Evening of 31 October, immediately preceding the Christian feast of All Hallows or All Saints' Day. Customs associated with Halloween in the USA and the UK include children wearing masks or costumes, and 'trick or treating' – going from house to house collecting sweets, fruit, or money.

Halloween is associated with the ancient Celtic festival of Samhain, which marked the end of the year and the beginning of winter. It was believed that on the evening of Samhain supernatural creatures were abroad and the souls of the dead were allowed to revisit their former homes.

Summary Article: **Halloween Origins and Development**
from *The Halloween Encyclopedia*

There are many names for Halloween, including Halloweve, Halleve, Hallowtide, Hollandtide, Hallowmas, November Eve, Holy Eve, Whistle Wassail Night, and Hallowe’en. The modern name “Halloween” (for the festival celebrated on October 31) derives from “All Hallows’ Even,” or the night before All Saints’ or “All Hallows’ Day.” The word “hallow” is from an early English word for “holy,” and until about a.d. 1500 “hallow” was a noun commonly applied to a holy personage or saint. “All Hallows’ Even” was first abbreviated to “Hallowe’en,” and sometime in the mid-twentieth century the use of the apostrophe was dropped, leading to the contemporary name for the holiday.

A nineteenth-century engraving entitled “All-Hallow Eve in Kilkenny, Ireland” by Edmund Fitzgerald.

Halloween is largely a combination of two celebrations: As a harvest festival, it is similar to the American Thanksgiving and the European Martinmas (which is celebrated on the day once belonging to Halloween, November 11); and as a commemoration of the dead, it may have roots in the Egyptian Feast of the Dead (which mourned the passing of the sun god Osiris), the Greek Anthesteria, and the...
Roman festivals of both Feralia and Lemuria. Most cultures celebrate a day in commemoration of their dead, and contemporary festivals include Japan's Bon, China's Yue Laan and Ch'ing Ming, and the American Memorial Day. However, for the last century it has been commonly accepted that Halloween's closest ancestors were two pre-Christian celebrations, the Celtic Samhain and the Roman Pomona (both believed to have been held on or about November 1). With recent advances in archaeology and folklore studies, we now know that many of the previous assertions were in error. For example, Samhain was often described as being the name of the Celtic “Lord of Death,” when in fact the Celts had no such deity and the name means “summer's end”; and there is no festival for Pomona (a minor wood-nymph or hamadryad) in the old Roman calendar. Samhain was traditionally a time when animals were slaughtered at the approach of winter, and the 1848 *Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry* by Thomas Tusser notes:

> At Hallowtide, slaughter time entereth in,  
> And then doth the husbandman's feasting begin.

Likewise, the *Statistical Account of Scotland* from 1793 says of one parish (Forfar): “...between Hallowmass and Christmass, when the people laid in their winter provisions, about twenty-four beeves were killed in a week...”

Recent scholarship on Halloween has waged a heavy debate concentrating on whether the holiday owes its character to the pagan Samhain or to the Christian All Saints’ Day (and the subsequent November 2 celebration of All Souls’ Day). However, it seems difficult to ignore the large differences between the way the holiday is still celebrated in Celtic areas such as Ireland (with bonfires, pranking and guising), and the way it is celebrated throughout the rest of Europe (with sober church services and grave decorating). Furthermore in some parts of Ireland the day is still referred to as Samhain, ample testimony to that pagan festival's endurance.

In Ireland, Halloween is often connected to fairies, who may also represent relics of Samhain. Alexander Montgomerie's sixteenth-century poem “Flying against Polwait” shows the connection between fairies (or “gude ncybouris,” according to Montgomerie) and Halloween:

> In the hinderend of harvest, on allhallow evin,  
> Quhen our gude ncybouris rydis, if I reid rycht,  
> Sum bukil on ane bwnwyd and sum on ane bene,  
> Ay trippard in troups fra the twilych;  
> Sum saidlit on a scho-aip all graithit in grene,  
> Sum hobland on hempstalkis hovand on hicht,  
> The King of Phairie and his court with the elph-quene,  
> With many elrich incubus was ryand that nycht.  

(“Buklit” = mounted; “bwnwyd” = ragweed; “scho-aip” = she-ape; “graithit” = arrayed)

And George Macdonald’s poem “Hallowe'en” demonstrates that ghosts (or possibly fairies again) prevailed in Scotland on Halloween:

> It's the nicht atween the Sancts and Souls  
> When the bodiless gang aboot,  
> An’ it’s ope hoose we keep the nicht  
> For ony that may be oot.

