

100 Years — And Counting

by Kendra Strubhart, Heritage Interpreter

2015 is an important year for the Forest Preserve District. On Jan. 11, 1915, conservation-minded DuPage County citizens filed an 800-signature petition requesting the organization of a county forest preserve district, and on June 7 of that same year voters passed the referendum that did just that. To celebrate this milestone anniversary, the District is hosting special centennial activities, events and initiatives throughout 2015.



The celebration officially kicked off May 23 at the annual “Family Field Day” at St. James Farm, which featured archery, fishing, and equestrian and canine demonstrations. On June 7 the “Centennial Medallion Search” begins, and forest preserve fans can use clues and their knowledge of the preserves to try to find hidden coins and win prizes. On June 27 St. James Farm will again play host, this time to the “Centennial Nature Fest,” which will feature all of the ways the District maintains the rich habitats that make our forest preserves such awesome places. Throughout the year, employees, volunteers and visitors will be sharing 100 of their favorite forest preserve stories online. Details on all of these programs and more are posted at dupageforest.org/100Years.

Here at Mayslake Peabody Estate, we are diving into the fun as well. In June we are opening an outdoor installation art exhibit, “When Art and Nature Meet,” which will explore the juxtaposition of art and nature with works from professional artists and community groups displayed on the grounds through October. In July we are hosting “Take Part in Art,” a free day-long event that will give visitors a chance to try different art techniques and mediums and contribute to a piece that will be part of the “When Art and Nature Meet” exhibit. We will also be embracing the Forest Preserve District’s founding year with “(Un)rest and Relaxation: A Look Into 1915,” which opens July 1 inside the mansion. The exhibit will look at events, fads and everyday life of 1915 through artifacts, displays, newspaper articles and informational panels.

One of the most interesting aspects we discovered during our research for “(Un)rest and Relaxation” was that 1915 was a year of polarity. Innovations were improving life, and people had more money and free time for leisure activities, but WWI was underway in Europe. At the Second Battle of Ypres in 1915, the first large-scale use of poisonous gas in any war made it evident that the Great War would be unlike any other. In the U. S. the threat of joining the war loomed ominously, and citizens spent a great deal of time protesting and worrying about the months to come. This duality of life in a single year is sure to make for a fascinating exhibit, but if that doesn’t spark your interest, here are some other interesting, tragic and humorous facts we discovered while researching 1915.

On Feb. 12, the 106th anniversary of Abraham Lincoln’s birth, workmen laid the cornerstone of the Lincoln Memorial. The memorial was the result of several years of planning. Early proposals included a bridge over the Potomac River, a road from Washington, D.C., to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, and even an Egyptian-style pyramid.

On April 24 the Turkish government arrested over 200 Armenian intellectuals and community leaders in Constantinople. This event is considered the start of the Armenian Genocide, in which approximately 1.5 million Armenians were systematically killed between 1915 and 1923. It’s commonly (although not universally) recognized as one of the first modern genocides and is the second-most studied after the Holocaust.

During spring training, Wilbert Robinson, the manager of the National League’s Brooklyn Robins, claimed it was no great challenge to catch a baseball dropped from hundreds of feet overhead. To prove his claim, he hired aviatrix Ruth Law to fly overhead and drop a baseball from 525 feet. Stories conflict, but either Law forgot the baseball or Brooklyn outfielder Casey Stengel decided to play a trick on Robinson. In any case, the baseball was replaced with a grapefruit, and when Robinson attempted to catch the “ball,” the grapefruit exploded. Robinson was unharmed, but from that day on he referred to airplanes as “fruit flies.”

