



The Legend of Jack O'Lantern

According to ancient Celtic folklore, a man named Jack, known for his drunken stupors, was really sauced up one All Hallows' Eve. The Devil, sensing a hot prospect, came to claim his soul but Jack tricked him so as to keep his soul intact.

Jack, eager to stay alive, begged the Devil to let him have just one more drink before he died. The Devil agreed. Jack was short of money and asked the Devil if he wouldn't mind assuming the shape of a sixpence so Jack could pay for the drink and after the transaction the Devil could change back. Seeing how the Devil is quite gullible in almost all these folk tales, he agreed to help Jack and changed himself into a sixpence. Jack immediately grabbed the coin and shoved it into his wallet which just happened to have a cross-shaped catch on it. The Devil, now imprisoned in the wallet screamed with rage and ordered Jack to release him. Jack agreed, but on the condition that he be left alone for one full year.

The next All Hallows' Eve as Jack was heading home when the Devil appeared and demanded that Jack accompany him. Once again, Jack, not eager to die, distracted the Devil by pointing to a nearby apple tree. Jack convinced the Devil to pick an apple out of the

tree and offered to hoist the Devil up on his shoulders to help him pick the apple. The Devil, fooled once again by Jack, climbed into the tree and plucked an apple. Jack took out a knife and carved a cross into the trunk of the tree. Trapped once again, the Devil howled to be released and told Jack he would give him ten years of peace in exchange for his release. Jack agreed, but survived only a few more years. His drinking caught up with his liver and he passed away on his own accord.

When he attempted the gates of Heaven, he was turned away. When he attempted to gain entry into Hell, the Devil refused Jack admission (his ego was still stinging from the tricks Jack played). However, the Devil handed Jack a glowing piece of coal to help him find his way in the darkness of Limbo. Jack put the piece of glowing coal in a turnip and it became known as a Jack O'Lantern.

On the marshes and moors of Ireland, the phosphorescent lights (swamp gas) are said to be Jack searching for a place to rest. When the Irish emigrated to America, pumpkins were more common than turnips (and easier to carve), so the pumpkin carving tradition was established.