A door creaks. A heart thumps hard, its fear-stricken owner cowering deep in the shadows. A glint of something sharp and white twinkles in the moonlight. Hairs stand on end. A blood-curdling cry shatters the stillness of the night.

Don’t despair (or maybe you should). The sounds, images, and frights of horror and Halloween are not breathing stealthily at your neck. They’re on your stamps and covers.

Autumn is almost here and as the air cools and leaves begin to change, many people look forward to Halloween, a time of being deliciously scared and having spooky good times. It’s a season for watching horror movies, reading a favorite ghost story, and planning Halloween decorations and chilling costumes.

It’s also a good time to get out your stamp collection, brave a few goose bumps, and explore the topic of horror. There is much frightful philately that can be collected on stamps, such as horror literature and films, spooky folklore, and, of course, Halloween.

Research is essential, as it is in any topical collection. Not all potential stamps in this topic are overtly horror, so you may have to dig to find connections to the topic. If you want to collect horror literature on stamps, you would have to determine which authors are considered horror writers, and you might want to find mainstream writers who have written some horror. Bram Stoker and Edgar Allan Poe are in the former group, while Charles Dickens and William Shakespeare fit in the latter.

Your collection could include stamps, covers, and postal stationery. Covers provide all sorts of opportunities for creative cachets and stamp combinations. For instance, adding a raven stamp to a first-day cover of a Poe stamp makes a great combination.

The vampires, demons, ghosts, and monsters lie hidden and dormant in your collection of philately until you bring them alive (if you dare!).

**Fancy Cancels**

Even before we talk about horror and Halloween on modern stamps, we can see evidence of the topic from the early days of postage. When the first United States stamps were issued in 1847, it became necessary to cancel them so they could not be used again. In the early days of stamp-canceling, the Post Office Department did not supply canceling devices to smaller post offices. The postmasters of these small offices had to buy their own devices, but many postmasters made their own cancellers by carving a design into a cork or piece of wood. These were known as fancy cancels and were prevalent in the 1860s.

Many of these fancy cancels depicted spooky subjects. A picture of a devil was used in New York City in 1861 and a devil’s mask in 1869. Various depictions of skulls were used in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1861, and in Newark, New Jersey, from 1861 to 1869. Postmasters in St. Paul, Minnesota, and Waterbury, Connecticut, went a little further by adding crossbones to the skull.

Following a Halloween theme, many post offices used fancy cancels showing jack-o’-lanterns [Figure 1], including

Figure 1. Fancy cancels on early U.S. stamps depicting jack-o’-lanterns. Images courtesy of Gerald Cross.
Ludlow, Vermont; Corry, Pennsylvania; Lincoln, Illinois; Providence; and Philadelphia. Boston used a cancel showing bats in 1861, and various cities had designs featuring black cats. Shown are a few examples of these fancy cancels. They are an interesting — but pricey — part of a horror topical collection.

**Classic Horror Literature**

The roots of English-language horror reach back more than a thousand years to *Beowulf*, the ancient tale of monsters. The following several centuries saw the publication of stories that can be considered horror but, as the people of those times were generally superstitious, those stories were believed to be true.

The 18th century saw the birth of modern horror. This was the Age of Reason, and belief in the supernatural was waning. Horror writing was now viewed as entertainment, not something to be believed.

What may be the first modern horror story is the ghostly *The Castle of Otranto*, a novella by Englishman Horace Walpole, which was published in 1764. The publication of this novella ushered in the era of Gothic fiction, which was characterized by the grotesque, the mysterious, and the desolate. Gothic novels were the bestsellers of their day, yet they were disparaged by critics (modern horror writers insist that trend continues to this day).

The most widely read of all Gothic novelists was Ann Radcliffe. Her books, such as *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), were full of weird events that were explained plausibly, though in a contrived way, at the end. The Gothic novels of this era tended to titillate readers with vague references to dastardly deeds rather than showing anything gory happening.

Matthew Lewis’ *The Monk* (1796) changed the convention to that date for Gothic fiction in that he went into lurid detail. *The Monk* caused a scandal and was banned, with later editions censored.

On Lewis’ last visit to Europe before his death, he met with a group of English writers and exchanged ghost stories with them. One of the members of the group was Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, and one of the topics of discussion was her work-in-progress, *Frankenstein* (1818), which would become one of the most famous and influential of Gothic novels. However, around the time *Frankenstein* appeared, the Gothic novel was falling out of fashion.

