

The story of Jack and the Devil

(The origin of jack-o'-lantern)

Traditionally, the jack-o'-lantern was carved from a turnip or potato and lit with a burning lump of coal or a candle. These lanterns represented the souls of the departed loved ones and were placed in windows or set on porches to welcome the deceased. They also served as protection, for example against evil spirits. Turnips were not easy to find in America, so the pumpkin was used instead.

There are many stories and legends about the origin of the jack-o'-lantern. The most popular tale is that of an Irishman named Jack. Always being drunk and mean, Jack got so intoxicated on a Halloween that his soul began to leave his body. The Devil saw an opportunity to claim a victim and came to earth. Jack was desperate to avoid his fate so he begged the Devil to allow him one last drink. The Devil said fine, but said that Jack would have to pay for his drink because the Devil carried no money. Jack claimed to only have a sixpence left and asked that the Devil took the shape of a sixpence to pay for the drink. Then, tab paid, the Devil could change back to himself.

The Devil considered the request reasonable and changed himself into a sixpence. Jack immediately grabbed the coin and put it in his wallet, which had a cross-shaped catch. The Devil was unable to get out and began ranting and cursing. They then made a deal that the Devil would be released if he agreed to let Jack alone for one year. The Devil agreed and Jack promised to change his behavior over the next year.

It wasn't long before Jack slipped back into his mean, drunken ways and the next All Hallows' Eve the Devil appeared to Jack and demanded his soul. Once again, Jack was desperate to save himself and did so by tricking the Devil. He suggested to the Devil that he may want one of the delicious apples hanging in a tree nearby. He offered to allow the Devil to climb on his shoulders to reach the apples.

Once the Devil was in the tree, Jack pulled out a pocket knife and carved a cross in the tree trunk. Then the Devil could not get out of the tree. Furious and desperate, the Devil offered Jack ten years of peace in exchange for freeing him. Jack demanded that The Devil never would bother him again and he would be freed. The Devil agreed. Jack then returned to his old ways but before the next Halloween, his body could not endure it and he passed away.

He was turned away at the gates of Heaven because of the malicious ways of his life. The Devil shunned him at the gates of hell, saying that he didn't want to see him again and told him to return from where he came. To help Jack see on his journey, the Devil threw him a burning lump of coal from hell. Jack put the piece of coal inside of a turnip and it has been Jack's light on his eternal wanderings ever since. To protect oneself from Jack on All Hallows' Eve, "jack-o'-lanterns" were placed on porches and in windows, in hopes that Jack would take the light if needed instead of bothering anyone.