

Alexandria Times

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Halloween in Alexandria

The celebration of Halloween had a slow start in the American colonies, especially in New England, where its emphasis on superstition and the otherworld clashed with the rigid Protestant belief systems practiced there. Halloween found a better reception in Maryland in southern colonies, which were less based in Protestant religious practices.

While some areas combined the beliefs and customs of various European groups and Indigenous Peoples, Alexandria's first mention of Halloween in a local newspaper dates to 1823, well after Alexandria's founding. The next article about the holiday was published after the Civil War. It seems that Halloween became a form of a harvest festival, with New England celebrating Thanksgiving and southern colonies celebrating Halloween before the Civil War. The mass immigration in the second half of the 19th century – especially those fleeing the Irish Potato Famine – helped to create the national cel-



PHOTO/VISIT ALEXANDRIA

A scene in the 2000 sci-fi thriller/horror movie 'Hollow Man' was filmed in Alexandria.

bration of Halloween that we know today.

While Alexandria has long had its own ghost stories, there was a push in the late 1800s to mold the holiday into one about community and neighborly get-togethers instead of superstitions and religious overtones. In 1976, the Alexandria Bicentennial Youth Commission, staffed by Alexandria secondary school students, collected ghost stories from local residents.

Their efforts led to the

publication of "Alexandria Ghosts," a 20-page booklet of six ghost stories, edited by Eric Segal. The most famous story in the booklet is "The Teller of Tales and the Devil-Bat of Market Square." Segal's version was relayed to him by Louie Robert, who owned a frame shop in Old Town.

Eagle-eyed residents and visitors might notice that one of the benches on the porch of the Alexandria Visitor Center is a gift from the cast and crew of the 2000 sci-fi thriller/

horror movie "Hollow Man" starring Kevin Bacon and Elisabeth Shue. The crew shot a particularly creepy swimming pool scene at 311 South St. Asaph Street.

Whether you celebrate Halloween by reading ghost stories, with friends and family, or watching scary movies, we hope you have a wonderful Halloween!

Out of the Attic is provided by the Office of Historic Alexandria.