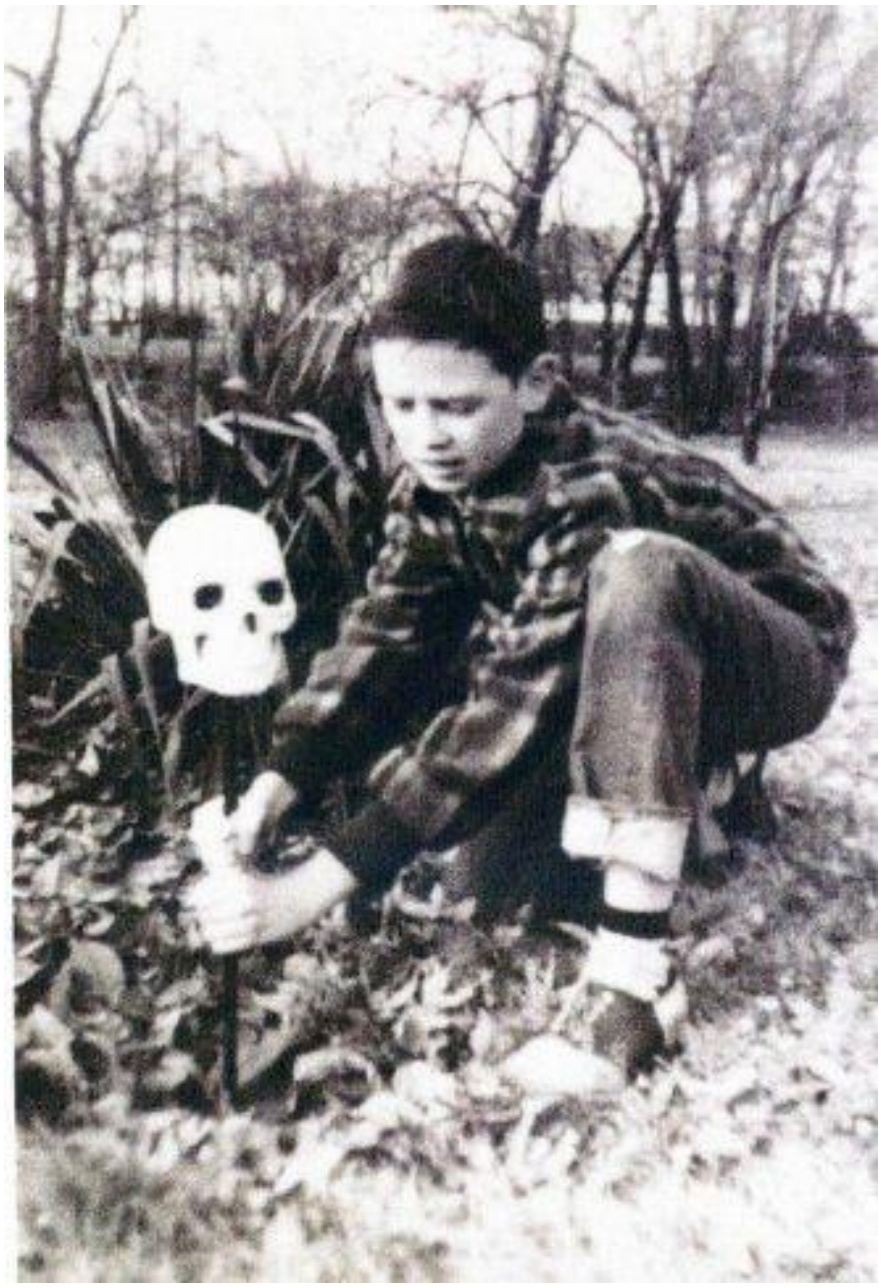
Our place in Halloween history

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A young John Carpenter with a skull-topped stake in an undated photo.





Halloween is just around the corner and serves a reminder of how Bowling Green played a key role in the iconic film bearing the holiday's name.

In honor of Halloween (the holiday and the movie), here are excerpts from my 2022 Daily News article:

"If Halloween icon Michael Myers was looking to go home, he'd likely pack up his knife and head to Bowling Green.

While the masked slasher terrorized the fictional small Illinois town of Haddonfield in the original 1978 "Halloween" film, director John Carpenter has made no secret of how his experiences growing up in Bowling Green influenced him, and the groundbreaking film.

The Bowling Green Area Convention and Visitor's Bureau has even produced a self-guided tour called "John Carpenter's Reel Sites, Real Scary" that highlights Carpenter's life in Bowling Green and the local references in "Halloween."

