

Curious Cbus: Why Isn't Trick-Or-Treating Always On Halloween?

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• PIXABAY

Newcomers to Central Ohio are often confused about why trick-or-treating often does not fall on October 31.

This led one curious resident to ask WOSU's [Curious Cbus](#), "Why is Halloween never on Halloween? This 'Beggars Night' makes no sense. Please help!"

The idea of a Beggars Night – when children go door-to-door for candy on a day before actual Halloween – has a complicated history that goes back a century.

Currently, the model for Beggars Night is for it to occur on Halloween, unless October 31 falls on a Friday, Saturday or Sunday. If that is the case, trick-or-treating is planned for the Thursday prior to Halloween.

That's the case in 2020 as Halloween falls on Saturday, so Beggars Night will be on Thursday, October 29. Despite COVID-19 concerns this year, many are planning ways to [trick-or-treat safely](#) or participate in alternative Halloween activities.

The current formula for Beggars Night was proposed by the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission in 2008, but each municipality decides for themselves whether they want to follow the recommendation or not.

Some are offended that trick-or-treating happens on any night besides Halloween, but in Columbus, celebrating Halloween has been a multi-night affair for decades.

Downtown Halloween Parade

One reason for the Beggars Night tradition can be attributed to the fact that Halloween became the night for parties and parades. Community-organized parties took place on October 31 and trick-or-treating was moved to the night before.

Downtown Columbus hosted one of the biggest Halloween celebrations and attracted tens of thousands of revelers every year.

The event may have been inspired by one special night in 1920, when politics, football, and Halloween merriment converged into a spontaneous

party in the streets. The Ohio State Buckeyes just beat the Chicago Maroons, Republican presidential candidate Warren G. Harding wrapped up his campaign with a rally in Columbus, and the Halloween celebration fell on a warm Saturday night.

“The combination of all resulted in a flood of humanity as such High Street has probably never seen,” the *Columbus Dispatch* reported the next morning.



A children's costume contest from the late 1930s or early 1940s.
CREDIT OHIOMEMORY.ORG

In 1925, the city held its first officially-organized Halloween celebration and parade. As the population of the area grew, so did the size of the downtown gathering. The annual party occurred for almost 30 years before it was shut down for being too raucous.

That's a little ironic, because from the city's point of view, the original purpose of the event was to help control Halloween vandalism across the city. Newspaper accounts from the time indicate that Halloweeners pulled stunts

ranging from the benign soaping of windows to more serious offenses like smashing windows and pouring paint on automobiles.

Originally, police wanted people to congregate downtown to curb destruction in the surrounding neighborhoods. By 1954, however, police officials said they believed the party outlived its purpose. Because the downtown event was no longer preventing vandalism, it didn't make sense to commit so many police resources to the parade, so the whole thing was canceled.

Tricks, Treats and Pennies

Even though the big downtown celebration was no more, Central Ohioans still couldn't confine their merriment and mischief to just one night. By the 1950s, festivities had expanded to three distinct nights: Halloween, Beggars Night, and Penny Night.

Observed on the night before Beggars Night, Penny Night consisted of children going door-to-door asking for pennies rather than candy.

3-Day Halloween Observance In Columbus to Skip Sunday

School and police officials took some liberty with the calendar Thursday to guarantee Halloween fun for the youngsters while preserving Sabbath decorum.

Since Halloween has grown to a three-day observance that, this year, runs through a weekend, Columbus public and parochial school officials and the police Juvenile Bureau set up this schedule and urged all children and their parents to observe it.

Thursday, Oct. 27, will be "Penny Night." Friday, Oct. 28, will be Beggars' Night or "Trick or Treat" Night. Monday, Oct. 31, will be Halloween.

ANOTHER ADVANTAGE, officials pointed out, is in keeping children at home and out of Saturday-Sunday traffic.

Halloween generally will be a "right around home" celebration this year, plans indicate.

Block parties, community programs and special school activities have been designed to keep children in their own neighborhoods.

Junior and senior high committees of the city public schools completed plans for "fun without destruction" programs for younger children at a meeting Wednesday morning. It will include poster contests, skits and talks staged by older youngsters for the younger ones.

THE CITY RECREATION Department announced it will hold Halloween-night parties at its six centers.

The United Council of Church Women of Columbus and Franklin County is sponsoring a plan for children to donate pennies collected on "Penny Night" for

the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

Children will be given UNICEF-marked milk cartons donated by the Columbus Milk Distributors for a penny collection to aid children in less fortunate countries. Mrs. Arthur Milne is general chairman of this project.

No plans have been made for a downtown Halloween-night celebration, city officials said.

Glass of Wine Kept Handy for Gremlins

MADRID, OCT. 20—In the warehouses in which Spanish wine growers store barrels of sherry there is always a glassful of wine with a tiny ladder leaning against it. This is a peace offering to mischievous gremlins who otherwise might harm the valuable stocks.

'Penny Night' Brings Vandalism Reports

Robberies, property destruction and attacks on small children made an ugly pre-Halloween picture on police records Friday morning.

Masked, costumed youngsters, on the streets for "Penny Night" activities were accosted and robbed of their small penny collections by older boys and men, police reported.

Vandals ran up several hundred dollars' damage in broken home, business and auto windows, dented and damaged autos, broken porch railings and fences.

In at least two instances, Halloweeners stole money from places they entered, police said.

cases, threatened or knocked to the ground, reports showed.

MARY YATES, 23, of 900 Franklin Av. said her purse containing \$18 disappeared with the visit of a group of Halloweeners, police said. They said two penny-begging youths snatched a dollar from the counter of a W. Broad St grill, and four others stole a jacket from an auto in N. 4th St.

Cement blocks, bottles and rocks smashed through windows of a Big Bear Store on E. Whittier St. the State Fair Grill on E. 11th Av, and a half-dozen residences.

Newspaper headlines about Penny Night festivities and vandalism, 1955 and 1956.

Although this would sometimes occur as a straightforward three-day affair, the city would choose to mess with the calendar when they saw fit. In 1955, for example, school and police leaders advised communities to observe Penny Night on Thursday, Oct. 27, Beggars Night on Friday, Oct. 28, and Halloween on Monday, Oct. 31.

The following year, officials urged the community to cut the fun down to just two nights – and vandalism was once again to blame. “It was getting out of hand and all the ‘nights’ were stretching into a week,” said police juvenile chief Lt. Philip Momberg in a 1956 *Dispatch* article.

Soon after that, the Penny Night tradition faded away.

The Modern Era Of Halloween Confusion

For the next several decades, Beggars Night continued in much of Central Ohio with each individual city or town deciding for themselves when to observe trick-or-treating.

To get the whole region on the same page and let communities and law enforcement coordinate their efforts, MORPC proposed a Beggars Night algorithm in the early 1990s. Their plan was for Beggars Night to be the day before Halloween unless that night is a Friday, Saturday or Sunday. In those cases, trick-or-treating would be on the Thursday before.

Another motivation for MORPC’s plan was football. With high school games on Fridays and college games on Saturdays, this plan prevents families from having to choose between candy and pigskin.

Though not every community adhered to the plan, the policy stood until 2005, when a new MORPC recommendation suggested that Halloween be

celebrated on actual Halloween. This plan proved to be too simple, though: In 2008, Halloween fell on a Friday, conflicting once again with football and causing some towns to move their Halloween observance date.

The next year, MORPC switched back to an algorithm where trick-or-treating would be held on Halloween except when that day fell on a Friday or the weekend. That's the schedule that remains in place today.