



The Almagest writers explore the meanings of various Halloween traditions.

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“YOU MISS 100% OF THE SHOTS YOU DON'T TAKE.” - Wayne Gretzky

## Kermit Poling discusses life and career

Malva Chintakindi and Emily Wright  
STAFF WRITERS

Kermit Poling was invited by the LSUS honors program as the Fall 2014 Distinguished Author. He spoke to mass communications and honor students at the third floor in Noel Library on October 20 at 6:00 p.m. He is celebrating his 20th season as Music Director of the South Arkansas Symphony and his 25th season as Music Director of the Shreveport Metropolitan Ballet.

Around fifteen students surrounded Poling in a semi-circle seating and a few faculty members were also present. He was dressed up in formal attire and spoke fondly of his memories and experiences.

Poling is the General Manager of the Red River Radio Network and has created orchestral arrangements for a wide range of artists. He credits his interest in technical aspects of music to his affinity towards new gadgets. For instance, he listened to symphonies when there was no public radio in Cleveland and learnt that it is the best way to record music.

“Symphonic music is what I love. There is nothing like being in front of eighty players. I love being a conductor,” he said.

Dr. Linda Webster, chair and professor of mass communication introduced Poling. Webster stated that he is a Renaissance man being that he is accomplished in many areas.

“That term, Renaissance man, kind of scares me,” Poling said. “I don’t necessarily think of myself in that way, but, I guess if you really look at it for what it is, someone who tries to do a lot of different things and tries to be accomplished at all, I do have some elements of that.”

Conductor, composer, and violinist Poling started playing the piano at age 5 and picked up the violin at 6 after he saw a demonstration of string instruments at his school.

“My parents didn’t find out about it until after they got the bill,” he said.

While people compliment his singing ability, he stated that he does not consider himself a real singer, but does enjoy choir.

His mother, a trained opera singer, wanted him to begin playing the piano at the age of five. He stated that when he began to master the piano he would accompany his mother. He also started playing the violin, which he considers to be his primary instrument.

“I had conducted from the time I was 15. I did a lot of musical theatre conducting,” Poling said. “My mom was involved with all of that so I got involved with theatre.”

He pointed out the events of significance in his life that happened in 1988 and 1989 where he had the opportunity to arrange music for the occasions of Hanukah and a stage play respectively. Those experiences made him realize about his talent as a composer.

“It reminded me of how I enjoyed writing even if it’s

doing simple arrangements,” he said.

He explained that his distinct love of music, preferably orchestral, was his desire for a career.

“Whatever it is that you’re passionate about, you can be successful at,” Poling said.

He made different tunes while he was young and carried them with him, which he still uses today. He is inspired by diverse music including Germanic and Russian music.

“There were many experiments in France and Russia. There was a ballet that caused a riot in Russia,” he said.

He travelled to Puerto Rico, Europe and various other places and cherishes those experiences. He moved from his hometown, Cleveland, to Shreveport in 1985.

“It was great down there but I had my family in states and I liked this part of the country,” he said referring to Shreveport.

He also composed music for various fairy tales including “Beauty and the Beast”, “Peter pan”, “Cinderella” and so on. “Snow White”, Poling’s first ballet, premiered at the Shreveport Symphony Orchestra in 2003. His other ballets include “The Wizard of Oz”, “Phantom of the Opera” and “Aladdin.” The Oklahoma City Ballet commissioned him to write “Beauty and the Beast”, which premiered this year.

He also stated that he wrote music for the musical stage production of the play “Epic”, based off of the book “The Leaf Men” by Bill Joyce. In addition, he composed musical scores to silent films, including the documentary of “Tarzan: Lord of the Louisiana Jungle.”

Students present at the discussion had the opportunity to ask a few questions to which he replied. He explained that having a career in music isn’t exactly a way to make money though there is a potential chance. But, he encouraged students to pursue their interests.

Students also asked Poling questions about his



Photo by Corey Drummond

Poling is an accomplished musician and composer

thoughts and opinions on the artistic side of education, whether or not he was able to sing, and information related to Red River Radio. He said he does believe that music is intellectually stimulating as music itself is very mathematical, but that music also requires creativity and imagination.

“If you are passionate about what you want to do, it is worth doing. You don’t have to necessarily focus on it as a career but you can always enjoy it,” he said.



Photo by Austin Brosset

Kermit Poling speaks to students about his career in music

## Masks and costumes: A new tradition?

Corey Drummond  
PRINT EDITOR

The greatest fear of a nightmare is not being able to escape the tormentor. Running full force, and yet not going anywhere. Hiding and hoping to wake up, but being pulled deeper into fear. Halloween masks and costumes are meant to conceal people from the terrors of the night.

