



Parked in the Past

Historic Halloween: pranks, parties, myths

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October 24, 2013

It was probably all in fun, but the fun ended with a gunshot wound to the head for 15-year-old Colorado Springs high school student Archie Tolley on Oct. 31, 1922.

The Flume of Nov. 17, 1922, said Tolley was with a group of other boys when one of them threw a firecracker into Alexander Meredith's Colorado Springs yard. Meredith's response was to fire a shotgun at the group; Tolley was hit in the head and face.

He was seriously injured but there was no follow-up story. Did he live? Possibly.

A veterinarian named Archibald Douglas Tolley died in Colorado Springs in 1969; he was born in 1906, and was listed as a 13-year-old living in Colorado Springs in the 1920 U.S. census.

The 63-year-old Tolley in 1969 could very well have been the injured Halloween prankster of 1922.

Pranks expected

But Halloween pranks by youth were seemingly expected in the years around the turn of the 20th century. The Nov. 2, 1917, Flume reported that Fairplay showed signs that the younger citizens

were out in force on Oct. 31 when "all the vehicles could be seen scattered over the streets of our town."

One can imagine a group of youth – typically boys – out on Halloween, often in the snow, pushing unsecured cars, wagons and buggies from one end of town to the other, probably a noisy activity, with much shouting and yelling.

But the practice was apparently accepted for several years. It was reported 27 years earlier in the Nov. 7, 1890, Buena Vista Democrat, that Halloween saw the usual celebrating "by the boys, in removing gates, boxes, etc., from their usual moorings."

Removing gates was a popular activity for youth on Halloween and was mentioned over the years in many stories reporting Halloween happenings. A story in Buena Vista's Oct. 30, 1895, Chaffee County Republican, simply advised residents that it would be Halloween the next day and to "look after your gates."

Occasionally, town authorities would intervene to stop youthful Halloween pranks.

The Nov. 3, 1905, Flume reported the tamest Halloween celebration in years and said it was because “the marshal had the boys pretty well frightened.” That year there were few pranks on Halloween night.

But maybe the tame Halloween had more to do with the foot of snow that fell between Sunday, Oct. 29, and Tuesday, Oct. 31, than with the marshal’s threat.

Sometimes pranks went too far. The Nov. 7, 1924, Chaffee County Republican reported extreme Halloween damage that year. It conceded that, “pranks are pranks, and Halloween pranks are often overlooked, supposed to have been done by small boys and little children,” but damage during the 1924 Halloween in Buena Vista was not done by children, the paper said.

A large window of the post office was broken, two wheels of a large wagon were pushed through its door, and the floor was littered with paper. The Hotel Princeton was extensively damaged, and stores in town had piles of ashes left at doorsteps, and their windows were marked with soap.

Vehicles were overturned, including a buggy at the telephone office and a large wagon at the Hotel Princeton. A bicycle was put on top of a telephone sign, and the weighing scales from the Central Drug Store were found at the barbershop across the street.

And, “of course,” the paper said, “many gates were missing.”

Outhouses

In the 1930s, indoor plumbing was not common, at least not in Park County. Behind every home there was an outhouse. And they were prime targets for pranks on Halloween.

Andy Anderson grew up in Como and graduated from Como High School in the late 1930s. In an oral history interview on Sept. 29, 2005, found on the Park County Local History Archives website, Anderson said kids in Como “were kind of ornery around Halloween sometimes.”

He said, “they,” (apparently not including himself in the group) “turned over outhouses hoping to get somebody in there. They put a buggy on top of the [elementary] schoolhouse.”

When asked where the buggy came from, Anderson said, “they” found it somewhere. “[It was] one somebody had in their garage there.”

Budde Freeman grew up in Fairplay and graduated from Fairplay High School in the early 1940s. She was interviewed on Sept. 12, 2002; that interview is also on the Archives website.

She said there were Halloween parties when she was younger, but as kids got older, it was more fun to go out and “turn over an outhouse or dump a trash can in the filling station area.”

Freeman said that on Halloween, children in Fairplay and Alma would have competitions. “It wasn’t destructive. It was just fun,” she said.

For example, one year, the Fairplay kids “went up there [to Alma] and pushed the Alma wagon; it was just a big old wagon that they had there in town – pushed it in the river,” she said.

She said the Alma kids “would come down and tie bicycles to the flagpole, just little things like that.”

Parties

But Halloween wasn’t only about kids creating mischief. There were parties of every type and for every age group.

Halloween dances and parties were typically held at various venues in Park County, and school parties, from elementary to high school, were reported in *The Flume*.

The society columns in Leadville and Aspen papers told about the Halloween parties of the well-to-do.

