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Halloween originally meant to scare away evil

By James A. Johnson

Of The Battalion Staff

"Hurrah for merry Hallowe'en,
The night when playful smiles are seen,
When grinning jack o'lanterns glow,
And shadows into giants grow!
Then ghosts behind the corn-stalks hide,
If witches on their broomsticks ride,
And screech owls hoot from moaning trees,
If graveyards fearful forms release!
As gates break loose from creaky hinge
Black cats on top of fences cringe,
And boys blow beans at window-pane
While girls their lovers entertain.
And merriment, the sweetest boon,
Steps lively to a jolly tune."

— Anonymous poem from ancient European literature

The Halloween season triggers thoughts of horrible masks, strange and unusual gowns, ghostly figures, frightening pranks and small children in the quest for a tasty treat. Although many people celebrate this festive day, few may know how the holiday originated.

Halloween has clear connections with the primitive and sometimes savage rites of the priestly druids in the pre-Roman, pre-Christian Celtic communities of Northern and Western Europe.

To honor their great sun god, the Celts held what was originally a festival for the dead. It was believed that on Oct. 31, the last day of the Celtic year, witches and warlocks flew about, and hugh bonfires were built to ward off these malevolent spirits.

A druid ceremony in pre-Christian times, this festival of the dead was gradually incorporated into Christian ritual.

In the ninth century, a feast in honor of the saints was fixed on Nov. 1. And in the 11th century, Nov. 2 was specified as All Soul's Day to honor the souls of the dead, particularly those who had died in the preceding year.

The Celts believed that on Oct. 31 the lord of the dead assembled the souls of all those persons who had died in the previous year, each having been required to expiate his sins by dwelling in the body of an animal.

The lord then decreed what forms the dead persons should inhabit for the next 12 months or perhaps admitted some to the druids' equivalent of heaven.

In medieval Europe, elves, fairies, and witches (who occasionally took the shape of cats) were believed to fly on All Hallows' Eve, and bonfires were lit to frighten away any lurking evil spirits.

Thomas Green, associate professor of anthropology and English at A&M, said many of today's Halloween customs resulted from the holiday's early practices.

"Many of the early rituals are the reasons why our costumes are like fearful creatures," Green said.

He said that while other religions chose to concentrate on the warding off of evil, Christians chose to use the holiday for paying respects to the dead.

One familiar sight people saw during the celebration, Green said, was phantom-like figures dancing around bonfires which were burned on hilltops.

Halloween was then a time for games and rituals involving methods of foretelling the future. Through such omens as apple parings thrown over the shoulder or nuts burned in a fire, young people tried to de-



Photo illustration by Mike C. Mulvey

The hideous and sometimes happy faces of jack-o-lanterns were originally carved into oversized turnips and potatoes — not into pumpkins. Jack-o-lanterns

were actually used as lights in ancient Halloween celebrations, not just merely as decoration, which is most common today.

termine their marital prospects.

Holiday traditions were then taken by the Scots and Irish to America, where the pumpkin replaced the turnip for what we know today as the infamous jack-o-lantern.

In Ireland, oversized rutabagas, turnips and potatoes — instead of pumpkins (which were not available) — were hollowed out, carved into hideous faces and illuminated with candles, to be used as lanterns at Halloween celebrations.

The name jack-o-lantern supposedly came from an Irish tale of a man named Jack who was notorious for drunkenness and for being stingy. One evening at the local bar, the Devil showed up to claim his soul. Jack skillfully persuaded the Devil to have a drink with him before leaving. To pay for his drink, the Devil turned himself into a sixpence, which Jack immediately snatched. He put it into his wallet, which had a catch in the form of a cross, preventing the Devil from escaping.

Jack eventually released the Devil on the condition that he be left in peace for an-

other year. Twelve months later, Jack played another practical joke on the Devil, letting him down from a tree only after he promised that he would never pursue Jack again.

Finally, Jack's body wore out and he died. Barred from heaven because of his misdeeds and from Hell because of the pranks he played on the Devil, Jack in desperation begged the Devil for a live coal to light his way out of the dark.

Like the ultimate "Twilight Zone" episode, Jack put the coal into a turnip he was chewing and, as the story goes, is condemned to walk the earth with his lantern until Judgment Day.

By the late 1800s, Halloween had become a national observance in the United States, characterized by games, divinations, parties, and especially the custom of "trick-or-treating" dressed in masks and costumes.

