

Celebrating the Season's End: Samhain

What is Samhain?

Samhain is a wonderful Neopagan holiday that honors the traditional Celtic festivals at the end of the harvest cycle, the Catholic All Saints & All Souls Day, the Festival of the Dead and Halloween. Roll all these minor holidays into one and you've got a modern interpretation of the Samhain celebration. The actual celebration date varies – with Celtic reconstructionists celebrating on the first frost. Typically, Neopagans celebrate beginning the night of October 31 and into the next day.



Why should we celebrate Samhain?

This is a time of the year when Celts believed that the lines between the living and the dead were blurred. Other cultures saw this as an opportunity to honor our ancestors and loved ones who have passed away. Whatever your spiritual inclinations, Samhain is an opportunity to acknowledge and teach about death as a part of the life cycle.

In our culture death is a topic that is taboo – especially for children. By blanketing death rituals and mourning in a shroud of mystery we only create fear of the inevitable – not that the topic of death isn't to be approached with awe and respect, but a fact of life is that every living thing will die.

This is also a great opportunity to teach younger generations, children and friends, about the people we remember having passed on – what those people taught us, how their stories are interwoven in our own and what of their lives should be preserved in our histories.

Spiritual families have the benefit of tapping into their specific traditions for advice, solace and rituals
October 31 2009

on how to deal with these heavy topics.

Secular families have the opportunity to create new rules and rituals to hold fast to on these lesser holiday occasions. Because our family is secular – living within a culture dominated by Christian traditions, I appreciate the opportunities that Neopaganism provides to interject the spirituality, ideas, art, customs and history that peoples from all over the world – ancient and modern bring to the table. In celebrating this diversity we also teach a respect and thirst for an experience outside our own.

What can you do for Samhain? How can you

begin?

The easiest way to begin would be to tell stories to your family and friends about loved ones passed. Storytelling can be awkward at first, but don't be dissuaded by faulty memory or a failing vocabulary. If your stories bring up strong emotions – laughter or tears, don't repress them, rather honor them as they are part of you. Create an environment where you feel



safe telling your stories. Ask other family members and friends to tell you about their departed loved ones – ask who they were and why they were important people. Maybe you’ll talk about a family pet that died instead – that’s okay.

Talking about the dead is an effective way to come to terms with the loss. Don’t be afraid to honor your



memories or the feelings they dredge up. If you are angry, be angry. If you are sad, be sad. If you are happy, be happy.

Another tradition that you can begin with Samhain this year is to create a family tree. If you already have one created, take

this opportunity to display or maintain it. There are plenty of printable templates available on the internet and I’m attaching a few different vintage family registers at the end of this issue. Call your parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents and other family members who might be able to help you fill in the blanks. Consider some genealogy research. Find a beautiful frame and hang your family tree in a place of honor in your home.

If you’re up for a more challenging tree, scavenge branches that will fit nicely in a vase or secure with floral arrangement foam and tape and decorate. Hang small framed portraits of your family members on the appropriate branch – or just decorate the tree with photos of your ancestors passed. The degree of effort you put in this project could range from simply finding photographs to frame, drawing portraits or silhouettes yourself, hand embroidering the portraits, or some other creative representation of your family and relatives.

If your family and relatives aren’t that important to you, consider making a tree that invokes the images of those who you do honor and care for – people you have respected and admired – whether you knew them personally or not.

Day of the Dead

The Mexican holiday, celebrated on November 1st or 2nd, involves building altars to ancestors and the offering of sugar skulls, flowers and favorite foods, the purpose of which is to invite the souls of the departed to visit and enjoy the festival with their earth-bound loved ones. Kits and molds are available online if you’re interested in making sugar skulls.

Halloween

Trick-or-treat is the secular manifestation of All Hallow’s Eve (the evening of Samhain on October 31). Traditional Halloween customs include carving pumpkins, dressing up and going door to door for treats. You may or may not wish to participate in these traditions. Other typical fall season activities include hay rides, corn mazes, apple picking and bonfires. The point is YOU can create your own special mix of traditional customs and ideas for your own unique celebration.

Holidays serve the purpose of setting aside a special day of rest to observe a custom. Holidays are how we have come to mark the passing of time. Whether you are religious or secular you can find comfort in the cyclic calendar of special events and the anticipation of holidays is important for children.

