked, arid, sand-swept land of the Pharaohs?

Well, kind of. According to Dr. James Hoffmeier, a renowned Egyptologist, there was no honoring or celebrating the physical birth of the regular, every day, common Joe in the ancient world. Rather, the focus was on the gods and goddesses. In Egypt, a king’s coronation was a transformation into a living god, a transition from human to divine, and that did not happen every day. Therefore, the pharaoh’s “birthday,” as mentioned in Genesis, commemorated his coronation day, his “birth” as a divine being on earth, and not the day his mother welcomed him into the world.

In ancient Greece, this honor and deference to the gods continued. There were no celebrations or rituals to mark the day you were born. There were celebrations and rituals to pay homage to the volatile, prickly, temperamental, and yes, quite high-maintenance pantheon of deities that oversaw everything from their humble abode atop Mount Olympus. To honor Artemis, the goddess of the moon, the ancient Greeks left offerings of moon-shaped cakes, lit with candles. The soft glow from the candle flame was reminiscent of the moon’s own pale light, and thus, brought the cakes closer to the goddess. Scholars today believe this ancient practice has carried on through the millennia – guess where the tradition of candles on our birthday cakes may have started?

Moving into the world of ancient Rome sees the beginning of the true birthday celebration. Roman men (men only) held celebrations with friends and families commemorating the anniversary of their birth, and public holidays were implemented to honor the birthdays of prominent citizens. Sorry, ladies. Your parties don’t start until the 1100s.

What I want to know is why Julius Caesar’s birthday is not a public holiday anymore??

Anyway, as the ancient world passed away into the Middle Ages and Medieval era, the tradition of commemorating the anniversary of your birth spread across the globe. With the dawn of the Industrial Revolution in the late 1700s, many of the customs associated with birthdays today – like cake – became more prominent and widespread. In fact, you can thank 18th century Germany for the whole idea of the birthday cake. German parents celebrated their children with *Kinderfeste*, a party that included a cake with a candle for each year of the child’s life. Gosh, now that tradition sounds familiar.

But why all this talk about birthdays? And birthday history?

Because this December, our very own cowboy movie star celebrates a big one. Yes, Hart Friends, good old William S. Hart turns the big 1-5-0 on Saturday, December 6, and we are continuing a tradition started 3,000 years ago in the wilds of ancient Egypt.

We are having a birthday party.

First, we invite everyone to come up to the hilltop mansion for a free guided tour of the birthday boy’s glorious home during our normal hours of operation on Saturdays (11:00am – 4:00pm, tours starting every 30 minutes and last tour starts at 3:30pm), and have some good old fashioned birthday party fun while you’re at it. We’ll be making party hats, playing classic games like pin the tail on …. Fritz, and following treasure maps to find buried gold.

But that’s not all! The Friends of Hart Park is hosting a very special, members-only birthday celebration as the sun goes down on December 6. Details of that incredible evening can be found at the beginning of this newsletter, and we hope you will spread the word to your friends. Invite them to join! After all, If they join the Friends at Family Level or higher, your friends receive 2 free tickets to this once-every-150-years event! You can’t miss that!

Besides, maybe we’ll make history, and add a whole new tradition to the celebration of birthdays.