Back in Celtic times, celebrators of Samhain would wear costumes in order to treat the roaming spirits of the dead. Samhain is a Gaelic festival marking the end of the harvest season and the beginning of winter or the “darker half” of the year. It was thought that if you could trick the spirit, the spirit would refrain from bothering you about

pesky things like tributes and respect.

It was considered that when the “veil” between the living world and the spirit world was the thinnest, the spirits could walk among the living. As it happened, people believed that the veil could be no thinner than on the day of Halloween. The idea of concealing oneself as a creature of the night would protect that person from harm.

Americans did not start wearing masks and costumes until the early 20th century. Clearly, though, they only utilized the costumes as a tradition instead of hoping to hide from evil like the Celtic originators. In the 1950s, masks and costumes became massively popular in the U.S. and drove the traditions of Halloween into an iconic status. However,

our friends across the sea had already begun this tradition.

In Great Britain and Ireland, people already started wearing masks and costumes during Halloween. They had a unique name for it too unlike the United States’ simplicity. The UK called it “souling.”

As far back as the Middle Ages, these traditions were finding their place. During the Middle Ages, poor children would go door to door to collect handouts from kind homeowners. They would accept these handouts for prayers of the dead. These children were called guisers, and became the simple act, with the application of a mask and costume

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# Symbols of fright and festivity explored: The origins of Halloween staples and traditions

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## Jack o' lanterns: Halloween's Santa Clause

**Katherine Lejeune**  
STAFF WRITER

As the end of October approaches illuminated ghoulish faces can be seen on almost every corner. The faces carved into the season's orange pumpkin fruit are an assured indicator that the annual holiday, Halloween, is vastly approaching. It has become a cultural tradition to pick out a pumpkin then go home and begin "gutting" it. Beginning by removing the sticky, jelly-like goo and large white seeds in order to be able to fit not only a light source, but also to have enough room to maneuver to create a ghoulish masterpiece.

From colored pumpkins, to carved out "Harry Potter" faces, the jack o' lanterns have transpired from a legendary tradition to an international symbol of Halloween

The fall activity, carving jack o' lanterns can be traced back to an Irish sinister legend dating back more than two centuries ago. The legend is about a man called "Stingy-Jack", who invited the devil to have drinks with him. True to his name, Stingy Jack didn't want to pay for the drinks so he tricked the devil into turning himself into a silver coin. After using the devil as payment for the drinks Stingy Jack placed the coin next to a silver cross in his pocket, this prohibited the devil from transforming back. Before Stingy Jack would allow the devil to transform back he made the devil swear to leave him alone for one year. The devil agreed and did so.

After a year the devil and Stingy Jack met again, where the devil was once again tricked. This time however Jack convinced the devil to leave him alone for ten years and promise not to take his soul after death. The devil had no choice and agreed.

The legend goes that Stingy Jack was banned from heaven by God because he was such an immoral person. The Devil, disappointed by the trick Jack had played on him and keeping his word not to claim his soul, forbid Jack into hell. The devil sent Jack off into the gloomy night with only a sweltering coal to light his way. Jack placed the coal into a carved-out turnip and has since been roaming the Earth.

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

The history of Halloween itself has religious-related roots dating back to the European Middle Ages. As Christianity began to replace



Graphic by Katherine Lejeune

Jack o' lantern collage celebrating the pumpkin tradition

other religious groups, the church wanted to move the Pagan holiday of "All Hallows Evening", later renamed and shortened to "Halloween" to a later date in the year. The Church decided that Halloween could be celebrated near the end of October, being closely dated to "All Souls Day", celebrated on November 2nd. "All Souls Day" was when people would pray for those stuck in purgatory.

The legend of Stingy Jack spread through Scotland, Ireland, and even to England where natives put their own spin on the legendary tradition. Using beets, rutabagas, gourds, potatoes, and turnips, they would carve daunting faces into the vegetables. Many people believed that placing jack o' lanterns outside of their home or in their windows would ward off evil spirits that may interfere with their prayers.

When the Irish Potato Famine of 1846 caused the Irish families to flee to America, the tradition came over with them. Since turnips and potatoes were not a recreational resource, immigrants discovered the ripe indigenous American fruit – the pumpkin, served as a great replacement.

By the early 1900s the holiday, Halloween and the jack o' lantern begun being celebrated by people all over the country. Today, the jack o' lantern tradition has become such a seasonal phenomenon that people are going as far as re-creating the jack o' lantern with other decorative materials. Pier 1 sells a mercury glass jack o' lantern cookie jar for \$40.00, schools and neighborhoods have "Jack O' Lantern Decorating Contest", even jack o' lantern party supplies can be purchased for invitations and favors.

The legendary Irish myth of "Stingy Jack", the manipulative soul who never made it to the afterlife, has transpired into an international customary "mascot" for the Halloween holiday. From toddling children to disabled geriatrics, carving jack o' lanterns has, and will continue to be a traditional ritual that most families across America celebrate.

