

Creating jack-o'-lanterns is a long tradition originating in Ireland where turnips and potatoes first served as the object under the knife. In England beets were used.

Immigrants brought their tradition to America, home of the pumpkin, and carving them became an integral part of Halloween.

Below is the story of how the carving tradition began.

“Stingy Jack” Legend

According to the story, Stingy Jack asked the devil to have a drink with him. Not wanting to pay, Stingy Jack persuaded the devil to turn himself into a coin. Once the devil did so, Jack kept the money and pocketed it next to a silver cross, preventing the devil from changing back into his original form.

Eventually, Jack freed the devil with the condition he would not bother Jack for one year, and should Jack die, the devil would not claim his soul.

The next year, Jack again tricked the devil into climbing into a tree to pick some fruit. While he was in the tree, Jack carved a cross into the bark so the devil could not come down until he promised Jack not to bother him for 10 more years.

Jack died soon after, and as the legend goes, God would not allow such a deceitful character into heaven.

The devil, still upset by Jack's trick, and having kept his word not to claim his soul, would not allow Jack into hell.

He sent Jack off into the dark night with only a burning coal to light his way. Jack put the coal into a carved-out turnip and has been roaming the Earth with it ever since.

The Irish began to refer to this ghostly figure as “Jack of the Lantern,” and then, simply “Jack O' Lantern.”

In Ireland and Scotland, people began to make their own versions of Jack's lanterns by carving scary faces into turnips or potatoes and placing them into windows or near doors to frighten away Stingy Jack and other wandering evil spirits.

In England, large beets are used. Immigrants from these countries brought the Jack O'Lantern tradition with them when they came to the United States. They soon found that pumpkins, a fruit native to America, make perfect Jack-O'-Lanterns.