

## Halloween History

Halloween, also known as All Hallows' Eve, is a yearly holiday observed around the world on October 31st, the night before All Saints' Day.



The history of Halloween goes back more than 2,000 years. The earliest celebrations of Halloween were among the Celtic people who lived in the areas which are now Great Britain and Northern France. The Celts had a festival commemorating the end of the year (the new year began on November 1). This festival was called Samhain. The end of their year signaled the end of summer, the end of the harvest season, and the beginning of a long, hard winter. It was a time for stock-taking and preparation for the cold winter months ahead. There was also a belief that this was the time of year when the boundaries between the worlds of the living and the dead overlapped. It was thought that on the night of October 31st the ghosts of the dead returned to earth, sometimes causing trouble and damaging crops.



Faeries were believed to roam the land during Samhain, dressed as beggars asking for food door to door. Those that gave food to the faeries were

rewarded, while those that did not were punished by the faeries.

The Celts continued with their ceremonies until they were conquered by the Roman Empire. The Romans brought with them their own customs and traditions. The Romans had two festivals celebrated at the same time of year as Samhain. One was Feralia, the Roman day honoring the dead. The second festival was for Pomona, the Roman goddess of trees and fruit. These two festivals were combined with Samhain.

By the 9<sup>th</sup> century the influence of Christianity had spread into Celtic lands, where it gradually blended with the older Celtic rites. The Christian day for honoring the saints, All Saints' Day (also known as All Hallows) fell on November 1<sup>st</sup>. Since Samhain was celebrated the night before November 1<sup>st</sup>, the celebration became known as All Hallows Eve,

and later Halloween. In the year 1000 A.D., the church designated November 2 as All Souls Day, to honor the dead who were not saints. It was traditionally believed that the souls of the departed wandered the earth until All Saints' Day, and All Hallows' Eve provided one last chance for the dead to gain vengeance on their enemies before moving onto the next world. To avoid being

recognized by one of the souls, Christians would wear masks and costumes to disguise themselves.



On All Souls Day in England, the poor would go "souling." They would go door to door asking for food, and in return, would pray for the souls of their dead relatives. It was widely believed at the time that the souls of the dead would await passage into heaven until enough people prayed for their souls.



Halloween was not a popularly observed in early

United States history, as most of the early settlers were Protestant. At the time, Halloween was considered mostly a Catholic, Episcopalian, and Pagan holiday. Halloween was more common in the southern colonies. The first celebrations included events held to celebrate the harvest. Neighbors would share stories of the dead, tell fortunes, dance and sing. By the middle of the nineteenth century, annual autumn festivities were common, but Halloween was not yet celebrated everywhere in the country.

By the mid 1800's, immigration increased. These new immigrants, especially the millions of Irish fleeing Ireland's potato famine, brought many Halloween traditions with them.

Catholics and Episcopalians, wanting to preserve their traditions, started an effort in the late 1800's to make Halloween and All Soul's Day known to the general population. Magazines and newspapers started to publicize these holidays. Halloween slowly gained popularity as a secular holiday, rather than a religious one.



Today, Americans spend an estimated \$6 billion annually on Halloween, making it the country's second largest commercial holiday.