



Halloween & Thanksgiving in the USA by Sara Tusek

HALLOWEEN

Halloween is a holiday celebrated on the night of October 31. Traditional activities include trick-or-treating, bonfires, costume parties, visiting "haunted houses" and carving jack-o-lanterns. Irish and Scottish immigrants carried versions of the tradition to North America in the nineteenth century. Other western countries embraced the holiday in the late twentieth century including Ireland, the United States, Canada, Puerto Rico and the United Kingdom, as well as of Australia and New Zealand.

Halloween has its origins in the ancient Celtic festival known as Samhain (pronounced "sah-win"). The festival of Samhain is a celebration of the end of the harvest season in Gaelic culture. Samhain was a time used by the ancient pagans to take stock of supplies and prepare for winter. The ancient Gaels believed that on October 31, the boundaries between the worlds of the living and the dead overlapped, and the deceased would come back to life, causing havoc such as sickness or damaged crops. The festival frequently involved bonfires. Masks and costumes were worn in an attempt to mimic the evil spirits or appease them.

Trick-or-treating, is an activity for children on or around Halloween in which they proceed from house to house

in costumes, asking for treats such as candy with the question, "Trick or treat?" The "trick" part of "trick or treat" is a threat to play a trick on the homeowner or his property if no treat is given.

The practice of dressing up in costumes and begging door to door for treats on holidays goes back to the Middle Ages, and includes Christmas wassailing. Trick-



or-treating resembles the late medieval practice of "souling," when poor folk would go door to door on Hallowmas (November 1), receiving food in return for prayers for the dead on All Souls Day (November 2). It originated in Ireland and Britain, although similar practices for the souls of the dead were found as far south as Italy.

Yet there is no evidence that souling was ever practiced in America, and trick-or-treating may have developed in America independent of any Irish or British antecedent. There is little history documentation of masking or costuming on Halloween — in Ireland, the UK, or America — before 1900.

Early national attention to trick-or-treating was given after WWII; the custom had become firmly established in popular culture by 1952, in the Disney cartoon "Trick or Treat." UNICEF conducts a national campaign for children to raise funds for the charity while trick-or-treating.

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Sara and Jarda Tusek at Blue Springs
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Halloween & Thanksgiving in the USA—from p. 1

Most stories of Thanksgiving history start with the harvest celebration of the pilgrims and the Native Americans that took place in the autumn of 1621.

Although they did have a three-day feast in celebration of a good harvest, and the local natives did participate, this "first thanksgiving" was not a holiday, simply a gathering. There is little evidence that this feast of thanks led directly to our modern Thanksgiving Day holiday.

In October of 1777 all 13 colonies joined in a thanksgiving celebration. It also commemorated the patriotic victory over the British at Saratoga. But it was a one-time affair.

George Washington proclaimed a National Day of Thanksgiving in 1789, although some were opposed to it. And later, President Thomas Jefferson opposed the idea of having a day of thanksgiving.

It was Sarah Josepha Hale, a magazine editor, whose efforts eventually led to what we recognize as Thanks-

giving. Hale wrote many editorials championing her cause in her *Boston Ladies' Magazine*, and later, in *Godey's Lady's Book*.

Finally, after a 40-year campaign of writing editorials and letters to governors and presidents, Hale's obsession became a reality when, in 1863, President Lincoln proclaimed the last Thursday in November as a national day of Thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving was proclaimed by every president after Lincoln. The date was changed a couple of times, most recently by Franklin Roosevelt, who set it up one week to the next-to-last Thursday in order to create a longer Christmas shopping season. Public uproar against this decision caused the president to move Thanksgiving back to its original date two years later.

And in 1941, Thanksgiving was finally sanctioned by Congress as a legal holiday, as the *fourth* Thursday in November. This is the real story of Thanksgiving.

