We all know the jack-o'-lantern is one of the most recognizable symbols of Halloween but where did this tradition come from and what's the legend behind it? The practice of carving Jack-o'-lanterns finds its origin in Irish myth. According to an old Irish legend there was a man who was nicknamed Stingy Jack. Here is part of the Irish legend of Stingy Jack. Stingy Jack was a miserable old man who loved to play nasty tricks on everyone including his friends and family or even the devil himself.

One evening Stingy Jack invited the devil to have a drink with him. Of course since stingy Jack was stingy he refused to pay for the drink. Instead he convinced the devil to turn into a coin which he could then use to pay for the drink. But instead of paying for the drinks Jack decided to keep the coin. He allowed the devil to return to his normal form only on the condition that he would not bother Jack for one year. One year later Jack tricked the devil into climbing a tree. Jack refused to help him down unless he promised not to bother him for 10 years. As part of this deal the devil also agreed that he would not claim Jack's soul when he died.

Not long after Jack did pass away but God would not allow such an unsavory character into heaven and the devil stayed true to his word and refused to allow Jack into his domain. As Jack turned away the devil felt pity on him and tossed him a burning piece of coal so that he might see in the darkness. Doomed to walk the earth forever, Jack carved out a turnip to hold his burning coal so that it might light his path. Many Irish claimed to have seen this ghostly figure whom they began referring to as ‘Jack of the lantern’. Eventually this was shortened to jack-o'-lantern.

It became traditional in Ireland to carve jack-o'-lanterns out of hollowed-out turnips, potatoes or even beets. However when Irish immigrants settled in America in the mid-1800s they found another vegetable that suited the purpose much better. Pumpkins are native to North America which proved to be perfect for carving and creating the jack-o'-lanterns that are known and loved today.