The next time your fingers, clothes, and sense of smell get drenched in pumpkin goo, remember; it's all because of Stingy Jack, and how he still is roaming, a soul with no place to rest.



Happy Halloween from the Almagest!

Photo by Emily Wright

## MASKS cont.

to honor the dead, of children in our day and age. It is the basis for modern Halloween.

Halloween is a surprisingly recent tradition in America, particularly the addition of costumes and masks. It is important to many people and plays a large role in our culture and media. As time goes on, people create their own traditions, and many of them are adopted by a mass of others.

The weeks surrounding Halloween are swarmed by horror films watched by millions of people. For most, seeing a scary film on Halloween is an important tradition to continue. Time will tell what changes, and what doesn't.



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# Symbols of fright and festivity explored:

The origins of Halloween staples and traditions

## Trick or treating changes throughout time

**Emily Wright**  
STAFF WRITER

The night air is cool. The wind blows slightly as leaves fly across grass and pavements of neighborhood homes. A sense of the night's festivities being underway is enough to send a delightful and cheery shiver down the spine of all trick or treaters. There is a knock. The sound of shuffling ensues, a person opens a door. Down on the dim-lit porch is a small group of children expectantly waiting for candy, "trick or treat," they say happily.

Today, the phrase trick or treat is well known in America as a greeting children give to the owners of delicious candy in hopes of actually receiving some of that candy for themselves. However, the Halloween phrase has evolved over hundreds of years into the meaning it holds now. So what was the meaning of trick or treat in the olden days?

The website [phrases.org](http://phrases.org) explains that the origins of the festive phrase lies in medieval Europe in pagan celebrations. These events took place every year on November 1st. The celebrators would dress themselves in disguises to connect with deceased spirits and go door-to-door asking for food.

November 1st was named All Hallows Day, while October 31st was called All Hallows Eve, which was shortened to Hallowe'en. Instead of asking for candy, though, these trick or treaters would ask for soulcakes, or food in exchange for prayers.

The article states that the practice of souling, or going door-to-door, was to give out gifts of food in return for prayers for the dead. Although the rituals are different in certain respects, this ritual is similar to that of The Day of The Dead that is celebrated in Mexico for the loss of loved ones where families gather together to pray for their dead.

The influx of European immigrants brought with them the souling rituals of their past generations. Needless to say, that medieval ritual has now been accepted as an American tradition.

However, the article continues, in the 1930s, adults were not exactly fans of the trick or treat phrase and believed it was ridiculous. Eventually, the socialism and happiness of Halloween night gave way to a wide acceptance to participate in the fall events.

Obviously, Halloween in America is a big deal as children get to dress-up as their favorite characters, such as, su-

perheroes, princesses, pirates, clowns, turtles, etc. It is also a much anticipated event as children enjoy being with friends, playing games, carving pumpkins, and, most of all, collecting sugared treats.

However, on the dark side of things, rowdy trick or treaters can feel shadowed with the events taking place on Halloween night and cause damage and destruction.

Despite this, the childhood memories of appearing to be someone else and enjoying a night of fun, and the transition from summer to fall, are memories that last a lifetime.

Daven Hiskey included some fun facts about Halloween in a trick or treat article on the Today I Found Out website. One fact pointed out that approximately two billion dollars is made in revenue in the U.S. every year from candy sales. Another mentioned that Halloween comes in second to Christmas as one of the highest revenue-collecting holidays in the whole world.

Lastly, approximately 35 million American children, ranging from ages five to thirteen, participate in trick or treating, which constitutes ninety percent of children in that age range. Likewise, sixty-seven percent of adults actually go trick or treating with their kids.

Another change in trick or treating as occurred in this century, however, that of not so much door-to-door trick or treating, but to events held at churches, schools, and local businesses. These activities have a positive influence on attendees as these groups and organizations provide fun and safety.

Moreover, such activities offer trick or treaters the opportunity to socialize and enjoy the evening with friends, family, and strangers who may actually be dressed up in the same costumes as others.

The door-to-door soliciting of candy and other goodies has seemed to all but disappear. Many people attend events offered in their local communities for their children to receive candy. Some of these events also offer games, door prizes, food, and other fun activities, such as face painting.

But, the phrase "trick or treat" is still used by many children at these events, although they are not visiting neighborhood homes.

While the background of Halloween is associated with pagan cultures rampant in that time period, dealing with the exchange of food for prayers for the dead, the overall meaning associated with Halloween in the 21st century is that of fun, fun, and even more fun.



