

BILL COOKE: The holiday of Halloween began around 2000 years ago. It was a holiday that was celebrated by the Celts, the people that populated Ireland, and Scotland, and the Isle of Man. The holiday that they celebrated wasn't called Halloween. It was called Samhain.

And this festival marked the end of the Celt year. The Celtic calendar was basically divided into two main categories, the dark and the light, winter and summer. And October 31 marked the transition. This was a night that the Celts saw there being a very tenuous hold between our world and the world of the spirits and the fairies, known as the aos si. They would put out food and drink so that the spirits would be happy, and they would accept this as a gift. And they would be ensured of a prosperous year coming ahead.

Some of these Celts would dress up in costumes. And this was a means of protecting themselves from any vengeful spirits that might attack them on this night. This was also a time that the departed souls of the people themselves would come back to our world. And so one tradition that they had was to leave an empty chair in front of the fire, or to leave empty chairs at the feast, to welcome their relatives who were back with them on this night.

In the ninth century, the Roman Catholic church tried to temper some of the pagan rituals that were going on. And one of their ways of doing this was to supplant holidays of their own onto the pagan holidays. And so, Samhain was changed by the Roman Catholics to what's known as the All Hallow Tide, which was a three day festival. It started with All Hallows' Eve on October 31, followed by All Hallows' Day, which was November 1st. That's also known as All Saints' Day. And then finally, on November 2nd, All Souls' Day.

Starting in the 15th century, a tradition known as souling started, which was when people went door to door. Usually they talked in verses or they sang songs, and in exchange, they were given soul cakes, which was food that was meant to appease the dead. The household that gave them was given good fortune for the coming year.

All Hallows' Eve, October 31, which was Samhain for the Celts, this, still, was a time where there was this recognition, if not celebration, of the supernatural and that time when the dead walked the earth. It was thought that people who had died during that year, their spirits were still wandering in this kind of limbo. And they were not to ascend to heaven or descend to hell until November 1st.

In the 16th century, there was a tradition that started in Scotland and was also practiced in parts of Ireland, known as guising. And this was similar to souling, with the addition that the people would dress up in costumes and go door to door, asking for food and money. And in other parts of the British Isles, it was known as mumming.

These traditions held true, generation after generation. It was in the 19th century, when we had a big influx of Irish and Scottish immigrants in the United States and in Canada, that these traditions of guising were adopted here in North America. And slowly, bit by bit, the custom caught on.

But the holiday of Halloween was very popular in Victorian times. This was the late 1800s, early 1900s. The Victorians were very much into bringing back old traditions. There was very much of an interest in the occult and spiritualism.

And they would have parties that, largely, were for young adults. And had many games that were a part of the celebration that were centered around young people and romance. For instance, bobbing for apples, the person that got an apple and bit into it was going to be the next person married.

Trick-or-treating interestingly, was not practiced during the Victorian period. For a long time, adults were kind of flabbergasted about this custom. There weren't a lot of rules centered around it, so people didn't know when it was happening, or why these kids were coming to their doors asking for money and for food.

What firmed up the custom was a group of kids in Philadelphia in 1950, who donated all the money that they had collected on Halloween night to UNICEF. This became an annual tradition with UNICEF until 1965, when they had amassed so much money by these efforts of children on Halloween, that they won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1965.

Trick-or-treating for UNICEF became such a big thing that, all of a sudden, trick-or-treating didn't have that mysterious aspect anymore. Everybody was doing it, and everybody expected children to be on the streets in the neighborhoods on Halloween night, going door to door.

Halloween is such a combination of different traditions and customs. But there are two things that have remained consistent since the very beginning. And that is that it's a time where the supernatural and superstitions are recognized. And secondly, it's a time to celebrate and to share food.

[EVIL LAUGHTER]