I encourage everyone to consider a special celebration of Samhain – whether it’s an intimate affair with your best friends, immediate family or a big party or reunion. Pick the customs and ideas that appeal to you and begin there. Do it again next year, tweaking and modifying your new traditions. Finally, write down why this is important to you, talk to your children about it and make sure that when you pass on, they will have something of you to carry on in themselves. ■



What's for Dinner?

Pumpkin-Ricotta Lasagna

This month's recipe is Pumpkin-Ricotta Lasagna -- a rich, smooth lasagna with white sauce. The pumpkin is surprisingly delicious and subtle. By far the best veggie lasagna I've ever had!

Serves 10

- 15 oz. can of pumpkin
- 2 lb. ricotta cheese
- 3 lb. chopped spinach
- 6 T butter or olive oil
- 1 finely chopped yellow onion
- 1 ½ tsp. black pepper
- 2 pinches nutmeg
- ½ c. flour
- 2 ½ c. milk
- 3 large minced garlic cloves
- 1 ½ lb. sliced mushrooms
- 1 lb. no-boil lasagna noodles
- ¼ c. parmesan cheese
- 1 lb. shredded mozzarella

1. Preheat oven to 400.

2. Stir together pumpkin and ricotta cheese until smooth and well-mixed. Set aside.

3. Steam spinach over high heat about five minutes until wilted. Squeeze out water in batches and chop coarsely chop. Set aside.

4. In large saucepan over med. heat, melt 3 Tbsp. butter or olive oil. Add onion and cook, stirring occasionally until soft, about 8 min. Add mushrooms and saute until soft. Add onion-mushroom mix to pumpkin-ricotta mix. Add 1/4 tsp salt, 1/8 tsp pepper and nutmeg. Stir to blend. Set aside.

5. Place empty saucepan back on stove and melt remaining butter/olive oil. Add garlic and saute until fragrant. Add flour and stir, cooking until dry, about 12 min. Add the milk and cook over med-high heat until it begins to thicken, about 5-8 min. Stir constantly. Add salt and pepper to taste. Remove from heat when

sauce is thick and creamy.

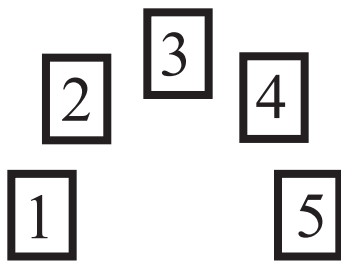
6. Grease pan, layer half of the noodles on the bottom. Spread half pumpkin mixture on top, then spinach, white sauce and half of the mozzarella. Repeat. Place Parmesan on top, cover with foil and bake for 45 minutes to 1 hour until hot and bubbly. Remove foil 10 minutes before taking pan out of oven to brown cheese on top. Let stand for 5 minutes before serving.



Interested in learning tarot?

Do you want to learn tarot for yourself? I'm currently investigating the possibility of correspondence-course style tarot lessons and even coaching group tele-sessions. If you think you'd be interested in these services, please email me (Melissa@tarotbymelissa.com) and let me know if you have any thoughts or suggestions on what you would like to see!

Featured Tarot Spread



1. What am I afraid of?
2. Where does it manifest?
3. How will this trap me?
4. How do I exorcise it?
5. What will I find?

For this month's featured tarot spread I was thinking about scary movies and stories that I've read. They typically involve some kind of irrational fear manifesting as a demon or spector (problem) that foils or traps the protagonist. The hero must then find a way to vanquish the ghost in order to achieve his or her goal. That's exactly what this spread is all about!

Cards one and two are about the fear or whatever it is that's tripping you up – and how it affects your life. Card three indicates an event when the fear and your life path will come to a head – this is the critical moment when you realize that your fear is preventing you from obtaining some of your desires. Card four is a direction you can take in order to overcome your fear and card five (the “outcome card”) tells you what you'll find in it's stead.

Try the spread on October 31, when the mood is prime for tarot exploration and divination!

On the horizon

I am one-third of the way done with my oracle deck and already I have lots of ideas on working on a tarot! Of course, don't expect a tarot deck to happen any time soon! Keep up on my progress with the Melissa Lenormand by subscribing to my blog. The next issue of TarotSense will be out by early December and will include more tarot-related articles rather than information of pagan interest – I just could resist writing an article on Samhain since it's my favorite holiday and all! This is my first time writing a newsletter and I'd love to have some feedback! Let me know what you liked, what you didn't, whether you tried my lasagna and what you'd like to see in the future! Bright blessings!

