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## From the Editor

Hello and Happy Friday historical fiction lovers!

I'm back from visiting with my Mom in Utah. Thanks for all the well-wishes I've received from many of you. Unfortunately, Mom isn't doing very well. The downside of ageing. My heart is still there, even though my body is back in Texas.

I'm gradually trying to catch up, but I'm still far behind. But at least this issue is still making it out on Friday. Not as early as I like to have it out, but still much earlier than it's made it some weeks, so I suppose it's all okay.

We're five months away from our April 1<sup>st</sup> second birthday. I've got some vintage photos pulled for another short story contest to celebrate our 2<sup>nd</sup> birthday with. No, I'm not sharing them yet. I'll post them in January, so that there's plenty of time to write something. I'm just putting a little teaser out there that although the year is nearing it's end, plans are already underway for a fun journey through 2021.

Stay tuned for future issues –In the weeks ahead we have author interviews scheduled with Lindsay Downs, James Conroyd Martin, Janet Oakley, Eileen Donovan, Angela Petch, Linore Burkard, Celia Martin, and a lot more!

*Trisha*

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## Ancient Origins of Halloween



*The following excerpt is from [www.history.com](http://www.history.com)*

Halloween's origins date back to the ancient Celtic festival of Samhain (pronounced sow-in). The Celts, who lived 2,000 years ago in the area that is now Ireland, the United Kingdom and northern France, celebrated their new year on November 1. This day marked the end of summer and the harvest and the beginning of the dark, cold winter, a time of year that was often associated with human death. Celts believed that on the night before the new year, the boundary between the worlds of the living and the dead became blurred. On the night of October 31 they celebrated Samhain, when it was believed that the ghosts of the dead returned to earth. In addition to causing trouble and damaging crops, Celts thought that the presence of the otherworldly spirits made it easier for the Druids, or Celtic priests, to make predictions about the future. For a people entirely dependent on the volatile natural world, these prophecies were an important source of comfort and direction during the long, dark winter.

To commemorate the event, Druids built huge sacred bonfires, where the people gathered to burn crops and animals as sacrifices to the Celtic deities. During the celebration, the Celts wore costumes, typically consisting of animal heads and skins, and attempted to tell each other's fortunes. When the celebration was over, they re-lit their hearth fires, which they had extinguished earlier that evening, from the sacred bonfire to help protect them during the coming winter.

By 43 A.D., the Roman Empire had conquered the majority of Celtic territory. In the course of the four hundred years that they ruled the Celtic lands, two festivals of Roman origin were combined with the traditional Celtic celebration of Samhain. The first was Feralia, a day in late October when the Romans traditionally commemorated the passing of the dead. The second was a day to honor Pomona, the Roman goddess of fruit and trees. The symbol of Pomona is the apple and the incorporation of this celebration into Samhain probably explains the tradition of "bobbing" for apples that is practiced today on Halloween.

On May 13, 609 A.D., Pope Boniface IV dedicated the Pantheon in Rome in honor of all Christian martyrs, and the Catholic feast of All Martyrs Day was established in the Western church. Pope Gregory III (731–741) later expanded the festival to include all saints as well as all martyrs, and moved the observance from May 13 to November 1. By the 9th century the influence of Christianity had spread into Celtic lands, where it gradually blended with and supplanted the older Celtic rites. In 1000 A.D., the church would make November 2 All Souls' Day, a day to honor the dead. It is widely believed today that the church was attempting to replace the Celtic festival of the dead with a related, but church-sanctioned holiday. All Souls Day was celebrated similarly to Samhain, with big bonfires, parades, and dressing up in costumes as saints, angels and devils. The All Saints Day celebration was also called All-hallows or All-hallowmas (from Middle English Alholowmesse meaning All Saints' Day) and the night before it, the traditional night of Samhain in the Celtic religion, began to be called All-hallows Eve and, eventually, Halloween.

### **HALLOWEEN COMES TO AMERICA**

Celebration of Halloween was extremely limited in colonial New England because of the rigid Protestant belief systems there. Halloween was much more common in Maryland and the southern colonies. As the beliefs and customs of different European ethnic groups as well as the American Indians meshed, a distinctly American version of Halloween began to emerge. The first celebrations included "play parties," public events held to celebrate the harvest, where neighbors would share stories of the dead, tell each other's fortunes, dance and sing. Colonial Halloween festivities also featured the telling of ghost stories and mischief-making of all kinds. By the middle of the nineteenth century, annual autumn festivities were common, but Halloween was not yet celebrated everywhere in the country.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, America was flooded with new immigrants. These new immigrants, especially the millions of Irish fleeing Ireland's potato famine of 1846, helped to popularize the celebration of Halloween nationally. Taking from Irish and English traditions, Americans began to dress up in costumes and go house to house asking for food or money, a practice that eventually became today's "trick-or-treat" tradition. Young women believed that on Halloween they could divine the name or appearance of their future husband by doing tricks with yarn, apple parings or mirrors.

