

Halloween party tips part of newspaper coverage

"Halloween is approaching and the happy event one week from tomorrow will be celebrated by many parties among the young folks of Bloomington." Bloomington Evening World, Oct. 23, 1903.

In case any local families didn't know how to put on a Halloween party, the *Bloomington Evening World* of Oct. 23, 1903, ran a complete blueprint that even the most inept host or hostess could follow. It was borrowed from the *Indianapolis News*.

The invitations should have jack-o-lanterns on them. Then the place where the party was to be held was supposed to be decorated with corn stalks and pumpkins and strings of gourds, apples and ears of corn.

There was one decoration item stolen from the Christmas season regarding the corn. "... letting red ear, which hangs in the doorway, perform the mission of the mistletoe." As for the rest of the room, it should be lit only by jack-o'-lanterns and firelight, "leaving many dark and mysterious corners."

Guests should have been advised to bring a pumpkin with the face of a famous person cut into it. The pumpkins would be the basis for a guessing contest. The suggested prize: a basket of fruit.



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

If the guests seemed to enjoy contests, the *Evening World* article suggests another. "Scatter pumpkin seeds on the floor and have a time limit in stringing them with needle and thread. To the winner of the longest string a pumpkin pie."

Of particular interest to marriageable age guests would be the "wassail bowl," actually a hollow-out pumpkin filled with sawdust and "fortune trifles, such as thimbles for old maids, pencils for authors and rings for brides."

If the readers of the *Evening World* had let the holiday slip up on them, the *Evening World* provided another reminder on Oct. 28. That article conjured up scenes from typical Halloween parties of the past like pranks and bobbing for apples.

The article also contained a rather odd sentence regarding females. "Even in this cru-

dite and advanced twentieth century, the same omens and tokens of the Halloween of yore are tested and the very up-to-date young college woman is quite ready with the rest to fling aside dignity and learning and play all the familiar tricks and charms and feel again the primeval thrills of terror course up and down her back as the hours grow ghostly."

By Oct. 31 the newspaper was able to report on a couple of local parties at least. There was a huge one at the United Presbyterian Church. Amid traditional decorations, the church members engaged in games like "peanut races, egg-eating contests, etc."

There was an enormous witch cake contributed by Mrs. (James) Woodburn — so big that it could be cut into the needed 135 pieces. What was important about the cake was the significance of some of the ingredients.

The *Evening World* explained. "The party receiving a slice of cake containing an English walnut kernel was to be married within six months. If the slice contained an almond, it would be a year before the wedding bells would ring, and if no kernel was found, the party would never marry." Each guest received a favor — a card containing the words "Halloween, United Presbyterian

Church, 1903," with a thorn attached with red and white ribbon.

There was another Halloween party described in that Oct. 31 edition of the *Evening World*. It was at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Marion Rice on South Dunn Street. The entertainment would have been more sophisticated than the church's, since it was for 12 couples.

There were Japanese lanterns and flowers. After some card games, the guests enjoyed pumpkin pie, doughnuts, apples, milk, olives, potato chips, buttered sandwiches, cake and coffee.

The Halloween stories on the 31st of October and been bumped to the last page of the newspaper, since there was another event that would inevitably link Halloween with real horror in the minds of those who lived in Bloomington and West Lafayette. On its front page of Oct. 31 the *Evening World* reported the collision of a train carrying the Purdue University football team and another train in Indianapolis. The death toll at first report ranged between 15 and 20, including a coach. Needless to say, the much-anticipated game was canceled.

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