There are several theories about the origins of trick-or-treating. One theory claims that the practice stems from the custom of

"souling" or "soul-caking," when Englishmen went around on All Saints' and All Souls' Days begging for soul cakes (square bread containing dried grapes) in remembrance of the dead. Those begging for cakes promised to pray for the dead relatives of the donors.

The contemporary custom of trick-or-treating also resembles an ancient Irish practice on Halloween, when groups of peasants went from house to house, asking for money in order to buy luxuries for a feast and demanding that fattened calves and black sheep be prepared for the occasion. Generous donors were assured prosperity, while threats were voiced against misers who were too cheap to contribute.

Although the 20th Century customs may promote a less destructive version of Halloween, today's celebrants still manage to contribute to the havoc which has been present since Halloween's beginning.

Green said Halloween has evolved from what was initially an adult festival into a holiday primarily for children.

Although horror stories and recent negative publicity have turned Halloween into something considered evil by some, Green views the holiday as merely another occasion for people to celebrate.

"It's like every other festival," Green added. "You abandon some of your inhibitions. Everyone has different reasons for celebrating something in different ways."

While our ancestors considered Halloween a serious event, other forms of amusement still make Oct. 31 a day anticipated by many.

Perhaps the biggest difference between Halloween of the past and Halloween of the present is that in its earlier years, participants tried to avoid trouble by warding off evil spirits. Today, most people find amusement by causing trouble through such "enjoyable" practices as telephone pranks, wrapping homes with toilet paper and throwing water balloons at whomever dares to spoil the fun.

Haunted houses, festivals offer sinister, light Halloween fun

Looking for a ghoulish time to make Halloween '89 memorable? The Bryan-College Station area offers a number of events that should fit this bill, several of which are free. Happy haunting!

Jaycees' Haunted House

The annual Bryan-College Station Jaycees' Haunted House will open Friday at 8 p.m. at 4613 Texas Ave. (the old Tom's Bar-b-que). The house will be open through Tuesday, beginning at 8 o'clock nightly and lasting until the crowd is gone.

Tickets for the event are \$4 for adults and \$3 for children 12 and under and may be purchased at the house site. Refreshments will also be sold at the house.

All proceeds from the event are returned to the community through Jaycees activities and donations to local charities.

For more information, contact Sam Urso, Haunted House Chairman, at 846-8751 (day) or 696-6280 (night).

Kappa Alpha Haunted House

The Kappa Alpha Fraternity will be hosting their third annual Haunted House in the Kroger shopping center. The house will be open Friday and Saturday from 8 p.m. until 1 a.m., and Monday and Tuesday from 7 p.m. until midnight. Tickets are \$2 pre-sale and \$3 at the door.

The fraternity is trying to raise \$10,000 for the Muscular Dystrophy Association.

St. Paul's Family Fun Festival

St. Paul's United Methodist Church will hold a Family Fun Festival Saturday from 8:30 a.m. until 7 p.m. at the church — 2506 Cavitt in Bryan. Admission to the fundraising event is free, and it is open to the public.

An auction of goods donated by local merchants will be held from 10 a.m. until noon. Among the items to be auctioned are a portable deer blind and a three-story doll house.

In addition, a sanctioned amateur arm wrestling contest and a 5K fun run will be held.

Weigh-in and registration for the arm wrestling contest lasts from 10 a.m. until 1 p.m., with the contest lasting from 2 p.m. until 5:30 p.m.

Fun run registration begins at 7:30 a.m., and the run begins at 8:30 a.m. Registration fees are \$15 for the arm wrestling contest and \$10 for the fun run. For information about either of these events, call 779-7608.

Other activities include carnival games and pony rides. A costume contest will begin at 5:30 p.m. Free festival entertainment includes puppet shows and a concert by the Texas A&M Women's Chorus.

For more information, call 779-7608.

OCA Haunted House

The fourth annual Off Campus Aggies Haunted House will be held Tuesday from 8 p.m. until midnight in the MSC Ballroom.

Tickets for the event, entitled "Little Shops of Horror," are \$2 and may be purchased at the door or at the MSC Box Office. The event is a fundraiser for the organization, helping them to sponsor club activities.

For more information, contact Melissa Miller at 693-8776 or Sherri Cook at 696-8646.

