On Halloween, The ghost is seen.
EVERYTHING YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT HALLOWEEN BUT WERE AFRAID TO ASK

The Kaleidoscope of candy has lined our grocery store shelves, trips to lush pumpkin fields are on Saturday schedules, and new blow-up figures of scary characters have popped up on neighborhood lawns. It is Halloween season. The Episcopal Church has embraced the holiday for hundreds of years in the form of All Hallows Eve. Current pop-culture might conjure scenes from “Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows” when the word Hallow is used. It did for me anyhow. There is also Hallowed be thy name. Something that we say every Sunday.

hal·low   ˈhalō/ noun archaic 1.a saint or holy person.

Hallow is described as an archaic noun. The traditions of Hallowe’en are also archaic in that they have roots that stretch back in time past the middle ages, the Celts, the Romans, and begin with the Etruscans. The Etruscans were an ancient and prosperous trade civilization that existed from 900 BC to 100BC in the corresponding Tuscany area of Italy before the Roman Empire. Around 700 BC the Etruscans became influenced by Greek Culture. Like the Greeks, the Etruscans had many God’s, but if they were to have a National God it was Veltune, God of the Harvest, Vegetation, and the underworld. The Romans organized and went to war with the Etruscans in the late 4th century BC. By 100BC the last remaining Etruscan cities were absorbed into the Roman Empire. The Roman’s also absorbed the Etruscan God, naming him Vertumnus, God of the harvest, seasons, and transformation. Vertumnus and Pomona are described in Ovid’s Metamorphoses from the first century AD. Pomona was the goddess of abundance in Roman mythology. She was a wood nymph, and her name originates from the Latin word for orchard fruit. Pomona was courted by the woodland gods Silvanus and Picus, but in the end, she married the god Vertumnus, who tricked her by coming to the entrance of her gated orchard and gardens in many transformations or disguises including that of an old women who persuaded Pomona to accept courtship of a suitor by explaining the benefits found in marriage. In the end it was only when Vertumnus revealed his true self that Pomona could not deny her love for him.

In 43A.D. The Romans Conquered the Celts of the British Isles. The Celts celebrated Sawhain halfway between the Autumn Equinox and Winter Solstice as the first day of the New Year. One of four of major Celtic festivals. Sawhain
marked the end of harvest, and beginning of dark winter. A time when cattle were brought back down from the summer pastures, and appropriate livestock were selected for slaughter. Cold nights meant better storage of meat just as the Hog
killing tradition of Eastern NC dictates Dec and January butchery. The harvest was collected and put up. The boundary between this world and the afterlife could be easily crossed during the days of Samhain. The souls of the dead were thought to revisit their homes. Feasts were had and dead relatives were beckoned to attend a place set at the table. Bonfires were set on hill tops to scare away any of the evil spirits looking to return. The Romans incorporated Sawhain with their own Feralia Festival, a day in late October where the Romans commemorated the passing of dead, as well as a tradition of celebrating Pomona and Vertumnus with a bountiful harvest’s end.

By the new century of 300 AD, Christianity had become established in the British Isles. In 314 AD the Church in Britain sent representatives to the council at Arles to decide what should be done with the apostates of faith. Jump to the 8th Century AD and Pope Gregory III designates November 1 as a day to honor saints and martyrs, All Saints Day. The night before becomes known as All Hallows Eve and incorporates the traditions of Samhain throughout the British Isles.

Halloween came to colonial America and is seen more in the South with celebrations of the harvest, dancing, singing, ghost stories, and mischief making. When the Great Potato Famine hit in 1846, the United States saw a huge influx of Irish Immigrants and with them their Halloween traditions of dressing up and going to house to house asking for food in exchange for reciting prayers for the family’s deceased relatives. This is the point in the time line that Halloween becomes a community celebration across the country and a holiday of neighbors getting together. Halloween grew and mischief was stemmed by redirecting participation in trick or treat to only children. The baby boom children of the 1950’s solidified the version of candy and costume Halloween that we know today.
Some traditions have been lost to time as the focus moved to a children’s holiday. One old custom harkened back to the story of Ponoma, her orchard, and love. Young women would hope to identify their future husbands and be married by the next Halloween. Cooks would bury a ring in mashed potatoes, and the diner who found the ring would find true love. Other games would incorporate apples. The first woman to bob an apple would be the next down the aisle. Or upon bobbing the apple, the woman would then peel and toss the apple peel over her shoulder to see if an initial could be made out once laying on the floor.

It is a shame that we have lost that bit of romantic love that once reverberated within the holiday for centuries. In place, let us remember those of us who have done well to live up to the Christian standards of sainthood. Let us remember their names, and strive to live by their example this coming All Saints Day. Happy Halloween, All Hallows Eve, Halowe’en, AL HOLOWMESSE

For more information go to https://www.episcopalchurch.org/library/glossary/all-hallows-eve

-Ben Harper