

Holiday's history unearths Celtic, Christian roots

■ Trick-or-treating, jack-o-lanterns and end-of-October festivities are recent additions to Halloween traditions

By Kara Westervelt
for the Emerald

Every year at the end of October, something peculiar happens. Children roam around the neighborhood and ignore the cardinal rule of "never take candy from strangers." Instead of cleaning up real spider webs, people put up fake ones and call them decorations. Rather than throw away the hollowed-out carcass of a large orange gourd, they put a face on it and proudly display it on the front porch.

And some people wear colorful costumes to school or social functions.

It must be Halloween.

In some form or another, people have been celebrating this time of year for centuries. According to Daniel Wojcik, a professor of folklore at the University, the earliest roots of Halloween come from the Celtic people of Ireland. The time of year surrounding Oct. 31 was known as Samhain (pronounced SAUW-eeen) and used to mark the end of

one year and the beginning of the next, he said. Nov. 1 was the Celtic New Year, and Oct. 31 was New Year's Eve.

Samhain is more than just a harvest celebration, however, and the rituals are still alive today. Norma Joyce, the high priestess of the local group Women in Conscious Creative Action, said, "There are two worlds: the overworld and the physical world. They rotate in a manner that they come closer together starting in October, and (on Samhain) they touch."

This is a "liminal period," Wojcik said, "where the souls of the dead return to the earth and the veil between the two worlds lifted."

Joyce calls this time an astrological "tension point" and said that it is "our time to go through the veil and communicate more easily with the dead." Joyce said the actual date of this "intersection of worlds" has changed based on the movement of the stars and planets and is now actually on Nov. 6.

Most of the modern manifestations of Halloween do not come from the original Celtic celebration of Samhain, Joyce said. As with other holidays celebrated in

America, Christianity has had an influence. According to Wojcik, in 601 A.D., Pope Gregory told his clergymen to allow the people to continue with their native beliefs and practices, but to incorporate them into Christian celebrations. Nov. 1 was deemed All Saints' Day, and as the name suggests, it was a day to commemorate all the Catholic saints, Wojcik said. The evening before was All Hallows Eve, he said.

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Daniel Wojcik
University professor of folklore

The various symbols and rituals associated with Halloween are a mixture of Christian and Celtic practices, Wojcik said. While no one knows for sure where trick-or-treating started, he said, "in some regions it was believed in this time of 'supernatural pres-

ence' that by setting out food and drink to appease the wandering spirits, the mischievous 'tricks' of the otherworldly beings could be avoided."

As the tradition developed, children and beggars would mask themselves and go door to door, promising a "trick" if they didn't get a "treat," Wojcik said.

"Being generous at this time was believed to bring one good fortune throughout the year," he said.

Joyce recognizes this practice as a way of "paying off the evil spirits."

The origins of the jack o' lantern — a carved pumpkin illuminated with a candle — are as unclear as most Halloween traditions, according to the book "Halloween," written by Wiccan Priestess Silver RavenWolf.

"Folklorists have not been able to pinpoint the birth of the tale of Jack and his frightening lantern," RavenWolf wrote. However, "the theme of the story appears to have Christian roots."

According to Joyce, two possibilities exist: Christians might have used jack-o'-lanterns to "warn away the devil," or the Celts may have used them as a way to call the souls of their de-

parted loved ones back.

Wojcik also offered an interpretation of Halloween's function in modern society. Halloween gives people a chance to "break the rules" and behave in a fashion that is normally not acceptable, he said.

"The rules of society can be lifted a little bit," Wojcik said. "Children have a night where they can threaten adults with mischief and get away with it."

Adults also take advantage of this "suspension of rules," he said, allowing them to "explore their own fears or desires" in their costuming and behavior.

The modern American celebration of Halloween is, more than anything, an excuse to party and "release tension," Joyce said. For the members of her group, however, Samhain is "a sacred time," not a time to party, she added. Wicca will have a ritual to commemorate this time of "the lifting of the veil between two worlds," she said. Joyce recognizes the need for emotional release, however.

"Because of the spiritual tension," she said, "people need a way to get it out — either through ritual or a party."

Kara Westervelt is a freelance reporter for the Oregon Daily Emerald.

