

AGGIE *life*

THE BATTALION

A haunted past

Halloween's past shrouded with the veil that separates the living and the souls of the dead

BY STUART HUTSON
The Battalion

To most children, tonight will be a night to dress up as a favorite ghoul or superhero and pace around the neighborhood in search of candy. To most college students, it is an excuse to get into a wild outfit and party heartily.

But the holiday now commonly known in America as "Halloween" is actually a complex mixture of significant and meaningful celebrations — many of which are still practiced today.

The beginning of the holiday can be traced back to the ancient Celtic celebration of "Samhain," a harvest festival to give thanks to the Earth for providing food and nourishment and a time to interact with those who have departed from this world.

"Now, [Samhain] can be celebrated on either Oct. 31 or during the full moon in October, which was the 13th this year," said Jennifer Evans, president of Texas A&M's Pagan Student Association and a senior biology major. "In old mythology, the idea was that, since the veil between the living and the dead was so thin, ghosts and evil spirits could cross over into this world. So, people would dress up in scary costumes and scare or lead them out of town where they couldn't hurt anybody or anything."

Evans said the Celtic calendar marks this time of the year as the Celtic new year and as one of the eight major celebrations of the year.

According to the Catholic news publication Zenit, "All Hallows' Eve" (or Halloween for short) began as a major feast or vigil in celebration of All Saints Day, the day the church glorifies God for all the saints.

The vigil was first universally celebrated by the Catholic Church in the year 840 A.D. and

soon accumulated additional meaning by much of Europe.

"It may have happened that popular culture adopted the belief that, the night before this celebration of the saints and their holy significance, the evil spirits were granted a type of reprieve where the forces of darkness and all their powers were put to flight into the world," said David Hudson, a history professor. "This was a time when the common folk feared an outburst of supernatural activity."

In 14th and 15th-century France, this fear became embodied in the form of the bubonic plague, a disease that killed almost half of Europe's population and was deemed "The Black Death."

According to an article in Catholic Parent by Father Augustine Thompson, this disease heightened the fear of Catholics concerning the afterlife and led to more masses being held on Nov. 2 (All Souls Day, a day of praying for the souls suffering in purgatory) along with dances meant to remind church-goers of human mortality. The participants of this "Dance Macabre" dressed up in various stages of life and death.

Thompson said this French practice blended with the Celtic practice in colonial North America when settlers from the two countries began to intermarry.

Thompson added that "trick or treating" came into the picture shortly thereafter when Catholic British colonialists brought over the tradition of wearing masks and visiting houses in order to gather cakes and beer for a celebration in honor of Guy Fawkes. Fawkes was a Catholic rebel who once planned to blow up the Protestant king and Parliament before being caught and hanged.

Today, while stores and big business continue to cash in on the common practice of dressing

up and visiting neighbors in search of candy, the organizations responsible for the origin of the holiday continue to observe it in their own unique ways.

"I would suggest to Christians, celebrate Halloween in a way that affirms the Christian roots and not the pagan ones," said Rev. Michael Sis of Saint Mary's Catholic Center in College Station. "Like just a few days ago — we had a Halloween party where little kids came dressed as angels and saints, instead of as devils or witches."

Evans said the celebration of Samhain is different for every pagan.

"Now is just a good time for us to give thanks for what we have and to get together and have a good party," she said. "Now is also a good time to sort of take a good look at things, read tarot cards or cast runes and try to figure out where things are heading and what is coming up."

Evans said the observance of Samhain is also a time when it is necessary to take advantage of the thin veil between the living and the dead.

"Honoring your ancestors is an important part of it," she said. "We believe that now is a good time to speak to those who have died before and make amends or say your last goodbye. ... Nothing as hokey [as a seance], just a heartfelt prayer."

Evans, a self-proclaimed witch, said outsiders' observations of her practices are sometimes humorous.

"You know, you see a witch mask with a green face and a big wart on the nose," she said. "We don't ride on broomsticks, and we don't wear pointed hats. We certainly don't eat our cats — I've been asked that one a few times."

"I do have a black cat, though."

RUBEN DELUNA/THE BATTALION

FLU SHOTS

The A.P. Beutel Health Center has a limited supply of the influenza vaccine, and will not be able to provide all students with flu shots.

In accordance with the Centers for Disease Control guidelines, students with the following health concerns or occupations will be immunized first beginning Monday, October 30th - Friday, November 10th on a first come-first served basis.

- ★cancer
- ★cardiac patients
- ★medical student
- ★diabetes
- ★asthma
- ★student teacher
- ★over 65
- ★immune compromised conditions
- ★HIV

Starting Tuesday, November 14th, any remaining vaccine will be given to the general student population on a first come - first served basis.

Vaccines will be given from 8:00am to 11:00am and 2:00pm to 4:00pm Monday through Friday in the Preventive Medicine at the Health Center.

For more information please contact Student Health Services at 845-6111.

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