In the late 1800s, there was a move in America to mold Halloween into a holiday more about community and neighborly get-togethers than about ghosts, pranks and witchcraft. At the turn of the century, Halloween parties for both children and adults became the most common way to celebrate the day. Parties focused on games, foods of the season and festive costumes. Parents were encouraged by newspapers and community leaders to take anything "frightening" or "grotesque" out of Halloween celebrations. Because of these efforts, Halloween lost most of its superstitious and religious overtones by the beginning of the twentieth century.

By the 1920s and 1930s, Halloween had become a secular, but community-centered holiday, with parades and town-wide parties as the featured entertainment. Despite the best efforts of many schools and communities, vandalism began to plague Halloween celebrations in many communities during this time. By the 1950s, town leaders had successfully limited vandalism and Halloween had evolved into a holiday directed mainly at the young. Due to the high numbers of young children during the fifties baby boom, parties moved from town civic centers into the classroom or home, where they could be more easily accommodated. Between 1920 and 1950, the centuries-old practice of trick-or-treating was also revived. Trick-or-treating was a relatively inexpensive way for an entire community to share the Halloween celebration. In theory, families could also prevent tricks being played on them by providing the neighborhood children with small treats. A new American tradition was born, and it has continued to grow.

## Historic Cemeteries



Who can talk about October without thinking of all the spooky cemetery images that fill this Halloween month? The movie industry loves the scariness of the dark, creepy cemetery. However, I'm not one of those that scares in a dark cemetery. I've spent many a night in the dark with my friends, doing paranormal investigations in cemeteries.

Cemeteries are also a favorite location of historical fiction authors. Even though our craft may be fictional, it's often based on real-life characters from the past. Many authors spent hours in cemeteries, either looking for a specific person they're writing about in their story, or looking for inspiration of people and times of the past.

There's a term for people that love cemeteries – taphophile. 'Taph' is from the Greek for tomb and 'philia' means an inordinate fondness. I'll admit it. I'm one. I could spend hours in cemeteries, browsing the graves, feeling connected to people from the past, cleaning up around overgrown headstones.

Often on visits, I'm saddened by the old, worn headstones that are near close to illegible. From seeing so many on my own genealogical cemetery visits in search of the graves of family members from the past, it's sometimes difficult to read the stone, or get a photograph of it. Many people say to use shaving cream or flour to be able to read the words. However, these substances can cause further damage and deterioration to the already poor conditions of the headstones.

The Association for Gravestone Studies has some other suggestions on how to get photographs. From their web site at [www.gravestonestudies.org](http://www.gravestonestudies.org), here are their suggestions.

When asked why not to use shaving cream on inscriptions, this is their answer:

“Our professional conservators tell us it is definitely not a good idea to use shaving cream on porous gravestones because there are chemicals and greasy emollients in shaving cream that are sticky and very difficult to remove from the stone with a simple washing. Indeed, even with vigorous scrubbing and lots of rinsing, the cream fills in the pores of a porous stone and cannot all be removed. The result of leaving it there is that in time it may discolor or damage the stone.

Instead, use a mirror to shine sunlight across the face of a stone, making the lettering stand out. You should always prefer a non-invasive method to interact with gravestones just as we do with medical tests on our own bodies.”

When asked why not to use flour to read worn inscriptions, this is what they had to say:

“No matter how carefully the stone is brushed afterward some traces of flour will remain, that, when in contact with water, may become tacky, trapping moisture and accelerating deterioration. Because of this, AGS does not endorse the application of flour to gravestones to read worn inscriptions. To safely read a worn inscription, AGS recommends the following methods:

Use a large mirror to direct bright sunlight diagonally across the face of the gravestone to cast shadows in indentations and make inscriptions more visible. In wooded areas, use a flashlight to achieve similar results.

Take a digital photo, upload onto a computer, edit the picture, and choose invert colors. This will make the image look like an old 35mm negative and bring out the lettering. To keep a copy of the original and edited photograph, select "save as" when saving the edited photograph.

Treat a wet gravestone with D/2 Biological Solution, scrub into a lather using a plastic bristle brush, and smooth the lather into the inscription to make the letters more readable. Afterward, rinse the stone thoroughly.”