RHalloween

The Residence Hall Association will hold the annual RHalloween Tuesday from 8 p.m. until midnight in the Grove. RHalloween is intended to provide a safe activity on campus for both on-campus and off-campus Aggies.

This year's activities include a costume contest beginning at 9:30 p.m. that will be judged by Dr. John Koldus, vice-president for Student Services.

Local band X-it will perform music for dancing all night, while a screaming contest will provide appropriate Halloween sounds.

A&M residence halls will sponsor booths to provide other types of entertainment, including a kissing booth, a "marriage" booth and a ring toss booth.

Refreshments are free. Costumes are not required for admission, although they are encouraged.

For more information, contact Jennifer Wiley at 847-0679 or the RHA office at 847-0689.

Compiled by Selina Gonzalez, Chuck Lovejoy and Katsy Pitman.

Horror videos provide pleasing party alternative

By Todd Stone

Of The Battalion Staff

If the lack of horror in your Halloween has you feeling down, why not let the video store put some suspense back in your October nights?

For many, All Hallows' Eve has become nothing but a series of ho-hum parties, boring haunted houses and nagging kids banging on their doors. But if you're looking for some excitement, just break out the popcorn, round up a group of friends, rent some scary movies at your local video store and let the horror begin.

Here are a few viewing suggestions for the Halloween video consumer:

Halloween:

The obvious choice. This is the movie that started the killing career of Michael Myers and established Jamie Lee Curtis as the horror film queen. The first "Halloween" is by far the scariest. The sequels lose most of the suspense and originality of the first. However, "Halloween" and "Halloween 2" would be a solid double feature.

Nightmare On Elm Street:

Freddie Krueger is the Michael Jackson of horror with that razor finger-glove. The original offers the most chills with good suspense, great dream sequences and Freddie screaming his fingers against all metals for that cringing chalkboard effect. Lots of blood too, and a good horror film needs plenty of blood.

The sequels to "Nightmare" ("Freddie's Revenge," "The Dream

Warriors" and "The Dream Master") aren't as scary as the original, but they are clever with good special effects and establish Freddie as a horror cult hero.

Psycho:

Many say this is the perfect Halloween movie. Who will forget the classic shower scene with Norman Bates (Anthony Perkins), knife in hand, slicing and dicing his way to legendary status? Still, I remember seeing this movie as a special presentation at my junior high school. If a principal isn't scared to show it to a bunch of 12-year-olds, "Psycho" probably won't scare you either. But, scary or not, it is a well-made film. The "Psycho" sequels aren't bad, but they don't match the innovation of the original.

Alien:

For science fiction fans, this is the perfect Halloween movie: a creature chasing and killing a helpless space crew through dark corridors of an enormous spaceship. The film has great suspense featuring an intense climax, original special effects and quality actors (Sigourney Weaver, John Hurt). Another good double feature: "Alien" followed by the more action-packed "Aliens."

Young Frankenstein:

In case you need to lighten up, this film is a hilariously clever parody of that eternal Halloween star, Frankenstein. Gene Wilder stars as the mad scientist, and Peter Boyle plays the funniest Frankenstein ever. Mel Brooks directed the film and wrote the screenplay with Wilder.

The Exorcist:

"The Exorcist" is probably the best film from the collection of demonic possession films of the '70s. This movie is intense. The possession is gripping, and Satan's presence is unnerving throughout the film. Beyond the fear generated, the film is also a serious drama about religion and faith. And on top of all that, you get to see a girl's head do a 360.

Friday the 13th:

Don't waste your time. None of the eight movies offer many thrills. This collection of crap is merely a hodge-podge of cheap gore, poor acting and stupid story lines. By the way, why is it that teenagers who are having sex or using drugs in these films are always the ones who die? Maybe the filmmakers are preaching.

If the films just listed don't catch your eye, the list of quality horror flicks goes on: "Night of the Living Dead," "Carrie," "The Texas Chainsaw Massacre" and "Rosemary's Baby." "The Shining" is another must-see. The film has the perfect horror movie combination: Stanley Kubrick directing Jack Nicholson in a Stephen King story. It doesn't get any better.

The haunted houses of boredom may be open, the keg parties of oblivion are always there and the little munchkins from hell want their candy. Renting a scary movie may not be the perfect solution, but at least the movies may give you some ideas on how to shut up the pestering kids.