**International Festival of 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.

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**The 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 allegedly 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.