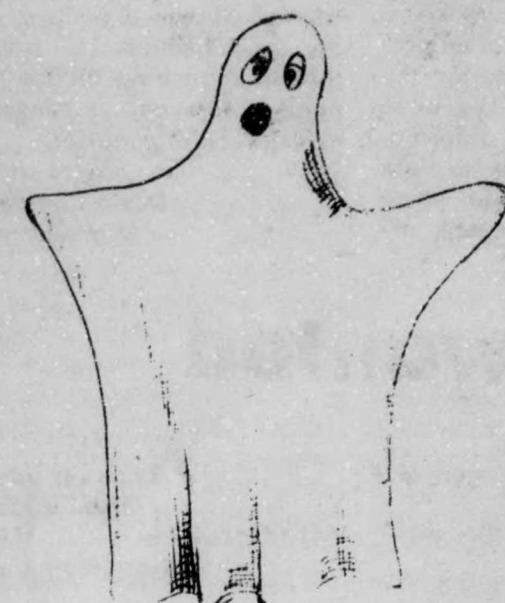


The festival of Halloween and how to find your true love



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It is Halloween tomorrow and ghosts, goblins and witches will be out in full force. Today Halloween is nothing more than one more reason for a party or, if you are very young, it means going out trick-or-treating and coming home with a sack full of candy. Actually Halloween is a very old festival and many curious customs are associated with it.

Halloween comes from the ancient Celtic festival of Samhain, which was celebrated on October 31 and marked the beginning of autumn. It was also the eve of the new year in both Celtic and Anglo-Saxon times. At this festival Samhain, the Celtic lord of death was honored and it marked the beginning of the season of cold, darkness and decay. Laws and land-tenures were renewed and divinations took place for the coming year. The souls of the dead were supposed to return to their earthly homes during this evening.

This became the evening to placate the supernatural powers controlling the processes of nature, for the protection of herds and harvest for the coming year by having fire-rites and sacrifices. The Druids built a new year's bonfire of oak branches on which they burned animals, crops and possibly even human beings. All household fires were put out and the next morning they were rekindled from this fire.

When the Romans came to Britain two of their festivals were combined with the Celtic festival. One was called Feralia and was held

late in October to honour the dead. The other honoured Pomona, the Roman goddess of fruit and trees. It was through her that apples became associated with Halloween.

As Britain became Christianized, the church established All Saints' Day on November 1. The Mass said on this day was called Allhallowmas and the evening before became known as All Hallow e'en or Halloween.

The Halloween custom was brought to the United States by Irish and Scottish immigrants and it became popular during the 1800's. Mischief making by boys and young men took the form of overturning sheds and outhouses and breaking windows. It was out of this 'custom' that trick-or-treating grew.

In different parts of Great Britain different customs grew up around this ancient festival as it was thought to be the best time for telling fortunes concerning marriage, luck, health and death. In Ireland, people marched in a parade honouring Muck Olla and begged for food. The leader of the parade wore a white robe and a mask made from the head of an animal. In Scotland, people paraded through fields and villages carrying torches. They lit bonfires on hillsides to drive away witches and other evil spirits. In Wales, every person marked a stone and put it into a bonfire. If a person's stone was missing the next morning, he or she would die within one year.



Bobbing for apples and cracking nuts was also customary on this night. One could burn nuts to foretell one's happiness in marriage and "if the nuts lie still and burn together, it prognosticates a happy marriage." Young women in Scotland determined the figure and size of their future husbands by drawing cabbages while being blindfolded. In Ireland, young women would know if their sweethearts were faithful by putting three nuts near the fire and naming each one. If a nut cracked or jumped, the sweetheart was unfaithful, if it began to blaze or burn, the boy liked her and if the nuts named after the boy and the girl burned together, they would be married. The following poem concerns this custom:

Two hazel nuts I threw into the flame,
And to each nut I gave a sweetheart's name:
This with the loudest bounce me sore amaz'd,
That in a flame of brightest color blaze'd;
As blaz'd the nut so may thy passion grow,
For 'twas thy nut that did so brightly glow!



The following are some tests for divining the name of a future husband or wife:

"Take a candle and go alone to a looking glass; eat an apple before it and comb your hair all the time; the face of your future companion will be seen in the glass, as if peeping over your shoulder."

"Steal our unperceived, and sow a handful of hempseed. Look over your left shoulder and you will see the appearance of the person invoked, in the attitude of pulling hemp."

"Go to a barn unperceived and alone, and open both doors, taking them off the hinges, if possible; then take that instrument used in winnowing the com and go through all the motions of letting down com

against the wind. Repeat three times and the third time an apparition will pass through the barn, in the windy door and out the other, having the appearance of your future companion."

"Go out to a south running stream where 'three kairds' lands meet and dip your left shirt sleeve. Go to bed, in sight of a fire, and hang your wet sleeve before it to dry; be awake, and some time near midnight an apparition, having the exact figure of the grand object in question, will come and turn the sleeve, as if to dry the other side of it."

"Get two lemon-peels, wear them all day, one in each pocket; at night rub the four posts of the bedstead with them; if you are to succeed, the person will appear in your sleep, and present you with a couple of lemons, if not, there is no hope!"

"Rise, to be at the church door between the hours of twelve and one in the morning, and put the forefinger of your right hand into the keyhole and then repeat three times:

"O sweet St. Agnes, now draw near,
And with my true love straight appear."
Then he will presently approach, smiling."

This Hallowe'en night if you want to find out who your true love is, and you have a fourposter bed or a barn, you might try some of these tricks and who knows, maybe you'll get lucky . . .

