2020 Programming at the Hart Museum

What’s the latest from the Hart Museum? We thought we’d take this opportunity to let you know more about one of our program offerings. Several years ago we realized that guided tours are not for everyone. As we explored other options, we found that a more casual, informal format was helpful to a wide range of visitors. We began experimenting with what we call Open House days, and discovered they were popular with families with young children, seniors with mobility issues, people who have lots of questions as well as those who just want to “see the house,” and others. These events are a favorite with many of the staff, as well as visitors, because they allow for a more personal experience, and we can explore some topics with a bit more depth. In connection with popular park events, these days also allow us to accommodate more visitors than we could ever do with scheduled tours.

With success we have gradually added more of these days to our schedule. They are now scheduled for the third Saturday of every month, with a couple of weekends on both Saturday and Sunday. On these days, visitors can enter the house at any time between 11am and 4pm, walk the space as they want, while we have staff and volunteers located around the house to answer questions.

Last year we committed to one of these days each month, with a theme or topic for every other month. This year we decided to offer a theme each month, several of which tie in to the County’s designated heritage months. Some of the subjects we are exploring this year are:

* March 21 – celebrating 100 years of Women’s Suffrage and a few amazing women in early Hollywood history whose voices played a role in the suffrage movement. See films made in support of the suffrage movement and others against it and get a better understanding of what public discourse was like at this time in history.
* April 18-19 – talking about Cowboys, of course (during the Cowboy Festival) – we have a display planned for the Ranch House, “How to Dress Like an Old West Cowboy.” Modern cowboys wear modern clothes, with some garments that are distinct to the work of a cowboy such as spurs, boots and hats. But most clothes are similar to other laborers, like shirts and trousers. It was the same for the old west cowboy from 1866 until 1900. Fashions were different then and we will be illustrating differences in shirts, trousers and boots.
* July 18 – the West –in connection with the National Day of the Cowboy, (but different from the days in April) we may explore the idea that just as the west was formative for William S. Hart’s identy, it played a major role in shaping the American identity
* August 15 – Community – visitors will learn about Hart’s contributions to the town of Newhall that made a difference in the lives of those who lived here, and we want to celebrate the museum volunteers who help us carry out his legacy every day
* September 19 – Radio - Can you imagine life without a television? Come join us at this open house to see what it would have been like. Learn about the history of radios, how they worked, and how they changed the world. Also gather around at scheduled show times and listen to some radio shows that Bill Hart might have listened to here in his mansion!
* December 19 – Friendship – Hart loved sharing his home with others, especially his many interesting friends. Join us as we introduce visitors to Bill’s well known, and lesser known, friends, highlighting some of the souvenirs of those friendships that are seen around the house.

We’ve also experimented with offering small “talks” or “chats” that go into a bit more detail on some aspect of the topic. For instance, when we focused on some of the art in the house, one of our volunteers created a 10-minute program about Charles Russell’s *Buffalo Hunt #14*. Debbie offered some context for the creation of the painting, invited guests to talk about what they observed in the painting, and provided reference for how Charlie knew how to paint subject matter he’d never actually witnessed. We arranged for visitors participating in these talks to get up close to the painting, something they never get to do on a regular tour.

During the Newhallywood Silent Film Festival in February, we offered visitors a chance to step up and view the inside of the projection booth, one of the most unusual features of the house, and not available on our everyday tours. Folks loved it! We also coordinated with the performing artists at NHM to offer a “Slapstick and Melodrama” workshop twice each day, which was also so much fun, and popular with kids of all ages.

We are already starting to plan topics for next year, so stay tuned. We hope you’ll come check out one of our Open House days this year!