The book many consider to be the best horror novel of all appeared in 1897: *Dracula*. It was written by Irish writer Bram Stoker. He penned other horror novels, but none as good as his masterpiece.

On October 1, 1997, in celebration of the centenary of the publication of *Dracula* issued by Ireland in 1997, Scott 1089a.

Ireland honored Stoker on the centenary of his death by issuing a se-tenant pair of 55-cent stamps on April 19, 2012, with Stoker depicted on one stamp and Dracula on the other [Figure 3]. There also was a souvenir sheet picturing the front of a cinema with the two stamps acting as movie posters. Other countries also honored Stoker and Dracula on stamps.

In 1997, Canada issued a se-tenant block of four called the Supernatural [Figure 4], showing a vampire, a werewolf, a ghost, and a goblin (Scott 1665–1668). This set was issued to begin Stamp Collecting Month and came in a souvenir folder.
that could be made into a pop-up haunted house. The back of the official first-day cover has glow-in-the-dark illustrations of Halloween figures, such as a skeleton and a jack-o’-lantern. The character of Count Dracula was inspired by Vlad III of Romania, also known as Vlad the Impaler. He ruled in the 15th century and was known for impaling his enemies. The name “Dracula” comes from the diminutive form of the Romanian word for “dragon” as his father, Vlad II, also known as Dracul, was a member of the Order of the Dragon. In modern Romanian, “drac” is the word for “devil.” Romania has issued several stamps in honor of Vlad III, including Scott numbers 1281 and C71 in 1959; 2614 in 1976; and 4157–4158 in 1997.

In the United States, fiction wasn’t published until the late 18th century. The first American author to achieve fame was Washington Irving. One of his most well-known macabre stories was “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” (1820). In this tale, Ichabod Crane is pursued by the Headless Horseman. The Horseman has a jack-o’-lantern atop his shoulders, which is the beginning of the carved pumpkin’s connection to Halloween.

The United States honored Irving on a 1-cent stamp in the Famous Americans series (Scott 859) issued in 1940, in Tarrytown, New York. Irving lived in Tarrytown, which is the location of Sleepy Hollow.

“The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” was commemorated on a 10-cent U.S. stamp issued in 1974, in North Tarrytown, New York [Figure 5]. The stamp was issued in time to be used on Halloween greeting cards.

Edgar Allan Poe grew up while Irving was publishing his best work. Perhaps the most important horror writer in history, Poe had a troubled life, which he described himself as “insane, with long intervals of horrible sanity.” Poe began writing poetry and later moved into prose. Poe rarely used the supernatural in his tales of terror, preferring to produce his frights by depictions of madness and murder. He wrote many well-known weird tales, including “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839), “The Masque of the Red Death” (1842), “The Pit and the Pendulum” (1842), and “The Cask of Amontillado” (1846). Poe also is considered the father of the detective story, as evidenced by his mysteries “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1841) and “The Gold-Bug” (1843), among others. His most famous poem is “The Raven” (1845).

The United States honored Poe on two stamps. A 3-cent Famous Americans-style stamp (Scott 986) was issued October 7, 1949, the centennial of his death. A 42-cent stamp was issued in 2009 marking the bicentennial of his birth [Figure 6]. The first-day city for both was Richmond, Virginia, where Poe lived.

A contemporary of Poe was Nathaniel Hawthorne, who wrote Gothic and weird fiction. Hawthorne’s work tended more toward the moralistic and abstract, not the concrete terror that characterized Poe’s work. Hawthorne’s stories include “Young Goodman Brown” (1835), about devil-worshippers; “Rappaccini’s Daughter” (1844), a mad-scientist tale about poisonous plants; and “Ethan Brand” (1851), a Gothic tale of the search for the “unpardonable sin.” His novels The House of the Seven Gables (1851) and The Marble Faun (1860) contain hints of the supernatural.

Hawthorne was the subject of a U.S. stamp in the Literary Arts series. The 20-cent stamp (Scott 2047) was issued July 8, 1983, in Salem, Massachusetts, both his birthplace and the setting of many of his works.

