

CELTIC NEW YEAR TRADITIONS

- The Irish New Year festival is known as Samhain (pronounced sow-en) which means the end of summer and is actually celebrated on October 31st. This day was considered of great danger for it was when the spirits of the dead returned to earth. Our world and the Otherworld came together on the night between the old and new years. Not all of these spirits were friendly, so Celts carved the images of spirit-guardians onto turnips. They set these jack o'lanterns by their doors to keep out unwelcome visitors from the Otherworld.
- The lighter side to the Celtic New Year's rituals was when the young people would put on strange disguises and roam around pretending to be the returning dead or spirits from the Otherworld. Boys and girls would put on each other's clothes, and would engage in boisterous behavior and play tricks on their elders. Many donned costumes so that the King of the Dead could not recognize them and force them to follow him back into his dark realm.
- The Celtic priests would go into the woods on New Year's Eve to gather bunches of mistletoe which they handed out to people to protect them from harm. The Irish girls would go to bed with the sprigs of mistletoe or holly and ivy leaves under their pillows so they would go to bed dreaming of their future husbands.
- Villagers gathered the best of the autumn harvest and slaughtered cattle for a feast. The focus of each village's festivities was a great bonfire. Villagers threw the bones of the slaughtered cattle into the flames. (Our word bonfire comes from these "bone fires.") With the great bonfire roaring, the villagers extinguished all other fires. Each family then solemnly lit their hearth from the one great common flame, bonding all families of the village together.

■ In the west, the direction of the wind blowing at the New Year would indicate the trend of politics in the coming year. If it blew from the west, it would flourish. If it blew from the east, the English would have the upper hand.

■ If you ate a large supper on New Year's Eve, it meant you would have plenty of food in the coming year. One custom was to take a large loaf of bread or cake outside the house and hammer it against the closed doors and windows. This was done so as to drive away any misfortune and let happiness in.

Whenever and wherever celebrated, the new year is a time to honor our ancestors, to look back and reflect to see where we have been and then to look ahead and consider the path we are walking.

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Bliain nua fe mhaise dhuit!



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See: www.fathertimes.net/traditions.htm

www.chebucto.ns.ca/Heritage/FSCNS/Scots_NS/Clans/Henderson/General/Celtic_NY.html