Delia Craddock, a 34-year-old unmarried Leadville woman originally from Ireland, “very pleasantly entertained a large circle of her young acquaintances ... in true Halloween style” on Friday, Oct. 31, 1890.

The party guests pulled taffy, ducked for apples and danced, and they had an “elegant supper” about 11 p.m., the Nov. 3, 1890, *Leadville Daily and Evening Chronicle* said. It gave a list of Craddock’s high-society guests, which curiously does not include her future husband.

According to family history at ancestry.com, Craddock married in 1891 to a man with the last name of Murray and by 1900, at age 44, she was a widow. That year she was listed as Delia Murray in the U.S. census. She was living at the Convent of Mercy, St. Catherine’s Home near City Park in Denver with 41 other women.

An online article titled “Colorado Catholicism – the Archdiocese of Denver 1857-1989” by Colorado historian Thomas J. Noel (archden.org/noel/01000.htm) says the home closed soon after 1900.

And Murray’s trail runs cold at the point.

Myths

Myths of Halloween focus on the ability to tell the future, and especially who one’s future spouse will be, at least according

to a story in the Dec. 19, 1889, *Aspen Daily Chronicle*.

Among the ways to find the identity of one’s future wife or husband, it said, was to place a glass of water containing a small sliver of wood on a table near one’s bed before retiring on Halloween.

“In the night you will dream of falling from a bridge into the river, and of being rescued by your future wife or husband, whom you will see as distinctly as though viewed with waking eyes,” the story said.

Games played at turn-of-the-century Halloween parties also focused on one’s future spouse.

In a game that promised “great amusement,” in an 1897 edition of the monthly *Ladies Home Journal*, two hickory nuts are placed about three inches apart on the hearth in front of an open fire. One represents the girl who placed it there; the other represents the one she wishes to be her future spouse.

If the nuts burn brightly, the two will have a happy marriage. If the nut placed for the man jumps toward the other nut, there will be a proposal before the next new moon.

Trick-or-Treat

According to a story about Halloween history at www.history.com, trick-or-treating originated in the mid-1800s when Americans adopted a custom from Irish immigrants of dressing up in costumes and going from house to house asking for food or money.

However, the ritual of trick-or-treating didn’t become popular until the 1920s, when it was seen as an inexpensive and non-destructive way to make the holiday more community-centered and to get

away from the vandalism and pranks of earlier years.

Halloween today

American society has come a long way from the expectation of a missing garden gate on Halloween night. Estimates vary from \$6 billion to \$8 billion spent annually in the U.S. on Halloween – including candy, pumpkins, decorations and costumes – both for people and their pets. It's the country's second largest commercial holiday, according to www.history.com.

But it's still nowhere near what the U.S. spends on Christmas, the largest commercial holiday. Christmas decorations alone account for \$6 billion in sales annually, and total spending is estimated at \$465 billion, according to the ABC News website.

See next page for images.

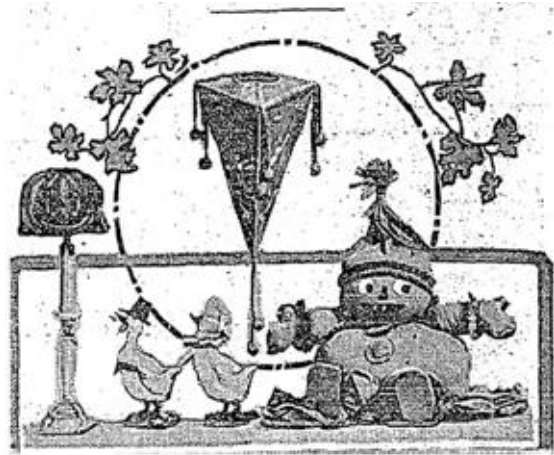


Haunted look

In this undated photo from early Fairplay, the home on Clark Street has the disheveled appearance of those in Alfred Hitchcock movies. (Photo courtesy Park County Local History Archives, source: South Park Historical Foundation)

Deer Creek halloween

Children and teachers at the Deer Creek School in Platte Canyon in the 1930s pose in costumes. (Photo courtesy of Park County Local History Archives)



Popular pumpkin

Originally illustrating the Nov. 1, 1919, Chaffee County Democrat, the drawing still brings to mind the Halloween holiday. (Courtesy of ColoradoHistoricNewspapers.org)

Dutch girls

Perhaps not for Halloween, but these women at a home on Front Street are not dressed in the typical fashion of early 1900s Fairplay. (Photo courtesy Park County Local History Archives, source: Isaac S. Smith family)



Historic black cat

Still an icon of Halloween, this cat originally illustrated a Halloween story in the Nov. 6, 1895, Chaffee County Republican. (Courtesy of ColoradoHistoricNewspapers.org)