Ghost stories flourished in the second half of the 19th century. It was during this time that Robert Louis Stevenson, who wrote some macabre fiction as a sideline, published The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1886). Unfortunately,
the story is now so familiar that it cannot be read as the suspense novel it was intended to be, where it is not revealed until the last few pages of the book that Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde are the same person.

Great Britain issued a 37-pence stamp, in 1997, picturing Jekyll and Hyde [Figure 7]. It was part of the Tales of Terror series also showing Dracula, Frankenstein, and the Hound of the Baskervilles (Scott 1754–1757).

The Tales of Terror stamps have an unusual feature. They are overprinted with phosphor designs that can be seen only under shortwave ultraviolet light. For example, when the stamp featuring Dracula is viewed under ultraviolet light, his teeth appear as fangs and the full moon behind the haunted house at the lower right shines brightly.

Other mainstream classic authors have written a few works with supernatural elements, including English author Charles Dickens. He penned one of the most famous classic ghost stories of all time, “A Christmas Carol” (1843). The novella was an instant success, both popularly and critically. Altogether, Dickens wrote about 20 ghost stories and was a proponent of the genre. He edited Household Words, later retitled All the Year Round, from 1850 until 1870, and he encouraged contributors to write ghost stories for the Christmas issues.

Many stamps have been produced celebrating Dickens. Among them is a Gibraltar set and souvenir sheet issued in 2012. The £2 single stamp shows Dickens and the cover and an illustration from A Christmas Carol [Figure 8].

There are many classic works that mention Halloween, including some of William Shakespeare’s plays, such as Henry IV, Part 1, Two Gentlemen of Verona, and Richard II. A multitude of countries have issued stamps depicting Shakespeare, and these stamps, especially if they show the plays mentioned, would make excellent additions to a horror or Halloween topical collection.

Robert Burns and Sir Walter Scott also mentioned Halloween in some of their works. Burns wrote a poem titled “Halloween” in 1795, and Scott’s poem “The Young Tamlane” (1802) is about Halloween and supernatural entities, especially fairies. There are a number of stamps featuring Robert Burns and Sir Walter Scott.

True Ghost Stories

Along with horror fiction, there also is a genre of literature that consists of purportedly true ghost stories. These tales all have the same theme: something uncanny that really happened. Many have a basis in an actual tragic happening or began as a legend that developed over time. Unlike horror fiction, there is no real author of these stories. Every country and culture has its true ghost stories, with the roots going back decades or even centuries.

On October 1, 1991, Canada issued a se-tenant block of four 40-cent stamps that was the second set in the Canadian Folklore series [Figure 9]. One of these depicted the Witched Canoe, which would fly through the air courtesy of the devil if the proper incantations were spoken. A looming danger

**STAMP LIBRARY RESOURCES**

Finding links to stamps for horror and Halloween and other topics within the performing arts and pop culture might be assisted by this book found in the American Philatelic Research Library: Stamps and Stamp Collecting in Popular Culture (2015), by Howard Summers, published by Howcom Services, Hertfordshire, United Kingdom. The 401-page book with bibliography and indexes includes such chapters as Television, Film, Radio, Poetry, Games, and Books.

HTTP://CATALOG.STAMPLIBRARY.ORG

**Figure 7.** Commemorative stamp picturing Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, from the novel by Robert Louis Stevenson, issued by Great Britain on May 13, 1997, Scott 1756.

**Figure 8.** Gibraltar stamp issued in 2012 featuring Charles Dickens and the cover of and an illustration from A Christmas Carol, Scott 1350.

**Figure 9.** Canadian Folklore commemorative stamps issued by Canada on October 1, 1991. These depict, clockwise from upper left, the legends of the Witched Canoe, the Orphan Boy, the Warm Wind Chinook, and the Buried Treasure of Nova Scotia, Scott 1334–1337.
was that if during the trip the canoe touched a cross or anyone spoke the name of God, the souls of the riders would go to Satan. Another stamp featured the Nova Scotia legend of pirates burying treasure with the body of a murdered seaman on top so his ghost would guard the treasure.

Canada just released its third group of five stamps in as many years in its Haunted Canada series that presents “true” ghost stories [Figure 10]. For each set, Canada Post produced a moisture-activated souvenir sheet of five and a self-adhesive booklet of 10. These are permanent stamps (equivalent to forever stamps in the United States), good for first-class postage within Canada. The stamps are printed in six colors with a holographic foil finish, which gives them a special ghostly effect [Figure 11]. A set of picture postal cards also was issued. These were good for mailing to any destination worldwide.