Samhain/Halloween Reading Special

Because Halloween is so conducive to tarot reading, I thought I'd offer a limited special reading to my newsletter and blog subscribers. Divination for the coming year is especially effective for my fellow pagan readers on Samhain – and that's just what I'd love to do!

For \$50 your Halloween reading will include one card for each month of the coming year (November 2009-October 2010) an analysis of your 2010 year card and a comparison of your year card with your soul card. I'll throw the cards on October 31 and you'll have a special printable PDF of your reading by November 1. I'm already reading at a party that night, so I'm only able to accommodate four reading requests for this special offer. To book a reading, email Melissa@tarotbymelissa.com.

About the Author

Melissa Hill lives in eastern Indiana with her husband, children, and a menagerie of pets, both mammal and microbial. When she's not shuffling cards, you'll find her baking sourdough bread, gardening (herbs and vegetables, mostly), coming up with fancy crochet patterns, and sewing small pretty things that make her happy.

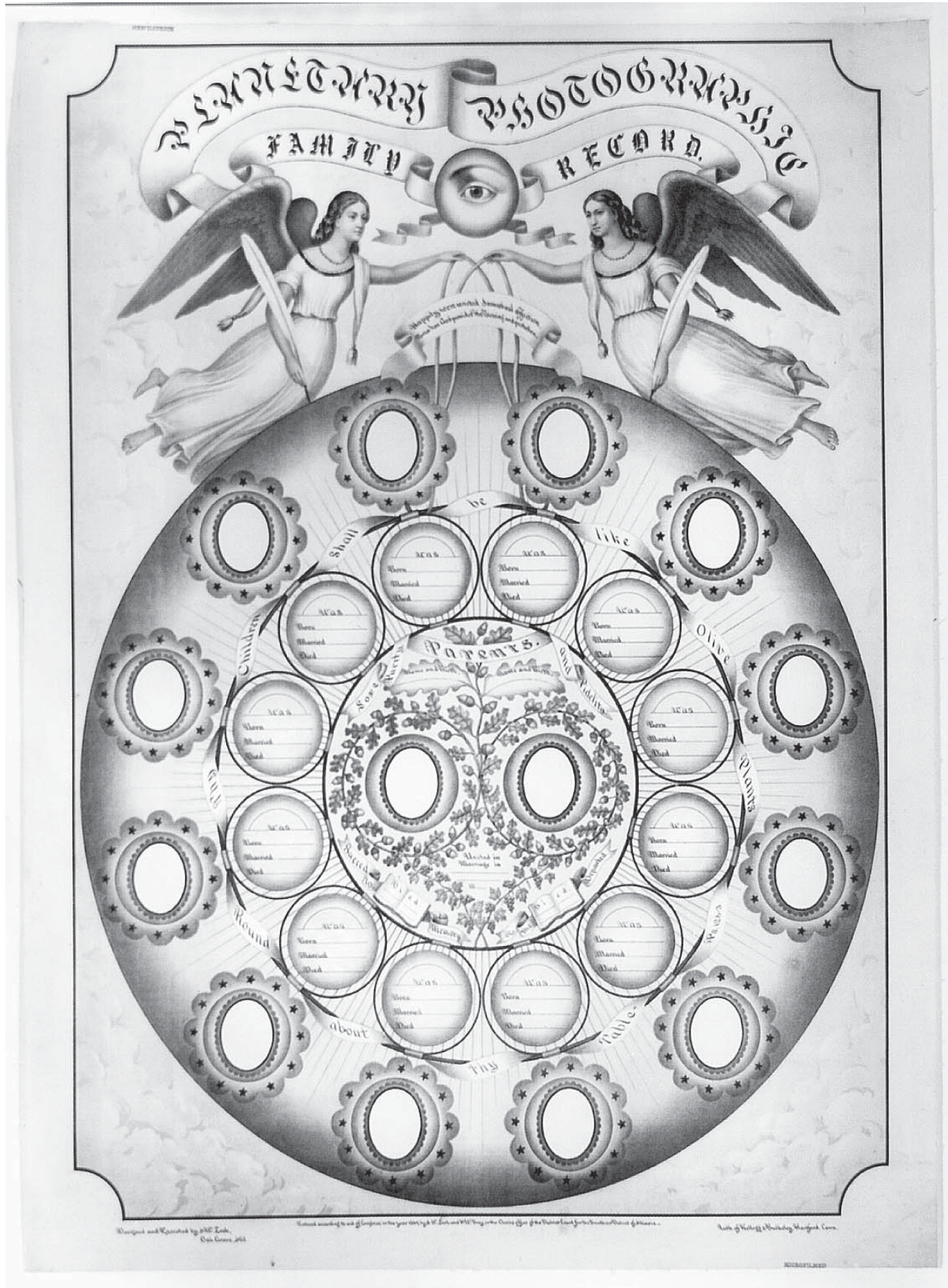


<http://tarotbymelissa.com>

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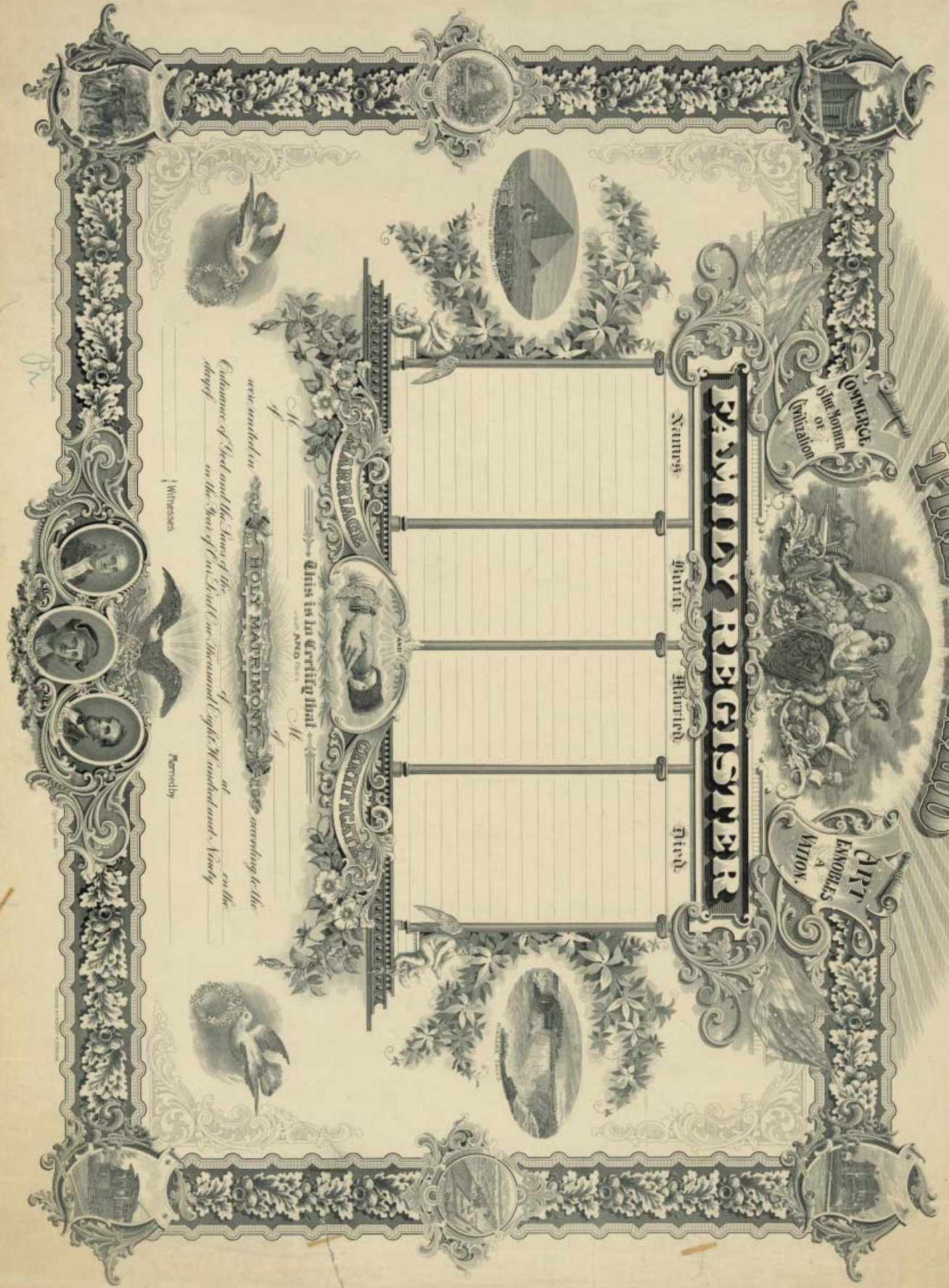
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Witnesses

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