

Ancient ritual now spoof on spooks

By John Ortmann

Setting aside a day to frighten the dead and pacify evil spirits is not as outlandish as it sounds, according to Richard Thill, University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) associate professor of foreign languages.

Halloween has its roots in festivals and rituals in honor of the dead that go back at least to Greco-Roman times and perhaps as much as 5,000 years, Thill said.

The festivals traditionally took place near the end of the year, he said, a time when spirits were thought to be especially active.

Such beliefs were widespread in Europe and the British Isles, he said, giving the ancient Celtic ritual of pacification of Sam, God of the dead, as an example.

Death and the autumn harvest also were connected in the minds of the ancients, according to Tom Fulton, a U.S. Department of Agriculture historian.

When the first harvest was brought to the barn, Bavarian peasants would ritualistically chant that they were bearing food for the dead, he said. The peasants also believed in the Corn Man, who was thought to die every year when the last of the crop was harvested, Fulton said.

One of today's common Halloween sights is the jack o' lantern, a term which *Funk and Wagnalls' Standard*

Dictionary of Folklore said once referred to burning swamp gas seen in wet places.

Thill said the evil connotations of jack o' lanterns came from the practice of following the lights into swamps at night. People who did often drowned in bogs and were never heard from again, leading to the belief that the jack o' lantern had gotten them.

The present date of Halloween, or All Hallows Eve, goes back to the seventh century, when Pope Boniface IV introduced All Saint's Day on Nov. 1. *Funk and Wagnall's* states that the day, which honors the souls of all known and unknown saints was probably meant to replace the pagan festivals of the dead.

Thill said we owe our current light-hearted view of Halloween to early British missionaries working among the Germanic tribes. As Christianity replaced the pagan religions, he said, the old Gods still were feared, but identified by the missionaries as demons and cohorts of the devil. Eventually, as Europe became more rational, the old Gods, today's spooks, ghosts and witches, became objects of humor.

And so, a time of stark terror became today's holiday of fun and pranks for children and more than a few college students. Happy haunting.



calendar

- 6 p.m.—Towne Club, Harvest room B
- 6 p.m.—Multi-Cultural Affairs-tutoring, room 225 G
- 6:30 p.m.—Kappa Kitchens, room 216
- 7 p.m.—Table Tennis Club, conference rooms
- 7 p.m.—Delta Sigma Pi executives, room 222
- 7:30 p.m. Delta Sigma Pi, room 222
- 7:30 p.m.—Math Counselors, room 225
- 8 p.m.—Delta Sigma Pi pledges, Auditorium
- union
- Noon—Chancellor's office Luncheon, room 203
- 2:30 p.m.—Panhellenic, room 343
- 3 p.m.—Vice Chancellor-Academic Affairs-Search committee, room 242
- 4:30 p.m.—Daily Nebraskan, room 243
- 5:30 p.m.—Towne Club pledges, room 343

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SOWN	GETA	SERIN
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AFT	UNRAVEL	
CLEAN	KID	SEAT
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