The most recent set, issued September 8 this year, features ghosts in a theater, a church, island marshes, a waterfall, and an old logging camp. Featured are the ghosts of Elgin and Winter Garden Theatre Center of Toronto; the Phantom Ringers of the Kirk of James, Prince Edward Island; The Hag of Bell Island, Newfoundland-Labrador; The Lady in White,
Quebec; and the Dungarvon Whooper, New Brunswick.

The first set, issued — appropriately on Friday the 13th — in June 2014, illustrates Alberta’s Ghost Bride; Saskatchewan’s St. Louis Ghost Train; ghost stories from Fort George, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario [Figure 12] and Château Frontenac in Quebec; and the phantom ship from Prince Edward Island.

The 2015 set shows the Headless Brakeman from Gastown in Vancouver, British Columbia; the ghost of Marie-Joseph Corriveau from Levis, Quebec; and ghost stories from Fort Garry in Manitoba, Halifax Citadel in Nova Scotia, and The Caribou Hotel in Carcross, Yukon.

On the other side of the Pacific, Japan issued an 80-yen stamp in 2004 [Figure 13] to honor the occasion of the centenary of the death of Patrick Lafcadio Hearn, a noted Irish writer and Japanese scholar. Hearn compiled *Kwaidan*, a volume of Japanese ghost stories. This was unusual because when Japan issues a stamp honoring an individual, the person is usually Japanese. However, Hearn did become a Japanese citizen after moving to Japan, and he took the name Koizumi Yakumo which is shown on the bottom of the stamp. The stamp was part of a set of three in the Cultural Pioneers series; the others showed sculptor Isamu Noguchi, an American with Japanese heritage, and composer Koga Masao.

**Classic Horror Movies**

Horror movies go back to almost the beginnings of cinema. Most early scary films were based on classic horror novels. However, one of the first classic silent horror films — and what many consider to be the first true horror film — was an original story: *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. This German expressionist film was directed by Robert Wiene and released in 1920. The film tells of the mysterious Dr. Caligari and a somnambulist who makes deadly predictions. The film is famous for its surreal sets and use of shadows.

Another German film, *Nosferatu*, is a vampire movie that was directed by F.W. Murnau and released in 1922. *Nosferatu* was noted for hideous make-up and special effects, which are still frightening to jaded modern audiences.

In the United States, Universal Studios was the pioneer in horror films. Lon Chaney (the elder) starred in the silent films *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1923), directed by Wallace Worsley, and *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925), directed by Chaney and Rupert Julian. *The Phantom* achieved a remarkable level in make-up and was rumored at the time to be too scary to be released.

Among the first horror movies of the sound era is *Dracula*, a Universal Studios film made in 1930, directed by Tod Browning and starring Bela Lugosi in an iconic role. The movie was very successful, but some considered that success a fluke, that there was really not much interest in horror movies. Lugosi’s appearance, diction, and performance cast the mold for future vampires in films.

The success of *Dracula* led Universal to produce *Frankenstein* (1931), directed by James Whale and starring Boris Karloff as the Monster. Jack Pierce produced eye-popping make-up for the Monster, and Karloff said that “it was Jack Pierce who really created the Frankenstein monster. I was merely the animation in the costume.” Also contributing to the success of the film was electrician Kenneth Strickfaden, who created a memorable lab set. The film was a critical and popular hit. With the success of these two films, the horror genre was on its way. Universal continued to produce horror movies,
Other Universal horror classics are *The Mummy* (1932), directed by Karl Freund and starring Boris Karloff, and *The Wolf Man* (1941), directed by George Waggner, with Lon Chaney Jr., as the Wolf Man. Five of these Universal movies and their monsters were honored on the U.S. Classic Movie Monsters stamps [Figure 14]. The 32-cent stamps were issued in 1997 in Universal City, California, in a pane of 20. The top border of the pane contains photographs of the four actors who portrayed the monsters: Bela Lugosi, Lon Chaney, Lon Chaney Jr., and Boris Karloff. An interesting design feature of these stamps are hidden images, such as three flying bats on the Dracula stamp, which are viewable through a special Stamp Decoder [Figure 15] that was sold by the United States Postal Service.

