

Facts & Fancies

Fairlawn Haven Care Center and West Haven Assisted Living



Celebrating March

**Irish-American Heritage
Month**

Optimism Month

Craft Month

Celebrate Your Name Week
March 3–9

Mardi Gras
March 5

International Women's Day
March 8

Pi Day
March 14

St. Patrick's Day
March 17

**Make Up Your Own Holiday
Day**
March 26

Religious Roots to Raucous Parties

As March arrives, many look forward to the holidays of St. Patrick's Day and Mardi Gras. Yet both of these holidays are more modern American inventions than age-old religious traditions.

St. Patrick's Day, as a religious celebration, has a lengthy history. It dates back to the mid-17th century and was initiated to honor Saint Patrick and his work to bring Christianity to Ireland. The Feast of St. Patrick was held each year on the date of his supposed death, on March 17, 461 AD. The observance of the date was a solemn occasion, mostly involving quiet prayer. As recently as the 1970s, pubs were closed in Ireland on St. Patrick's Day. The rollicking revelry typically associated with the day was decidedly un-Irish and an American invention. During the Irish Famine of 1845–1850, many Irish immigrated to America, where they were not welcome. As the Irish community in America grew and prospered, they began to celebrate both their Irish-ness and their newfound American-ness. Corned beef, shamrocks, and leprechauns were never part of true Irish St. Paddy's Day celebrations, but they were integrated into Irish-American identity and so became celebrated symbols of St. Patrick's Day. The American version of St. Patrick's Day is so strong that many Irish-American traditions have even returned to Ireland.

Mardi Gras, like St. Paddy's Day, originated as a solemn religious holiday. As the day before the start of the ritual fasting of Lent, it was an opportunity to indulge in sweet, fatty foods, giving rise to the name "Fat Tuesday." Over the centuries, these small indulgences led to greater hedonism, practices that were heavily discouraged by the Church. The elaborate Mardi Gras celebrations held in New Orleans emerged in 1857 when a group of men created a secret society called the Mistick Krewe of Comus. They held a lavish ball and parade, setting the secular foundations for many wild Mardi Gras to come.

A Shakespearean Mystery

For a week in March each year, the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust in Stratford-upon-Avon, England, celebrates the life of William Shakespeare. From March 18 to 24, fans of the bard are invited to visit the Shakespeare family home and view his many famous works. However, there are some who believe that William Shakespeare did not write the many plays and sonnets that he is credited for. These doubters assert the existence of an alternate writer.



Toward the end of the 19th century, some scholars began to doubt the identity of William Shakespeare. At first, these doubters were thought to be crackpots. Over the years, the conspiracy gained traction. In 2007, a group of Shakespeare skeptics, consisting of performers and scholars, made an official “Declaration of Reasonable Doubt.” Ample evidence exists to prove that Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon and became a well-known actor and theater-owner in his time. But these skeptics believe that there is simply not enough evidence to prove that this Shakespeare was the same man who wrote so many famous works. They believe Shakespeare’s modest upbringing could not have afforded him the quality education that such a talented writer would have needed. The true author, they argue, must have been a traveler, writer, or aristocrat such as philosopher Francis Bacon, poet Christopher Marlowe, or Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford.

Of course, Shakespeare has a wealth of defenders, too. They argue that Shakespeare’s elementary education would have been adequate for his talents. Paper evidence may not exist because paper was a scarce resource back then and no one would have kept scraps of notes or letters. It instead would have been reused. Regardless of your belief in Shakespeare’s identity, Shakespeare Week may be a time to enjoy the bard’s words rather than question his good name.

Grammar Rules

The Society for the Promotion of Good Grammar has declared March 4 as Grammar Day. English is often said to be the hardest language to learn, and English grammar is even difficult for native speakers. Why is it so difficult? The order of words, pronunciations, homophones, synonyms, idioms—all of these are confusing! As language evolves, more and more grammar rules are being ignored. It is considered okay to begin a sentence with *And* or *But*, just as it is acceptable to end a sentence with a preposition. You can also split as many infinitives as you want! There are some rules, however, that are not as flexible. Double negatives are still a no-no. Also, *alot* is still not a word. You can write *a lot* when you mean “many,” or *alot* when you’re assigning a share or portion. With well over a million words in the English language, you are likely to find something to celebrate today.

