

DRINKS WITH DEAD PEOPLE

QUARANTINE EDITION

APRIL 6, 2020:

[WHITE HOUSE EASTER EGG ROLL](#)

It's a week of holidays here in quarantined-history-land. First up: why does the President of the United States host an Easter Egg roll on the White House Lawn every year?

THE STORY

It was 1876. Congress was debating budget, and they were in a pickle over the Capitol grounds – every year at Easter, the place was swamped with kids and families rolling dyed eggs down the hills. This in and of itself was ok, but the overall ruckus made a mess of the lawn, and Congress' landscaping budget was totally dry for the year. Plus, this was an age where cattle still routinely grazed in downtown D.C. and people were totally freaking out the cows. And so, the Capitol Building Turf Protection Act was enacted on April 21, 1876 and banned public festivities on the Capitol grounds.

Story goes, in 1877 it rained on Easter so no one had reason to see if Congress was really serious about the ban. But in 1878 when there was a good forecast and it looked like there would indeed be a crackdown on rolling eggs at the Capitol, kids marched straight up to President Rutherford B. Hayes and asked if they could come play in his yard instead (literally). Hayes said yes, and the White House Easter Egg Roll was born.

By 1880 it was a shindig, with the Evening Star noting that “The children took absolute possession of the grounds south of the White House to-day....The pump near the White House was a never-failing source of amusement and dampness. There must have been at least between five and six hundred children celebrating Easter Monday in the grounds.”

The occasion has been held most every year since. It was suspended on food conservation grounds in 1918, with WWI in full swing) and has been [cancelled for 2020](#). Read on [at the blog](#) for more detail and resources.

DISCUSS:

Does a public event like the Easter Egg Roll serve a valuable purpose? What is it?

Should government grounds and facilities have fundamentally public use and access? What restrictions are reasonable?

Apparently Mrs. Coolidge had a pet raccoon [named Rebecca](#). Is that weird, or sort of cool? Discuss.

Hi, I'm Betsy. Stuck at home? Let's learn history together, because the past helps us to understand that we are not alone. Weekday updates during #COVID19.

Questions? Comments? Say hello.

bgkellem@gmail.com

IG: @bgkellem

Visit Drinks With Dead People™ and subscribe for updates at:

<http://www.drinkswithdeadpeople.com>

READ MORE:

“[Origins of the White House Easter Egg Roll](#),” The White House Historical Association

“[Egg Roll](#),” *Retropod* by the Washington Post (PODCAST)

Primary source: “[Easter Monday Egg Rolling on the White House Lawn](#)” (stereograph, 1901)