The Origins of Halloween



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| haunted house.gif | The origins of Halloween go back thousands of years! The festival we call Halloween has had influences from different cultures during its history. | |
| Halloween probably began hundreds of years ago in what is now Great Britain and Northern France. These people were known as Celtics. They worshipped nature and had many gods, but the sun god was the most important. It was the sun who commanded their work, their rest, and who made the earth beautiful and the crops grow. | | Celtic cross.gif |
| sun.gif | The Celtics celebrated their New Year on November 1st. It was celebrated with a festival and marked the end of the "season of the sun" and the beginning of "the season of darkness and cold." | |
| On the eve before their new year (October 31st), it was believed that all the dead people were called together. The dead would take different forms, with the bad spirits taking the form of animals. The most evil taking the form of cats. | | black cat.gif |
| druid.gif | On October 31st after the crops were all harvested and stored for the long winter, the cooking fires in the homes would be extinguished. The Druids, the Celtic priests, would meet and light new fires and offer sacrifices of crops and animals. As they danced round the fires, the season of the sun passed and the season of darkness would begin. | |
| When the morning arrived the Druids would give an ember from their fires to each family who would then take them home to start new cooking fires. These fires would keep the homes warm and free from evil spirits. | | fire.gif |
| deer.wmf | The festival would last for 3 days. Many people would parade in costumes made from the skins and heads of animals. This festival would become the first Halloween. | |
| During the first century the Romans invaded Britain. They brought with them many of their festivals and customs. One of these was the festival know as Pomona Day, named for their goddess of fruits and gardens. It was also celebrated around the 1st of November. After hundreds of years of Roman rule the customs of the Celtic's festival and the Roman Pomona Day mixed. | | fruit.wmf |
| All Saints Day.gif | The next influence came with the spread of the new Christian religion throughout Europe and Britain. In the year 835 AD the Roman Catholic Church would make November 1st a church holiday to honour all the saints. This day was called All Saints Day, or Hallowmas, or All Hallows. Years later the Church would make November 2nd a holy day. It was called All Souls Day and was to honour the dead. It was celebrated with big bonfires, parades, and people dressing up as saints, angels and devils. | |
| The growth of Christianity did not make people forget their early customs. On the eve of All Hallows, October 31st, people continued to celebrate the Celtic festival and Pomona Day. Over the years the customs from all these became mixed. October 31st became known as All Hallow Even, eventually All Hallow's Eve, Hallowe'en, and then - Halloween. | | All Saints Eve.gif |
| Halloween pumpkin.gif | On this magical night, glowing jack-o-lanterns, carved from turnips or gourds, were set on porches and in windows to welcome deceased loved ones, but also to act as protection against malevolent spirits. Burning lumps of coal were used inside as a source of light, later to be replaced by candles. | |
| The practice of dressing up in costumes and begging door to door for treats on holidays dates back to the Middle ages in Ireland and Britain and the practice of ‘souling’. Poor folk would go door to door on November 1, receiving food in return for prayers for the dead on All Soul’s Day. This and the jack-o-lantern tradition were taken across to America by the Irish immigrant population. The traditions evolved into the modern day trick or treat and pumpkin carving. | | All Soul's Day.gif |
| ghost5.gif | The Halloween we celebrate today includes all of these influences, the Celtic festival’s black cats, magic, evil spirits and death, Pomona Day's apples, nuts, and harvest, and the ghosts, skeletons and skulls from All Saint's Day and All Soul's Day and the practice of ‘souling’ from Ireland and Britain. | |