Night Owls



The International Festival of Owls, a celebration of these mysterious nighttime creatures, will occur during the first three days of March. Is it the owl’s nocturnal nature, their swift silence, their chilling calls of “who,” or their bizarre rotating necks that make them so fascinating? These birds have figured prominently in our imaginations for millennia. In ancient Greece, the owl was the symbol of Athena, goddess of wisdom. It was believed that an “inner light” gave the owl its superb night vision, and it was considered a good omen if an owl was spied overhead watching you. Because an owl is a bird of darkness, it has often been associated with death. During the Middle Ages, owls were thought to be witches or witches’ helpers. American Indians, too, held many beliefs about owls and death. To some, owls were the spirits of the dead. To others, owls were guides of the recently deceased to the underworld. During the Festival of Owls, take the time to encounter one of these magnificent animals up close and you, too, may begin to think they are more than just birds.

Girls Guiding Girls

The Girl Scouts is one of the largest and most successful organizations for girls in the world. Juliette Gordon Low, finding inspiration from the Girl Guide movement in England, established the first Girl Guide Troop in America on March 12, 1912. For this reason, the week of March 10–16 is celebrated as Girl Scout Week.



Born in Savannah, Georgia, just before the American Civil War, Gordon Low was raised with traditional Southern values emphasizing duty, loyalty, and respect. Gordon Low was also an American aristocrat born to successful parents. As such, she attended boarding schools, met many influential people, married well, and moved to England. Gordon Low's marriage was not a happy one, however, and she spent much time alone painting, learning metalworking and woodworking, and doing charity work. After her husband died, she met Sir Robert Baden-Powell, founder of the Boy Scouts, a guide movement for boys that taught the skills of military preparedness and outdoor adventuring. Scouting proved to be the perfect unity of values that she had enjoyed all her life: duty and respect combined with practical skills for survival. It was not long before Gordon Low met Agnes Baden-Powell, Sir Robert's sister and founder of the Girl Guides, and so Gordon Low organized Girl Guide troops in London herself.

Gordon Low returned to her beloved Savannah in March of 1912 with the mission to grow the girl scouting movement in America. On March 12, she registered 18 girls, establishing the very first Girl Guide troop. Thanks to her family's extensive social connections and the help of Sir Baden-Powell, Low was able to quickly grow her local troop into a nationwide movement. She faced one competitor, the Camp Fire Girls, but this organization believed that girls should not participate in strenuous outdoor activities meant for boys. Gordon Low held fast to her love of scouting, and for over 100 years, the Girl Scouts have given young girls the confidence, skills, and character to become the leaders of tomorrow.

Heist of the Century

On March 18, 1990, over \$500 million worth of artwork was stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston, Massachusetts. In the early morning hours, guards admitted two men dressed as police officers into the museum. These clever thieves quickly tied up the guards and spent the next hour stealing some of the museum's most valuable art. They stole works by Vermeer, Rembrandt, Degas, Manet, and Flinck. The FBI launched an investigation and, despite following leads all around the world, neither the thieves nor the artwork have ever been recovered. The heist remains the largest robbery of private property in history. Investigators do have their theories about the thieves. It is thought that they were part of an organized crime group from New England and the mid-Atlantic. The stolen paintings likely moved through Connecticut to Philadelphia, where they were illegally sold. Gangster Bobby Donati, an associate of known art thief Myles J. Connor Jr., may have led the robbery under the orders of Boston crime boss Vincent Ferrara. With no admissions or further evidence, there is still hope at the museum. Empty frames still hang on the walls, so visitors can see where the paintings once hung and may hang again.