Eugene clubs get a bit spooky with various Halloween festivities

■ Local night spots will feature Halloween events with one or more bands, DJs, a witches' ball and a drag show

By Erin Cooney
for the Emerald

All Hallows' Eve is almost here, and Eugene bars and venues are planning to celebrate with gusto. Many local hotspots are hosting

special events to celebrate the spooky holiday. Costume contests, prizes and music are only some of the reasons to hit the town this Halloween.

Chuck Hare, the owner of Olym-

pus, is planning a big night for the dance club. A costume contest is scheduled for Halloween night, and the grand prize is a trip for two to Jamaica with lodging and airfare included. Tickets are available in advance for \$10 at both Olympus on West 6th Avenue and Taylor's Bar and Grille on East 13th Avenue. Taylor's, Hare's other bar, is celebrating

Halloween early with the OM Trio, scheduled for Tuesday, Oct. 30.

Olympus is not the only club hosting costume contests — Rock 'N' Rodeo and adjoining Kokomo's Island Grill & Bar at the corner of West 7th Avenue and Willamette Street are hosting Halloween-themed evenings as well. Festivities begin tomorrow with a Halloween party and prizes for best costumes. Tomorrow only, people can compete to win the title of best island costume at Kokomo's. On Halloween night, \$700 in cash prizes are up for grabs for the winners of categories such as best costume, best group costume and best couple costume. The weekly "diva foxy lady" costume/karaoke contest is also on the agenda for Halloween night with a bigger prize of \$100 for first place. The Cheeseburgers, a Jimmy Buffett-style band, is scheduled to perform at Rock 'N' Rodeo in between DJ sets. DJ Mark Gatlin said last year's turnout was so impressive, owner Spencer Whitted decided not to charge a cover this year.

Diablo's Downtown Lounge at 959 Pearl St. is charging a cover, but the \$20 advance tickets will buy a lot of entertainment. The Downtown Lounge's entertainment director, Rocco, ("like Cher," he said) organized the bash, dubbed "Halloween in Hell 2," and he said it promises to be a great night of adult-themed entertainment.

Pool tables will be hauled off to make more room for dancers, and throughout the evening, the bar will host a total of 13 DJs and two bands. Advance tickets are on sale now at the Downtown Lounge, Delphina's and CD Game Exchange. Better get them soon, though — Rocco said the club had to turn people away last year. Doors will open at 7 p.m.

The Downtown Lounge will be kicking off Halloween this weekend with The Deep Eynde from Los Angeles, and Rocco promises a great punk/rockabilly/Halloween

show. DJs Brothers of Beat are opening, the show starts at 9 p.m. and the cover is \$3 after 10 p.m.

Campus Bar Neighbors is also on board the Halloween bandwagon early. Tonight the bar is hosting a drag show/costume party, with drag queen Shebang as emcee. The cover is \$5 on Saturday and Wednesday. General Manager Michael Lowe is optimistic about this year's turnout.

"(Wednesday is) a really busy night for us. We play pretty hot music," he said.

Speaking of music, John Henry's is hosting two '80s cover bands Halloween night. Regular John Henry's DJs Chris and Jen performed as Loverboy last year and "brought the house down," owner James Carroll said. This year, John Henry's will host the bands Chocolate Death and Vanildo for its "Scary '80s Halloween Bash." Between the bands, DJs will be spinning '80s hits. The cover is \$2, the same as last year.

Bars are not the only places planning special Halloween events. Tomorrow, the WOW Hall is hosting its seventh annual Witches' Ball in association with local pagan organization Cauldron of Changes. Bands Onomatopoeia and Serpentina Ala Nar are performing. Doors open at 8:30 p.m., showtime is at 9 p.m. and admission is on a sliding scale of \$6-\$10 at the door.

Halloween night, the WOW Hall is hosting The Disco Biscuits, a four-piece band from Philadelphia that MTV.com has dubbed "the Forefathers of Techno Jam Rock." Tickets are \$10 in advance, \$12 at the door and are available at CD World, Face the Music, House of Records, Taco Loco, the EMU Ticket Office and the WOW Hall.

With all the events planned for the coming weekend and through Wednesday night, Halloween party-seekers have plenty of options.

Erin Cooney is a freelance reporter for the Oregon Daily Emerald.

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