The makeup Pierce used for the Monster in *Frankenstein* was depicted in the American Filmmaking: Behind the Scenes pane of 10 37-cent stamps [Figure 16] issued in 2003, in Beverly Hills, California, the headquarters of the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences.

In England in the late 1950s, Hammer Films started producing its own take on classic horror movies. The studio’s business model was to produce the films fast and cheap while maintaining quality. It filmed in color and did not shy away from gore, giving audiences their first taste of Technicolor blood. *The Curse of Frankenstein* was released in 1957 and starred Peter Cushing as Dr. Frankenstein and Christopher Lee as the Monster. The film was an immedi-
ate hit in Britain and did equally as well when distributed in the United States. This was followed by *Dracula* in 1958, with Christopher Lee as the vampire and Peter Cushing as Van Helsing. Lee and Cushing returned in *The Mummy* in 1959. The Hammer horror films were parodied in the British Carry On series of comedies with the film *Carry On Screaming* (1966), featuring send-ups of *The Curse of Frankenstein*, *The Mummy*, *The Two Faces of Dr. Jekyll*, and others. Great Britain issued a set of stamps in various denominations in 2008 honoring Hammer Horror and Carry On films [Figure 17]. These stamps depict movie posters for *The Curse of Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, *The Mummy*, *Carry On Screaming*, and two other Carry On movies.

Figure 17. Great Britain in 2008 honored Hammer Horror and Carry On movies with six stamps, including *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957), which introduced the acting team of Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee, Scott 2584. Two more Cushing and Lee films honored were *Dracula* (1958), Scott 2582; and *The Mummy* (1959), Scott 2586. A horror-parody, the comedy *Carry On Screaming* (1966), also is in the set, Scott 2585.

Though he is not considered a horror director, Alfred Hitchcock [Figure 18] made one of the most famous horror movies of all time with *Psycho* (1960). Hitchcock made this movie, in part, to surprise audiences who expected a certain type of picture from him. The movie starred Anthony Perkins and Janet Leigh, and was based on a book of the same

Figure 18. Some fun opportunities for cachetmakers opened up in 1998 when the U.S. Postal Service made movie director Alfred Hitchcock one of its Legends of Hollywood, Scott 3226. One cover shows scenes from *Psycho*, *North by Northwest*, and *The Birds*. Four more show scenes from *Psycho*, which starred Anthony Perkins and Janet Leigh.
name by Robert Bloch. In the best tradition of classic horror movies, it was made quickly and on a small budget, but the impact of this film was huge, and it ushered in the era of the modern horror film. Instead of gothic characters in a gothic setting, everyday people appear in a real estate office, a used-car lot, a motel. The U.S. issued a 32-cent stamp in 1998 in the Hollywood Legends series to honor Hitchcock. Shown are first-day covers of the Hitchcock stamp with various cachets depicting scenes from *Psycho*.

**Folklore and Customs**

Not all spooky folklore and customs around the world have to do with Halloween. In Italy, there is the tradition, dating back to the 16th century, of the Christmas witch, called La Befana. The witch delivers gifts to children on Epiphany Eve (January 5). She fills their stockings with candy and gifts if they had been good, and with lumps of coal (or candy coal) if they had not. It is said the witch then sweeps the floor, symbolically sweeping away the problems of the year. La Befana is typically depicted as a witch dressed in tatters and covered with soot because she enters homes through the chimney. She carries on her flying broom a bag or hamper with loot for the *bambini*. Italy doesn’t appear to have issued a stamp honoring Le Befana, but the witch is shown on a 48-cent stamp (Scott 1453) issued by Canada in 1992, as part of a Christmas set also featuring Jõuluvana (Estonian Santa Claus) and Weihnachtsmann (German Santa).

A witch figures in a holiday tradition in Finland. Just before Easter, children dress up as witches, with costumes usually consisting of colorful old clothes, head scarves, and an apron, and with freckles painted on their faces. Children go door-to-door and, at each house, they wave willow twigs decorated with feathers and crepe paper as blessings to drive away evil spirits. Children give the householder one of the twigs, and hold out their copper pots to receive treats, such as a chocolate egg or a coin. In folk art, the witches are usually portrayed as scarf-clad women riding brooms, accompanied by a black cat and a copper coffee pot.

Finland issued a self-adhesive 60-cent stamp [Figure 19], in 2002, that portrays such a witch and a self-adhesive, free-form 65-cent stamp (Scott 1230), in 2005, illustrating a costumed child carrying a bunch of willow twigs.