The Birth of Rock 'n' Roll



The very first rock 'n' roll concert was staged on March 21, 1952, in Cleveland, Ohio. It was called the Moondog Coronation Ball and featured guitarist Tiny Grimes and His Rocking Highlanders, saxophonist Paul Williams and His Hucklebuckers, Billy Ward and His Dominoes, singer Varetta Dillard, and Danny Cobb. The concert was the idea of local radio DJ Alan Freed, the same man who popularized the phrase *rock 'n' roll*. On the night of the show, 20,000 people showed up with tickets, but the venue held only half the number. Tickets had been counterfeited. Afraid of a riot, the fire department stopped the concert after only one performance.

The Patterns of Life



The third Saturday in March has been designated Worldwide Quilting Day, a global celebration of quilters and their fabulous creations. Quilts began not as the intricately patterned blankets

we often use today, but as padded clothing. The first evidence we have of humans wearing quilted clothing comes from ancient Egypt. Quilted clothes were uncovered at the Temple of Osiris dating back 5,000 years. Modern quilting of clothes dates back to the Middle Ages in Europe when these soft garments were worn over and under chain mail armor. The first evidence we find of quilted blankets comes from 15th-century England, but all this evidence is merely written about; few, if any, blankets from that era have survived.

English immigrants brought their sewing and quilting skills with them to America, where quilting grew into more than a practical skill—it became an art form. Patterns grew into symbols and stories. When President Lincoln signed the Homestead Act of 1862, which opened up the West for settlement, families prepared for their westward journeys by sewing quilts. These quilts have become records of history.

One of the earliest patterns, known as the Nine Patch, was simply nine squares in a three-by-three pattern. This was the quickest quilt to sew and a great and thrifty use of leftover scraps of fabric. Often, girls as young as age three or four could be taught to sew the Nine Patch pattern. A more elaborate pattern was known as the Log Cabin. This pattern was symbolic of the home. The center square was always red, to symbolize the hearth at the heart of the home. Narrow strips of fabric, like logs used to build frontier cabins, radiated from the center square in stacks. Light fabrics representing the light of day were sewn on one side of the quilt. Dark fabrics representing night were sewn on the opposite side. This pattern was also known as the Sunshine and Shadow. Patterns depicting pinwheels, stars, flowers, animals, crops, biblical stories, and even schoolhouses followed. Women sewed as they lived, a tradition that continues to this day.

March Birthdays

In astrology, those born March 1–20 are the slippery Fish of Pisces. Selfless Pisces are very wise and empathetic, making them always willing to help others. These deep emotions also make Pisces talented artists and good friends. Those born March 21–31 are Rams of Aries. Like rams, Aries charge forward with courage, confidence, and enthusiasm. They embrace action, take risks, and will fight for their goals.

Ron Howard (actor/director) – March 1, 1954
Dr. Seuss (author) – March 2, 1904
Jean Harlow (actress) – March 3, 1911
Elizabeth Barrett Browning (poet) – March 6, 1806
Bobby Fischer (chess champ) – March 9, 1943
Liza Minnelli (entertainer) – March 12, 1946
Albert Einstein (scientist) – March 14, 1879
Moms Mabley (comedian) – March 19, 1894
Fannie Farmer (culinary expert) – March 23, 1857
Alan Arkin (actor) – March 26, 1934
Sam Walton (businessman) – March 29, 1918
Liz Claiborne (designer) – March 31, 1929

The March of Women's History



The month of March is Women's History Month, in recognition of women and their impact on culture and society all around the world. The movement to establish recognition of women's history began in Sonoma, California, in the 1970s. A group of women formed the Education Task Force of the Sonoma County Commission on the Status of Women. Their goal was to include women's history in the local school curriculum. For too long, men had dominated the study while women's contributions had nary a mention. The movement in Sonoma was such a success that it gained traction nationwide. In 1980, President Jimmy Carter established the first Women's History Week, and then in 1987, Congress declared the entire month of March as Women's History Month. Politicians, writers, freedom fighters, scientists, soldiers, athletes—women have made contributions in virtually every field. Honor them this March.