Modern Halloween also owes a considerable debt to the English Guy Fawkes Day (November 5), which

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may have given Halloween some of its rowdier aspects. Prior to the establishment of Guy Fawkes Day on 1606, the few references to Halloween that appear mention soul cakes, bells and even bobbing for apples; pranking doesn't seem to appear until after the introduction of Guy Fawkes Day, which was celebrated during Protestant times when Halloween itself was banned as too Catholic or "popish." Folklorist Jack Santino has conducted interviews with contemporary Irish natives who literally don't know whether they celebrate Halloween or Guy Fawkes Day.

Until 1582, Europe operated under the Julian calendar, instituted by Julius Caesar; however, the Julian Calendar actually made each year 11 minutes too long, amounting to an entire day in 128 years. By 1582, the calendar was 10 days off, making it difficult to reconcile religious days (which were often calculated by phases of the moon—for example, Easter is celebrated on the first Sunday after the full moon next following the vernal equinox) with civil days and seasonal changes. On October 5, 1582, Pope Gregory XIII instituted a new calendar, and ordered that the day should be changed to the 15th (Gregory's system gives the average year 26 extra seconds). However, because the Gregorian calendar was considered Catholic, some areas of Europe were longer in adopting it than others; in England, for example, it was not accepted until 1751, a decision which caused many Protestants to demand the return of their 11 days.

One of the earliest records of a Halloween party appears in 1629, and was recorded in the journals of eminent lawyer, writer, and parliamentarian Bulstrode Whitelocke. Even though the Protestant king Charles I was in power, Whitelocke's records and biography describe an evening of dancing in St. Dunstan's Tavern: "...on All-hallows day, which the Templars considered the beginning of Christmas, the master, as soon as the evening was come, entered the hall, followed by sixteen revelers. They were proper, handsome young gentlemen, habited in rich suits, shoes and stockings, hats and great feathers. The master led them in a bargown, with a white staff in his hand, the music playing before them. They began with the old masques; after that they danced...till it grew very late." This was nearly twenty years before Parliament — in 1647 —abolished all festivals but Guy Fawkes Day.

The importance of Halloween in modern Irish society is shown by the fact that schools have a Halloween break; and the Monday nearest to Halloween is recognized as a bank holiday in the Republic of Ireland. Up until the early twentieth century, Halloween was held in greater significance than Christmas in Ireland. In parts of Ireland the term "Old Halleve" refers to November 12.

In Scotland, the famed Robert Burns poem “Hallowe'en” (1785) suggests that Halloween was still popularly celebrated there through the close of the 18th century. But by 1833, Scots seem to have consigned the holiday to children, as this description from Scottish explorer Captain J. E. Alexander suggests (this was written as Alexander made his way through Canada): "We spent the evening of Halloween among drowned woods and swamps and a deluge of rain whilst we recounted the legends and ghost stories with which the Scottish crones are wont to affright their juvenile audience on that dreaded night and then had a round of music.”

Although Guy Fawkes Day was celebrated in America up until the end of the nineteenth century (and despite the emigration of over a quarter of a million Ulster-Scots to America in the eighteenth century), Halloween was almost completely forgotten until the influx of Irish and Scottish immigrants in the mid-nineteenth century, driven here largely by the Potato Famine from 1846 to 1852. (Another current debate stems over which of these ethnic groups was likelier to have brought Halloween to America.) Even after the famine had ended, another six million Irish left the country (joining over a million
who had left during the actual famine years); 80 percent of these emigrants came to America. Over the next half-century, Halloween gained in popularity and was celebrated largely as a harvest festival, with hay rides, corn-husking, and bobbing for apples, and it was enjoyed almost completely by adults. Strangely enough, as Halloween was on the ascendant in America, it was declining in Great Britain and Ireland, where the practice of bonfires was dying out, partly because they had inspired considerable drunken violence and partly because many locales had simply stripped the areas of burnable brush. A small piece from the November 1, 1876 edition of the New York Times suggests that “the glory of this once popular festival has departed.” Nevertheless, Halloween had started to spread out from American Scots-Irish enclaves into the Victorian middle class, who found its divination customs quaint; middle-class periodicals such as Godey’s Lady’s Book and Magazine and Harper’s Monthly Magazine began to describe Halloween festivities and offered tips on hosting seasonal parties. What was probably the first Halloween book, Martha Russell Orne’s 48-page Hallowe’en: How to Celebrate It, was published in 1898, indicating that the holiday had firmly settled into the middle class of America.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the Irish love of Halloween pranking had spread to American youngsters, who roamed the countryside on this night, removing gates, tipping outhouses and frightening farmhouse inhabitants. As the country became more industrialized, pranking moved into the cities; at first it retained an innocent nature, with egg-throwing, chalking and noisemakers the favored pastimes, but it quickly became more destructive, with lights broken, fires set and pedestrians tripped. This “rowdyism” reached a peak during the Great Depression, forcing many Eastern American cities to take action.

