

## Editor's notes:

October 2004, 20-2

### Ode to October

*It is the Harvest Moon! On gilded vanes  
And roofs of villages, on woodland crests . . .  
In rooms where children sleep, on country lanes  
And harvest-fields, its mystic splendour rests!*

-- *The Old Farmer's Almanac*

Here are some dates of note in October:

**Leif Erikson Day, October 9** -- A day to remember the Viking explorer who came to North America almost 500 years before Columbus.

**Thanksgiving, October 11** -- According to some historians, the first Canadian Thanksgiving after confederation was observed in April 1872 to celebrate the recovery of the Prince of Wales from a serious illness. In 1957, the Canadian Parliament proclaimed the second Monday of October as the fixed date.

**The Ironman Competition, October 16** -- This gruelling triathlon -- which features a 2.4 mile ocean swim, a 112-mile bicycle race, and a 26.2-mile marathon -- is held every October in Hawaii. Athletes move from one event to the next without stopping. It began in 1978 when three Marines stationed there debated whether runners, bikers, or swimmers were the most fit. Navy Commander John Collins suggested settling the argument by combining the three sports into a single competition. Whoever came in first would win the title of "Ironman."

The first race took place on January 18, 1978. Fifteen men competed, with 12 finishing and the winner completed the events in just under 12 hours. Today, the race attracts nearly 1,500 athletes of both genders. More than 10 other countries host their own Ironman competition.

**Person's Day, October 18** -- This day commemorates the 1929 ruling by England's Privy Council that recognized Canadian women as "persons in matters of rights and privileges." Previously, English common law had held that women were persons only in matters of pains and penalties. This day also recognizes people who have made outstanding contributions to the quality of life for women in Canada.

**Lunar eclipse, October 27** -- A total lunar eclipse will begin at 8:05 EDT on this night and block the light of the moon by 11:04. It will be visible in all of North America, as well as parts of Antarctica, Greenland, Africa, and Europe.

**Halloween, October 31** -- The traditional colours of Halloween --orange and black -- have symbolic meaning. Orange represents the harvest; black signifies death.

### Columbus Day

Despite most authorities' belief that Columbus first set foot in the New World on an island near North America on October 12, 1492, a number of incorrect myths about his discovery persist. Here are two:

**Myth:** Columbus set out to prove the earth was round. **Fact:** At the end of the 15th century, it was already widely believed that the earth was a sphere. The more important question was its size. Columbus underestimated its circumference by one-fourth.

**Myth:** Columbus first set foot on what is now a part of mainland United States. **Fact:** Columbus did not land on North America. His first landfall was in the Bahamas, either on what is now San Salvador or Samana Cay, an island 65 miles farther south. Columbus never claimed that he had discovered a new continent.

### History of Jack-o'-Lanterns

According to Irish legend, a renowned sinner named Jack trapped the devil up a tree and refused to release him until he promised never to tempt Jack to sin again. Upon Jack's death, his early sinning ways barred him from Heaven, and the devil wouldn't have him in Hell. Condemned to wander in darkness until Judgement Day, Jack begged the devil for embers to light his way and was given one coal. He put the coal in a hollowed turnip to make it last longer, thus forming "Jack's lantern."

Irish immigrants in America switched over from turnips to pumpkins, which were more plentiful in the New World.



**H A P P Y H A L L O W E E N**

## Books to give your kids a good scare

Librarians find that children like scary stories because they help overcome everyday fears and provide an outlet for disturbing thoughts and feelings. When parents read a scary book, they should allow their children to ask questions, make comments, and even close the book if it gets too upsetting.

Here are some scary books recommended by librarians:

**Toddlers:** *Little Red Riding Hood*; *The Cat in the Hat*

**Ages 5-8:** *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak; *The Witches* by Roald Dahl; *Witch, Goblin & Sometimes Ghost* by Sue Alexander

**Ages 8-12:** *Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark* by Alvin Schwartz; *The Haunted School* by R.L. Stine (a *Goosebumps* book); *Encyclopedia Brown: Boy Detective* by Donald Sobol

**Teens:** *The Other Side of Dark* by Joan Lowery Nixon; *Don't Look Behind You* by Lois Duncan; *A Wrinkle in Time* by Robert Cormier

## The Story of Werewolves

Anthropologists date the lore of werewolves to various points in history, with some citing as the first written account the Biblical story of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. He was condemned by an angel to live like a wild animal for seven years. His hair grew long, and his fingernails came to resemble claws. In one ancient Greek legend, Zeus turned King Lycaon into a wolf, thus spawning the term "lycanthrope" for "werewolf." Herodotus, a Greek historian of the 5th century B.C.E., told of the Neuri, a sect of people who turned into wolves for brief periods once a year. According to legend, humans turn into werewolves after being cursed, bitten by another werewolf, or consuming the raw flesh of a rabid wolf. Brad Steiger, author of *The Werewolf Book*, theorizes that people are attracted to the notion of werewolves because it plays out desires for power or revenge. "The werewolf tradition . . . sought to release the beast within and accomplish the transformation of human into wolf."

## Old sayings explained

Here's how some common expressions got their start:

**Rule of thumb** -- Under old English law, a man could beat his wife with a rod that was no thicker in circumference than his thumb.

**Pass the buck** -- Poker players once used something called a "buck" button to mark whose turn it was to deal. Later, silver dollars replaced the buttons and were also called bucks. "Passing the buck" meant the poker player forfeited his right to deal.

**Red herring** -- To confuse hounds in a fox hunt so as to prolong a hunt, participants sometimes dragged a red herring across the trail, which is how the phrase came to mean a fake clue.

## Fun Fabric Facts

Corduroy means "fabric of the king" in French.

Silk was invented in 2,600 B.C.E. in China by an emperor's concubine, who accidentally dropped a cocoon into hot tea and saw its threads unravel.

Legend has it that poor women who could not afford silk would beat on cotton cloth with sticks to soften the fibres, and then rub it against a stone to make it shiny. The resulting fabric was called "chintz." (The word "chintzy" has come to mean of lesser quality.)

Paisley is named for the Scottish town where shawls were manufactured in the 19th century based on patterns from cashmere shawls imported from Kashmir, India. Some historians hold that the curlicue design was inspired by leaves; others contend that it was the result of stamping dye onto cloth with the side of the fist.

The word "plaid" comes from the Gaelic "plaid," meaning blanket. In the 1600s, Scottish clans adopted particular tartans or plaid textile designs. Today, there are more than 2,500 tartans listed in the *Register of All Publicly Known Tartans*.

## Riddles for Your Coffee Break

1 I cannot be felt, seen or touched  
Yet I can be found in everybody  
My existence is always in debate  
Yet I have my own style of music  
What am I?

2 I soar without wings, I see without eyes  
I've traveled the universe to and fro  
I've conquered the world,  
Yet I've never left home  
Who am I?

3 I am a ruler of shovels  
I have a double  
I am as thin as a knife  
I have a wife  
What am I?

4 What force and strength cannot get through,  
I with a gentle touch can do  
And many in the street would stand,  
Were I not a friend in hand.  
What am I?

5 What is black when you buy it  
Red when you use it  
And grey when you throw it away?

6 I can sizzle like bacon, I am made with an egg  
I have plenty of backbone, but lack a good leg.  
I peel layers like an onion, but still remain whole  
I can be long like a flagpole, yet fit in a hole.  
What am I?

### Match Choices:

- A. A snake
- B. A key
- C. Charcoal
- E. The King of Spades
- F. Your imagination
- G. A soul

Answers: 1-G, 2-F, 3-E,  
4-B, 5-C, 6-A