

Editor's notes:

*The sweet calm sunshine of
October, now
Warms the low spot; upon its
grassy mould
The purple oak leaf falls; the
birchen bough
Drops its bright spoil like
arrowheads of gold.*

-- William Cullen Bryant

As we say goodbye to the fading warm and glowing days, we turn our attention to what this month brings. Here are a few dates to consider:

St. Francis of Assisi Day October 3 -- In addition to his vow of poverty, St. Francis of Assisi was celebrated for his compassion to animals. On his feast day (the day of his death, October 3), the church honours his memory by hosting a "Blessing of the Animals" ceremony either on that day or the first Sunday in October.

Years ago, church members adorned their farm animals -- sheep, chickens, oxen, cattle, goats, and horses -- with garlands of flowers and led them to the altar, where a priest said a prayer for them and sprinkled them with water. Today, domestic pets, including cats, dogs, birds, and fish, are the primary honorees.

Oktoberfest, October 5-13 -- Ontario's Kitchener-Waterloo Oktoberfest - also billed as Canada's Greatest Bavarian Festival -- is the second largest in the world, just after the original celebration in Munich, Germany. Since the late 1960s, the twin cities of Kitchener-Waterloo have hosted the annual event, which traditionally starts the Friday before Canadian Thanksgiving and runs until the Saturday after. The area is well known for its German heritage, with Kitchener once named "Berlin."

More than 700,000 visitors attend to take part in dozens of events, including barrel racing, a Thanksgiving parade, art, car, and fashion shows, a bocce ball tournament, and a Miss Oktoberfest pageant. The festival formally kicks off with the "tapping of the keg" in the Kitchener Civic Square, a ceremony featuring local dignitaries, oompah bands, and Bavarian dancers. Seventeen "Festhallen," Bavarian-decorated buildings or tents scattered throughout the Kitchener-Waterloo region, form the hub of the festival and sell beer and German cuisine.

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Leif Erikson Day, October 9 -- While most people regard Christopher Columbus as the first European explorer to discover America, many historians believe the rightful credit should go to Leif Erikson, a Viking born around 970, the son of Norwegian-born Erik the Red.

While Contradictory historical accounts make it impossible to be certain about the details of Erikson's life, it is thought that he was born in Iceland and travelled to both Norway and Greenland before he set out to explore the area west of Greenland. Speculation is that he made three landfalls -- in Labrador, Newfoundland, and near Cape Cod -- around the year 1000, putting him nearly 500 years ahead of Columbus.

Magic Day, October 31 -- The Society of American Magicians proclaims this day in honour of Harry Houdini, the famous magician who died on October 31 in 1926. Although it was reported that he died while performing in a water torture act, he actually died from a ruptured appendix, believed to have been sustained when a college student punched him in the abdomen to test his well-known ability to withstand blows to the body.

Hallowe'en, October 31 -- Hallowe'en dates back to an ancient fall festival celebrated by Druids in Ireland, Great Britain, and Northern France. They would gather around a bonfire and don animal heads and skins, the precursor to our masks and costumes. After the invasion of Britain by the Romans in 43 A.D., the festival was merged with two Roman celebrations, Feralia -- a late October commemoration of the passing of the dead -- and the day to honour Pomona, the goddess of fruit and trees, whose symbol was the apple.

Haunted Houses

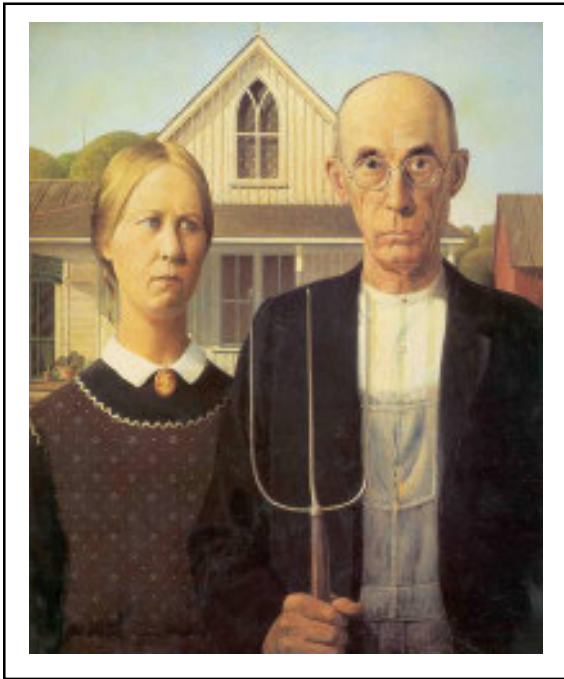


Haunted houses are a \$300 million a year business, with more than 3,000 throughout North America. Detroit is considered the Haunted House Capital of America because it boasts nearly 60 of them, more than any other area. Typically haunted houses open the month before Hallowe'en, with attendance doubling every weekend up to the 31st, while some haunted houses operate year round.

Indian Corn

Multicoloured ears of dried corn often decorate doors and tables during the fall. Known as Indian corn, these varieties hark back to Native American crops of small, knobby ears of corn with red, yellow, blue, and black kernels. The Indians roasted some of the fresh corn and ate it, but much of it was dried and pounded into meal for corn bread or cornmeal mush. Today, most people eat white and yellow corn developed by horticulturists, but colourful varieties of corn are still grown in the American Southwest and in Central and South America. In recent years, horticulturists have developed miniature versions of Indian corn, primarily for decorative use in bouquets and fall arrangements.

The Story Behind “American Gothic”



“American Gothic” by Grant Wood (1891 - 1942) is one of America’s best-known paintings, but this simple depiction of a farm couple with pitchfork is not what it seems. For starters, the painter’s subjects weren’t married, nor were they farmers. The man, Byron McKeeby, was Wood’s dentist; and the woman was Nan Graham, his sister. They lived in town and didn’t even pose together for the painting. The farmhouse behind them is a real building and still stands in Eldon, Iowa.

Wood entered his oil painting for a competition held by the Art Institute of Chicago in 1930. The judges rejected it until a museum trustee bought it for \$300 and convinced them to reconsider. Art critics say the painting resonates with the American public because it depicts the character and values that helped this country weather the Great Depression.

Halloween Riddles

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| 1. How do you mend a broken jack-o-lantern? | A. <i>Dead ends</i> |
| 2. Why didn’t the skeleton dance at the party? | B. <i>Do you believe in people?</i> |
| 3. Why don’t mummies take vacations? | C. <i>Tweets</i> |
| 4. Why do witches use brooms to fly? | D. <i>A cereal killer</i> |
| 5. What did one ghost say to another ghost? | E. <i>A blood vessel</i> |
| 6. What do you call someone who poisons a person’s cornflakes? | F. <i>With a pumpkin patch</i> |
| 7. What kind of streets do zombies like best? | G. <i>A stake sandwich</i> |
| 8. What does a vampire never order in a restaurant? | H. <i>Because vacuum cleaners are too heavy</i> |
| 9. What do birds give out on Halloween night? | I. <i>He had no body to dance with</i> |
| 10. What is a vampire’s favourite mode of transportation? | J. <i>They’re afraid they’ll relax and unwind</i> |

Answers: 1F; 2I; 3J; 4H; 5B; 6D; 7A; 8G; 9C; 10E

We either make ourselves happy or miserable. The amount of work is the same. Carlos Castenada