



rbchistory.org

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GET READY FOR SPOOKY FUN!



RBCHS Quarterly Membership Meeting

& HALLOWEEN PARTY!

Saturday, Oct. 30, 2–4 p.m.

@ the Heritage Cultural Center
5th and Park Ave., Meeker

EVERYONE WELCOME!

Dress up as your
favorite historical
character for a chance
to win a prize!

White River Museum
will be **OPEN!**

What's the real history of Halloween, and why do we celebrate it on Oct. 31?

Halloween has become more popular than Christmas for some folks, but do you ever wonder where this holiday originated and why? According to most authorities, the early pagan holiday of Samhain involved a lot of ritualistic ceremonies to connect to spirits, as the Celts were polytheistic. It's a lot older than you might think! And as for the witches and wizards that you've come to associate with it? They're part of the story, too. Here's the true tale of how Halloween officially came to be.

While there isn't a lot of detail known about these celebrations, many believe the Celts celebrated in costume (granted, they were likely simple animal hides) as a disguise against ghosts, enjoyed special feasts, and made lanterns by hollowing out gourds (hence, the history of jack-o'-lanterns). Over time, as Christianity took over and the pagan undertones of the holiday were lessened, the basic traditions of the holiday remained a part of pop culture every year; they simply evolved and modernized.

The mystical rituals of earlier times evolved into more lighthearted fun and games. For example, the somewhat heavy concept of connecting to the dead was replaced with the more lighthearted idea of telling the future. Bobbing for apples, for example, became popular as a fortune-telling game on All Hallows' Eve. Apples would be selected to represent all of a woman's suitors, and the guy-er, apple-she ended up biting into would supposedly represent her future husband. In fact, Halloween previously posed a huge (albeit rather superstitious) matchmaking opportunity for young women in the 19th century.

WHY DO WE CELEBRATE ON OCT. 31?

Halloween falls on October 31 because the ancient Gaelic festival of Samhain, considered the earliest known root of Halloween, occurred on this day. It marked a pivotal time of year when seasons changed, but more importantly, observers also believed the boundary between this world and the next became especially thin at this time, enabling them to connect with the dead. This belief is shared by some other cultures; a similar idea is mentioned around the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur, which also typically occurs in October and involves saying prayers for the dead. This is also where Halloween gains its "haunted" connotations.

You already know that Halloween takes place on the last day of October, but here's something you might not know: The word itself literally means "hallowed evening," and was previously known to early European celebrators as All Hallows' Eve. All Hallows' Eve (October 31) and All Saints' Day (November 1) both paid homage to saints ("hallows" = saints). The name was eventually shortened to "Halloween," which we know and love to this day.

The pagan and Christian occasions haven't always been back-to-back, though. Up until the 7th century CE, All Hallows' Eve fell on May 13. Perhaps in an attempt to offset the occasion with a religious celebration, Pope Boniface IV ultimately made the call to change the observance to its current November 1 date.

Another popular All Hallows' Eve ritual was mirror-gazing, as people hoped to catch a vision of their future by looking into the mirror. There are also reports of fortune-cookie-like favors being given out during earlier times. People wrote messages on pieces of paper in

milk, and the notes were then folded and placed into walnut shells. The shells would be heated over a fire, causing the milk to brown just enough for the message to mystically appear on the paper for the recipient.

HISTORY OF HALLOWEEN COSTUMES AND TRICK-OR-TREATING

Many people were said to dress up as saints and recite songs or verses door to door. Children would also go door to door asking for "soul cakes," a treat similar to biscuits. Technical note: Soul cakes originated as part of the All Souls' Day holiday on November 2 (yep, a third holiday!), but eventually became a part of Halloween night as the concept evolved into trick-or-treating. The candy-grabbing concept also became mainstream in the U.S. in the early to mid-1900s, during which families would provide treats to children in hopes that they would be immune to any holiday pranks.

As for the costumes, they evolved, too. While they began as earnest tributes to saints, that tradition likely fell out of favor at some point...until young Scottish and Irish pranksters got the idea to dress up in scary-looking garb again as a way to spook unsuspecting neighbors. And just like that, thanks to these local hooligans, Halloween costumes became scary, spooky, funny, and creative all at the same time.

HOW HALLOWEEN IS CELEBRATED TODAY

Halloween obviously remains a popular holiday in America today, but it almost didn't make it across the Atlantic. The Puritans were disapproving of the holiday's pagan roots, so they didn't take part in the celebrations. But once Irish and Scottish immigrants began to arrive in America in greater numbers, the holiday made its way back into the zeitgeist. The very first American colonial Halloween celebrations featured large public parties to commemorate the upcoming harvest, tell ghost stories, sing, and dance.

It's estimated that by the early 20th century, Halloween was celebrated across North America by the majority of (candy-loving, costume-wearing) people. And this year, once again, we'll all be enjoying our favorite candy and admiring our neighbors' decorations on October 31—and the only spooky spirits we'll be talking about are the witch and ghost costumes our friends are wearing.

WHAT IS A SOUL CAKE & HOW DO I MAKE IT?