When curfews and increased police presence proved ineffective, the cities began to institute instead alternative forms of entertainment for children. Costuming and parties had become popular adult Halloween activities during the first decades of the twentieth-century, and so these ideas were now transferred to children. Youth groups such as the Boy Scouts and the YMCA organized parties and carnivals, and parents were also encouraged to join forces (since this was the Depression and money was spare) to provide private entertainments. Combine this with the guising and mumming traditions of Halloween (and Guy Fawkes Day), and the popular American trick or treat was born, effectively replacing destructive pranking. Meanwhile, adult celebrations of Halloween were on the decline, possibly due to Prohibition (1920 to 1933).

Trick or treat also gave rise to the commercialization and marketing of Halloween in America (although the custom spread slightly to European countries as well). Masks, costumes, candies, decorations, lanterns and more all brought millions of dollars to retailing; by the end of the twentieth century, Halloween was second only to Christmas in the amount of holiday dollars (six billion) spent on it.

By the 1960s, the first urban legends of dangers to trick or treaters began to surface, and by the 1980s children were being encouraged to avoid trick or treating, because of poisoned candy or razor blades hidden in apples by anonymous malefactors (ironically, this craze may have been fueled by the public’s fascination with the decade’s “slasher” horror films, a cycle begun by John Carpenter’s Halloween). Even though there was not a single documented incident of an anonymous psychotic killing a child, the public bought into the scare and Halloween as a day for children began to decline. However, at the same time its popularity with two subcultures was gaining: The gays claimed the day for themselves with parades such as the one in Greenwich Village; and the Neo-Pagans (who were energized by the 1979 release of Margot Adler’s Drawing Down the Moon) tried to transform the day into a deeply-felt celebration of the ancestors.
By the 1990s, trick or treat seemed to be on the rise again, only to be dealt another blow, this time by fundamentalist Christian groups who believed the holiday celebrated the devil. In literally hundreds of web sites and books, these groups spread their belief that costuming and even carrying jack-o’-lanterns constituted sins; however, their “proof” was drawn almost entirely from inaccurate and obsolete sources, such as Ralph and Adelin Linton’s 1950 *Halloween through Twenty Centuries*. Halloween survives, however, probably in large part because, as Jack Santino suggests in his introduction to *Halloween and Other Festivals of Death and Life*, it serves a purpose in the calendrical cycle: Images of birth (at Christmas) are followed by images of growth and fertility (spring and Easter), and then by images of death (at Halloween). The holiday also has a special meaning for twentieth- and twenty-first-century children: Sociologists and folklorists have suggested that trick or treating is an inversion of the usual power structure, the one day a year when children are “officially licensed” to have power over adults. It is also the first real holiday in the American school year, and even though there is no school break for the holiday in the U.S. (save for in the state of Louisiana), it nevertheless represents the first occasion for merrymaking after the beginning of the school year.

In 2001, many journalists predicted a disastrous Halloween in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States, but instead the holiday enjoyed its biggest year ever, with record numbers in retailing, parties, parades and trick or treating. These amazing statistics attested to the holiday’s adaptability and unshakable entrenchment in America. The American conception of Halloween — especially trick or treating — has also spread to other countries; for example pumpkin and jack-o’-lantern decorations have become popular in Germany and Austria. Trick-or-treating is still uncommon in Europe, but parties are popular. Not all of Europe is welcoming the arrival of this largely American holiday, however; for example, Polish and Austrian church leaders attacked the newly-imported customs in 2001, saying they were “humiliating” and “alien to our traditions.” Similarly, church leaders in Mexico denounced the holiday there in favor of their own Days of the Dead.

In his essay “Carnival, Control, and Corporate Culture in Contemporary Halloween Celebrations,” Russell W. Belk suggests that “Halloween may be becoming co-opted in subtle ways by being transformed into a vehicle for nurturing corporate and consumer cultures,” but he also believes that the holiday’s “… participative humor … invigorates it and contributes to its longevity.”

One of the most fanciful explanations for the origins of Halloween is found in the work of philosopher and theosophist Alvin Boyd Kuhn, who suggested that the date of October 31st was chosen as a festival day because of its position exactly forty days after the fall equinox, with forty days being symbolic of rebirth and new life.
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