Whether you're off to the cemetery to research local history, trace your genealogy, have a paranormal hunt, or just enjoy being a 'graver' (as some people call it), enjoy your visit. Have a safe one and remember to be responsible and considerate, of the live people that may be there, and the deceased that lay in their final earthly resting place.



Hood Cemetery, Southlake, Texas

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## 'X' Marks the Spot

Giving your story a sense of place is very important to drawing the reader into your tale. Setting the scene and providing specific details is an art unto itself. Here are a few tips:

If the story is in a certain location, research before you write. Specific details about landmarks, how the town is laid out, where the park is, the woods at the edge of town, the breweries on one end, the train tracks and depot on the other; these will all help you create an authentic feeling tale. Reading historical accounts of the town in its earlier days will give you a wealth of information to draw upon.

If possible, a trip to the location or a visit to a local historical museum or historical society will also provide more details that would be difficult to locate online.

Some of the things to keep in mind about local history that will add depth to your tale are:

**Historical Events:** A town's history may influence actions and events later on. When I was researching for *Fat and Sassy*, I discovered that with the flu epidemic in Glendora (many years before the period of time I was writing about), when library books were returned, they had to be wrapped up and held for a length of time before they could be used again. Basically, the town shut down. Even church services weren't held. Now this was long before the 1940's when the Jones' moved to Glendora, but I wanted to include this historical tidbit. So I had the librarian mention this in a fictional field trip my mom's class took to the library.

**Local climate:** What type of setting does this location lend to the story? *Fat and Sassy*, set in southern California had a moderate climate. When the family moved to Arkansas and Missouri, the winters there were much different, providing more specific details to include as the family battled severe cold and snow.

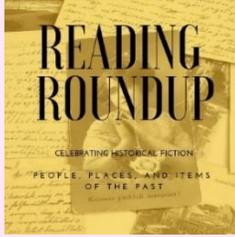
**Local characters:** Who are the local merchants and people that your ancestors/characters will interact with? When my mom tells of pushing her younger brother to downtown Glendora, to buy 3-cent stamps for her mom, the postmaster was Edgar Murphy. Adding specific names adds a depth to the book, and provides some historical context, even if the family stories are written in a fictional manner.

**Specific city details:** Are there socioeconomic divisions in the town? Are there wealthier areas as opposed to the 'wrong-side-of-the-tracks' areas? Was the post office once part of a general merchandise store, and not as a stand-alone building in its current location? Have street names been changed? For instance, I grew up in Glendora also, but in the 1960's, when I remember it, the main street was Glendora Avenue. When my mom was growing up there in the 1940's and 1950's, it was called Michigan Avenue.

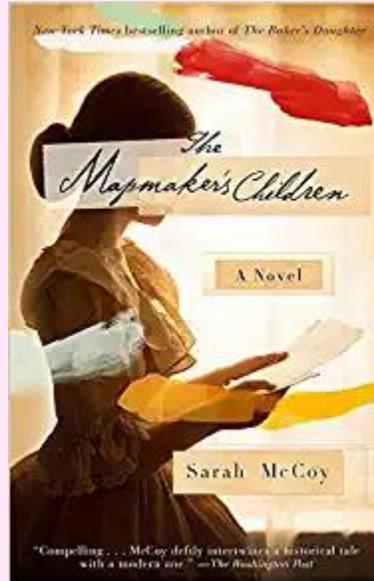
**Occupations:** Is your story set in a farming community? Or a congested urban environment? Common occupations will vary from setting to setting, and these details can dramatically change a story. For instance, Glendora was a citrus town in the time period I was writing about. Many of the residents worked in either the groves, or at a packing plant. Now, you can rarely find an orange grove within the city limits. An earlier in the century story will have a much different flavor than a more contemporary era tale. This family story will also be unlike a story like *Memories on Muslin*, set in a rural farming community in Iowa in the 1930's.

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## The 1800s



### The Mapmaker's Children Sarah McCoy

When Sarah Brown, daughter of abolitionist John Brown, realizes that her artistic talents may be able to help save the lives of slaves fleeing north, she becomes one of the Underground Railroad's leading mapmakers, taking her cues from the slave code quilts and hiding her maps within her paintings. She boldly embraces this calling after being told the shocking news that she can't bear children, but as the country steers toward bloody civil war, Sarah faces difficult sacrifices that could put all she loves in peril.

Eden, a modern woman desperate to conceive a child with her husband, moves to an old house in the suburbs and discovers a porcelain head hidden in the root cellar—the remains of an Underground Railroad doll with an extraordinary past of secret messages, danger and deliverance.

Ingeniously plotted to a riveting end, Sarah and Eden's woven lives connect the past to the present, forcing each of them to define courage, family, love, and legacy in a new way.

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