On December 31, many countries observe Old Year’s Night. This holiday is celebrated in Tristan da Cunha with Okalolies, a group of revelers wearing bizarre costumes, going around the village in the afternoon scaring dogs and children. The party continues to the Chief Islander’s house, where the Okalolies sometimes unmask and reveal their identities. In 2008, Tristan da Cunha issued a set of stamps (Scott 878–881) in various denominations depicting Island Traditions. The £1.60 stamp features Old Year’s Night, with Okalolies in frightening costumes [Figure 20].

There are many stories around the world of legendary creatures. Some of these legends are global, such as large, hairy humanoid creatures, variously called Bigfoot, Sasquatch, and Abominable Snowman. Others, like the Loch Ness Monster of Scotland, are local.

The first of the Canadian Folklore series — Legendary Creatures — is a se-tenant block of four 39-cent stamps [Figure 21] issued in 1990 in conjunction with Stamp Collecting Month. The stamps depict three legendary creatures and one out of horror literature and movies: Sasquatch, the sea monster Kraken, Ogopogo, and a werewolf. The Ogopogo is a lake monster said to inhabit Okanagan Lake in British Columbia, Canada.

*Dias de los Muertos*, or Days of the Dead, is a holiday celebrated mainly in Mexico and Central America, usually from October 31 to November 2, though there are local variations. During these days, the dead are honored. Customs include cemetery visits, where the gravesites are cleaned, offerings are set out, and picnics may be held in honor of the dead. Another tradition is the setting up an elaborate memorial altar, an “ofrenda,” in the home.

Among the traditional decorations are skeletons, skulls (including small skulls made of decorated spun sugar), and a yellow-orange flower known as “zempaschuitl.”

Beginning in 2009, Mexico issued stamps depicting these
customs [Figure 22]. The stamps show various traditions associated with these celebrations of the dead, including skulls, skeletons, ofrenda, and zempaschuitl. A large 15-peso imperforate stamp issued on October 22, 2013, shows a cemetery visit scene.

Halloween

The origins of Halloween go back about a thousand years, and it became a distinct holiday in the 16th century in the British isles. Irish, Scottish, and English immigrants brought Halloween to the United States in the mid-19th century, including such customs as various fortune-telling games, bonfires, mischief, cabbage as a Halloween food and an item for pranks, and ghost or devil costumes.

Because Halloween coincided with the harvest, Americans began to use scarecrows as Halloween decorations and replaced cabbage with corn and apples. Corn-husking was often a part of Halloween parties, and party fare included apples and apple juice.

The jack-o’-lantern has its origin in the Irish legend of Stingy Jack, a drunkard who made a deal with the devil and then tricked the devil into agreeing not to take him to hell. However, because of this deal, he was also denied entrance to heaven. Therefore, he was condemned to walk the earth forever looking for a resting place, carrying a lantern made from a hollowed-out, carved turnip. Thus, he was known as Jack of the Lantern. Americans began to use pumpkins instead of turnips, and the most famous Halloween icon was born.

However, the pumpkin jack-o’-lantern did not originate as a Halloween decoration. Grinning faces were carved into pumpkins decades before the arrival of Halloween in the United States. In Washington Irving’s story “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,” published in 1820, Ichabod Crane’s head was replaced by a carved pumpkin, and there was no mention of Halloween in the story.

John Greenleaf Whittier’s 1850 poem “The Pumpkin”
linked a jack-o’-lantern to another fall holiday, Thanksgiving. He wrote of the pumpkin: “When wild, ugly faces we carved in its skin, Glaring out through the dark with a candle within!” Traditionally, fairy stories were told by the light of the jack-o’-lantern.

One of the first mentions of carved, lighted pumpkins as Halloween decorations was in an 1898 pamphlet titled Hallowe’en: How to Celebrate It, written by Martha Russell Orne. She also suggested making “bogies.” These were hollowed-out pumpkins with demon-visaged human faces carved into them and lit with a candle inside. They were placed in darkened rooms where party-goers may come upon them unawares.

Halloween stamps issued by several countries feature jack-o’-lanterns.

