Carey celebrates namesake’s 250th birthday

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YOU MIGHT NOT COUNT lighting 250 candles on a cake as one of life’s shrewd ideas.
Myron Noonkester, dean of William Carey University’s Noonkester School of Arts and Letters, put his finger on a few of the potential hazards as he proudly unveiled a birthday cake for the school’s namesake on Aug. 22.

“Lots of folks have said if you put 250 candles on the cake, the icing will melt, or you’ll set off the smoke alarm, or you may trigger the sprinkler system,” Noonkester told the assembled students, faculty and staff who came to celebrate Carey’s 250th birthday at the student conference center.

And, in the process, water the rare William Carey lithograph that you unveiled minutes earlier.

So Noonkester and company resorted to tactics, slowly lighting and extinguishing the candles in sections signifying such key numbers as the years Carey lived.

Then they ate cake. But, before that, they got a lecture about that precious lithograph.

It’s of the iconic painting of Carey with a Brahmin pundit now housed at Regent’s College in London.

Carey lived in India from 1793 to 1834.

Noonkester and Bennie Crockett, professor of religion and philosophy, recently purchased the lithograph – dated 1813, just two years after the original painting – from Grosvenor Prints in London. It will now become a prominent part of the Carey Center that they co-direct on campus.

“As far as we know, we are the only repository in the world that has a copy of this item,” said Noonkester.

One reason for its rarity? Carey wasn’t the kind of guy who posed for a picture.

“Carey was intensely uncomfortable during his life with celebrations of his life, of biography itself,” said Noonkester.

Cade Jarrell, a history graduate student in attendance, noted this irony in light of the yearlong celebration of Carey that lies ahead.

“I don’t think he minds,” Jarrell said with a laugh.

In fact, the real issue is getting more folks to learn about him. Jarrell got a firsthand glimpse at the school’s vast Carey resources by working at the Carey Center over the summer.

“It’s on campus. It’s just getting people to go to it,” he said.

The students who participated in the candle-lighting, certainly know about it. Because Chelsey Maywalt, Nafiyyah Younes and Marian Mauseth are Carey scholars on top of being members of the student government association, they must visit the center once a year.

“It’s not a chore, Maywalt said, explaining the appropriateness of the school being named after the Baptist missionary.

“When you think of missions, you think of William Carey,” said Maywalt, the student body president.

“Also my mother is a mini-feminist, so I like the things he did for women in India, such as outlawing widow-burning.”

Meanwhile Younes, the vice-president, cited Carey’s varied interests from botany to languages.

“He can be incorporated into every major at Carey, so that’s pretty cool,” she said.