Photo by Emily Wright

The trick or treat traditions is firmly planted in the future of Halloween

While some events may become rowdy and allows for certain individuals to ruin a night intended to bring joy to the hearts of kids nationwide, the meaning of Halloween has been "Americanized" to that of being able to dress and act unlike yourself for a while, enjoying time with friends, and getting a stomachache after consuming favorite pieces of candy.

## Black cats: Pure evil or just misunderstood?

**Malva Chintakindi**  
STAFF WRITER

One of the most famous Halloween symbols is a black cat. Black is a common color of mystery and the unknown. Black is also considered to be an absorbing element taking on negative energies and neutralizing them. When viewed at the meaning of Halloween symbols based on the understanding, it is a transitional process where the black cat becomes a suitable totem which means a natural object or animal believed by a particular society to have spiritual significance for the celebration. The black cat fosters our connection with the intangible, and serves as a bridge from the mundane to the magical.

They are great stalkers allowing them to sneak around at night making humans very paranoid. Being associated with the darkness of night didn't help their image because the color black has always been associated with evil due to our ancestor's fear of the night.

The superstition about black cats being a bad omen started in the middle Ages. During the time when witches were believed to be a great threat to society, it was also believed that witches often owned black cats and saw them as possessed spirits. Some people believed that witches could transform themselves into black cats. Other myths stated that black cats were servants of their witch owners. If cats were seen roaming about, townspeople would sometimes think that cats were doing their masters' evil bidding.

Another medieval myth told that Satan turned himself into a cat when socializing with witches. But nowadays, black cats aren't synonymous with bad luck and mischief everywhere especially in Ireland, Scotland and England where it's considered good luck for a black cat to cross anyone's path.

Germans seem to have lightened up this piece of legend, believing that a cat that crosses from right to left is bad

news, while one that moves left to right signals good things ahead. As any cat owner knows, one needs good fortune, skill, and a whole of patience to get any kind of cat black or not to follow direction as related to paw placement.

Scottish folklore includes a fairy known as the Cat Sith, a giant black cat with a small white spot on his chest who was believed to have the ability to steal a dead person's soul before the gods could claim it. That belief led to the creation of night-and-day watches called the "Late Wake" to guard bodies just before burial. The Scottish also employed such tried and true methods as "using catnip" and "jumping around a lot" to scare off potential Cat Sith soul-stealers.

There is a lot of cultural significance to the black cat, be it positive or negative. The Puritan Pilgrims distrusted anything associated with witches and sorcery, including black cats. They actively persecuted black cats and it became a practice to burn black cats on Shrove Tuesday to protect the home from fire. Shrove Tuesday is the day before Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent in the Roman Catholic Church. "Shrove" is the past tense of the word "shrive," which means to hear a confession, assign penance, and absolve from sin. Shrove Tuesday is a reminder that a person is entering a season of penance.

After the anti-witch zeal had subsided in the colonies, black cats had been thoroughly cemented in popular legend right alongside witches. Decorators use them as a Halloween symbol, both alongside witches and independently, to add a frightful, harmful ambience to their front steps, their green eyes spooking trick-or-treaters.

During witch trials, cats were often tortured and killed by Christian puritans along with the supposed witches. Some thought that witches had the ability to change shape into a cat. However, due to a few conservative views of people, to this day many animal shelters will not allow the adoption of cats around Halloween for fear of their abuse.

Some animal shelters offer lower rates on black cat adoptions or have special events simply to find homes for these animals. Black cats are the same as other cats, and their behavior is no different. Yet this legend persists and keeps some people from adopting cats that need homes simply because of their color. Another consequence is that sometimes during Halloween people pull pranks and may try to injure black cats. Living in the 21st century, believing in superstitions that condone black cats is surely pitiful since there has been no substantial evidence as of date to indicate as such. This may very well be scene of racism itself. People who want to adopt a cat or kitten should always select a black one if there is one available to keep it from a sad or lonely fate.

Views on black cats have undergone a transition. Some people think of black cats as fun and cute, and there are many black cat costumes each year on Halloween for women and girls. Characters like Cat woman have made the black cat cool, and cat lovers love all cats equally. Pop culture, attractive costumes and celebrities have made black cat symbols famous. To an extent, horror movies have also changed the perception towards black cats quite a bit. Though there are people who still believe that when a black cat walks in front of them, they are doomed to bad luck, perceptions overall have changed a bit. Nobody really believes that black cats are associated with witches, but some people can't shake the feeling that owning a black cat is asking for bad luck.

Black cats have had a long and controversial history. They are forever associated with Halloween, and pop up on decorations, pumpkins, costumes, and all types of Halloween items. Though black cats don't bring bad luck more than any other animal, the superstition is deeply rooted in people's thinking because of the many number of years it has been stereo-typed. Black cats with their green or orange eyes are simply misunderstood and beautiful animals that need a shelter, love and care like any other cat.

# Amber Waves

by Dave T. Phipps