France [Figure 23] issued a 3-franc/46-cent jack-o’-lantern stamp in a souvenir sheet of five on October 20, 2001. The sheet includes four labels with free-form-perforated Halloween symbols. This was followed by a 50-cent stamp issued in 2004, and a non-denominated (60-cent) booklet stamp in 2012.

Austria issued a 55-cent stamp, in 2005, showing a jack-o’-lantern with a witch flying in the background (Scott 2021), and in 2013 a souvenir sheet of four 62-cent stamps depicting a large, elaborate Halloween scene with various symbols of the season surrounding a haunted house (Scott 2475).

Belgium released a semipostal (15+3) (Scott B1106), in 1992, depicting the legend of Gustine Maca and the witches, as part of a Folk Legends trio of stamps. A booklet of two 44-cent Halloween stamps (Scott 2043–2044) came out in 2004. One stamp shows a witch, bats, and a black cat, and the other has a jack-o’-lantern and bats.

The U.S. Postal Service on September 29, 2016 will issue a block of four self-adhesive smiling jack-o’-lantern commemorative forever stamps in the Minneapolis suburb of

Anyone interested in connecting with others interested in horror and Halloween might consider joining the American Topical Association, a member affiliate of the APS (#AF0177), which has a study unit called Halloween Spooktacular Stamps ‘n’ Stuff. The ATA’s goal is to promote topical collecting, encourage thematic research, and connect members with similar interests. The ATA has a bimonthly journal, Topical Time, and a website, www.americantopicalassn.org. Dues are $30, $40 outside U.S., and $25 electronic. Contact: Vera Felts, Box 8, Carterville, IL 62918-0008; e-mail to americantopical@msn.com. In addition, the Halloween study group ($15 a year U.S.) has its own quarterly.

STAMPS.ORG/SPECIALTY-SOCIETIES
Anoka, Minnesota [Figure 24]. Paul Montanari designed and carved the pumpkins under the art direction of Derry Noyes, of Washington, D.C. Sally Andersen-Bruce photographed the lit jack-o’-lanterns shown on the stamps.

A consultant on the stamps was Lisa Morton, president of the Horror Writers Association and author of Trick or Treat: A History of Halloween and other works on Halloween. When asked why all the jack-o’-lanterns are smiling and there are no scary ones, Morton said, “These stamps need to appeal to as wide a consumer base as possible. They were very conscious of the possibility that anything spooky could be perceived as occult or diabolic, which might be offensive to some groups.”

Anoka was chosen for the first-day city because it is the Halloween Capital of the World. It is believed to be the first city in the United States to host a Halloween parade, which marched down Main Street in 1920. The evening parade was part of a week-long celebration, including a pumpkin bake-off, a house-decorating contest, a bonfire, and other activities. The festival has been held every year since (except for 1942 and 1943 because of World War II), and has grown to include more events and a daytime parade, in addition to the evening march. A recent parade had more than 200 floats, bands, dignitaries, and 3,000 costumed children.

The U.S. Postal Service notes that these are the first Halloween-themed stamps issued by the U.S. However, that is not quite accurate. The “Legend of Sleepy Hollow” stamp (Scott 1548) of 1974 [Figure 25] was actually the first Halloween issue. The New York Times stamp column of September 15, 1974, noted that the stamps would be distributed nationwide in time for use on Halloween cards, and that the Postal Service “says that large numbers of Halloween cards are delivered every year.” That stamp came out on October 10, just in time for Halloween and depicts a scene suitable for the holiday.

The U.S. Postal Service will issue a se-tenant block of four jack-o’-lantern stamps September 29, 2016 in Anoka, Minnesota, which bills itself as the Halloween Capital of the World. Shown here is the publicity image for the block of stamps.

Figure 24. The U.S. Postal Service will issue a se-tenant block of four jack-o’-lantern stamps September 29, 2016 in Anoka, Minnesota, which bills itself as the Halloween Capital of the World. Shown here is the publicity image for the block of stamps.

Figure 25. The U.S. 10-cent Legend of Sleepy Hollow stamp, Scott 1548.

The Halloween season is the perfect time to start your own topical collection of horror and Halloween on stamps, and to place a haunted stamp album on your shelf.

Resources

The Author
Ron Breznay is a long-time stamp collector from Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. He has a worldwide collection but semi-specializes in United States, Canada, and Israel (tab singles), and is developing a horror topical collection. He is a member of various philatelic societies and the Horror Writers Association.