The tradition of giving soul cakes to soulers came from Medieval Britain and Ireland. Soulers, mostly children and poor people, with songs and prayers went to the rich people. Round cookies were given to them "for the souls of the givers and their friends" at Halloween.

This Christian tradition was also found in Portugal, Italy and Philippines. Souling is seen as an origin of trick-and-treat.

Christians adopted the tradition of soul cakes, which were blessed and given to poor people in churches and monasteries.

Try these soul cakes for Samhain! This is an easy cookie recipe, no need to buy, when you have staple ingredients and a little bit of time. Although there are a variety of different recipes for these Halloween cookies, they mostly made with available grain and other ingredients.

Buttery flaky soul cakes are made with staple ingredients, such as eggs, butter, and sugar. Additionally you may want raisins, cranberries, nuts and mixed spices.



Buttery Soul Cakes



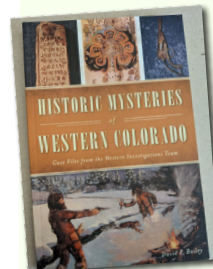
Ingredients:

- 2 sticks butter, softened
- 3 1/2 c. flour, sifted
- 1 c. sugar
- 1/2 tsp. ea. cinnamon & allspice
- 2 eggs
- 2 tsp malt vinegar
- Powdered sugar
- Raisins, nuts & cranberries (if desired)

Cut the butter into the flour with a large fork. Mix in the sugar, nutmeg, saffron, cinnamon and allspice. Lightly beat eggs, and add to flour mixture. Add malt vinegar. Mix until you have a stiff dough. Knead for a while, then roll out until 1/4" thick. Use a floured glass to cut out 3" circles. Cut a cross on top of each cookie. Traditionally the cross is cut with a knife, but you can place raisins or cranberries on top of the cross as well. Place on greased baking sheet and bake 25 minutes at 350 degrees. Sprinkle with powdered sugar while the cakes are still warm. Leave on a rack and allow to cool before eating or giving to soulers.

GHOST STORIES & MYSTERIES

One of the greatest traditions around Halloween is the telling of ghost stories and mysteries. Well wouldn't you know that there are a few mysteries regarding our beautiful White River valley.



Our research took us no further than the Gift Shop in the White River Museum. There we found the Arcadia Publication, *Historic Mysteries of Western Colorado*.

There are two Spanish-style halberds on display in the White River Museum. One is a colonial halberd which was a long-pole infantry weapon used by early Spanish soldiers and explores and became a standard Weapon of Spanish infantrymen. Halberds usually had three parts that made up the metal head attached to the pole. There was an axe blade for slicing, a spike for thrusting, and a hook for pulling an armed opponent off his horse. The infantrymen essentially had three weapons in one. One of the many variations of the halberd was with the wider axe face and a longer spear point. The halberd began to lose its effectiveness with the introduction of firearms.

One the halberds had been found on the site of the Meeker Incident and the other was found 20 miles from the town of Meeker. It was theorized that the halberds might have been left by the Utes, who might have acquired them from Spanish Traders. The Mesa State Electron Microscopy Lab, researchers tested the halberds and dated them from the late seventeenth century to the early nineteenth century because of the metallurgic impurities in the forging process. The smaller of the halberds had an unusual axe face that was curved on the edges and flat in the middle section. This halberd style was later found to be similar to those used as to cut plug tobacco. The second Spanish style halberd has beautiful Arabic scrollwork, a wide blade, a lance point and a hook. It would seem to any Southwest historian that these blades were out of place. However, early on, these exotic blades were imported for the Native American trade. These blades, known as Persian blades, have been discovered within Native American collections, and one is cited in Carl P. Russell's book, which mentions a Persian blade with a snakeskin/buckskin cover over a wooden handle.

Interestingly, the halberd that looked "authentic" was actually a nineteenth century tobacco cutter and the Arabian halberd was actually used by the Ute Indians. Who did it belong to? Why was it there? We will never know.

GREAT NEWS!

Trappers Lake Lodge is partnering with a few local businesses to provide carriage rides, tours and more! Stay tuned for schedules and offerings.

Help preserve the past for our future!

Join the Rio Blanco County Historical Society, become a business patron, make a donation or memorial gift, or donate to a project! Scan the QR code or visit rbchistory.org/donate



SCAN ME

Rio Blanco County Historical Society collects, preserves and interprets Rio Blanco County's heritage and culture. The board meets at 5:45 p.m. at the Heritage Building next to the White River Museum the last Tuesday of every month (except December as this is combined with the November meeting to allow for Christmas). Anyone may attend these board meetings.

Executive Director: Teresia Reed

Board of Directors: President Niki Turner, Vice President Jay Sullivan, Secretary Emily Mohr, Deirdre MacNab, Chance Walker, Kay Bivens, Nancy Harmon-Richardson, Sparky Pappas, Luke Trout

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White River Museum
565 Park Ave., Meeker

Hours of Operation:
Mon. - Sat. 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Sun. 12 p.m. to 4 p.m.

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