In a 2016 interview with the Daily News, John Carpenter described his Bowling Green upbringing.

Carpenter was born in 1948 in Carthage, N.Y. When he was 5, his family moved to Bowling Green where his father, the late Dr. Howard R. Carpenter, started teaching music at Western Kentucky University.

Music was destined to be a big part of the future director's life. But perhaps there were early signs of a horror career in his future. An enigmatic photo from the WKU archives of the young Carpenter, perhaps 10 to 12 years old, shows him placing a skull-topped stake into the ground – likely a Halloween decoration.

Carpenter was inducted into WKU's Hall of Distinguished Alumni in 1999. In a video at the time, Carpenter discussed his local memories: "I suppose that most of who I am and what I believe in was figured out walking around the grounds of the Kentucky Building after dinner when the sun's going down … I don't think I've been in a more beautiful spot in all my life. And the thoughts of life and death, people, beauty, cruelty, fear … whatever I was thinking about, I thought about walking by myself there. I was a loner, but I grew up in a paradise. I kind of became who I am now."

But Carpenter also said that not all of his memories of Bowling Green were idyllic; "Everything I learned about evil, I learned in Bowling Green," he told the Daily News, referencing being exposed here to "the Jim Crow South" for the first time.

But Bowling Green's downtown movie theaters were always a safe haven for Carpenter.

Carpenter said the Capitol, Princess and State theaters and two drive-ins are where he took in double features that spurred a love of movies.

"Those theaters are where I got my movie education," he said.

Before he launched his movie career, Carpenter attended Western and immersed himself in music. He played in various WKU musical groups, including Gemini 15, alternately described as a jazz or "dance" band, that toured nationally and internationally.

He also played in smaller bands that made the fraternity party circuit, including one called Kaleidoscope, Carpenter recalled, that was a local favorite for several years.

Carpenter eventually left WKU to attend the USC School of Cinema in Los Angeles and pursue a film career.

He first made a low-budget thriller called "Assault on Precinct 13," which garnered the young director some notice in Hollywood.

Then came "Halloween."

The 29-year-old director was picked to helm the low-budget film in part because of his various skills – Carpenter, utilizing his music background, wrote the iconic music for the film. The young director also came relatively cheap – he was paid $10,000 to direct the film.

Carpenter looked back at an experience he had at WKU to help create Michael Myers.

In a 2003 documentary called "Halloween – A Cut Above the Rest," Carpenter recalled being on a class trip to a mental institution while at Western.

"There was this kid, maybe 12 or 13, and he literally had this look," Carpenter said. The look was the stare of a schizophrenic patient. He then wrote the line recited in the film describing the young Michael Myers as having "the blackest eyes, the devil's eyes."

"It was unsettling to me," Carpenter said of the encounter. "It was the creepiest thing I had ever seen."

The look coincided with the creation of Myers as "Human, yes, but also like a force … that can't be stopped," Carpenter said.

It was another former Bowling Green resident who is responsible for the iconic Myers mask.

Tommy Lee Wallace, who would go on to a long career in Hollywood himself, was a Carpenter bandmate in Kaleidoscope. He eventually joined Carpenter in California and the pair collaborated in film and a band called the Coupe de Villes.

Wallace served as both editor and production designer on "Halloween."

In a 2008 interview with the Daily News' Amplifier magazine, Wallace described how the Myers look came to be:

"I wanted everything but the mask to kind of fall away and not be noticeable, so I went with a neutral colored set of coveralls, and nondescript boots. For the mask, I had to go out and find it, or make it myself. John was open to the idea of me bringing back a couple choices, so I went and found two: One was the classic Emmett Kelly 'sad clown,' with the downturned mouth. The other needed to come close to the script, which, as I recall, described the mask as a blank face," Wallace said. "There were several human faces for sale, Richard Nixon and others, but most were cartoonish and recognizable. Then in the corner, next to Mr. Spock, I saw

Captain Kirk. It didn't look especially like William Shatner. It was really just a blank face. I took it home and doctored it a little, cut the eye holes bigger, yanked off the sideburns, darkened the hair and spray-painted the whole thing dead white.

"We had a little audition of the two masks at the production office. The clown mask came first, and we liked the effect. It was spooky and strange, and so we knew we were home free, that the whole idea of a masked killer was going to work. None of us were ready, though, for the effect the blank mask had on us. From the minute it appeared, it was just stone cold terrifying. There's no explaining exactly why. But all of a sudden we knew 'Halloween' was going to be a very scary movie."

Carpenter, who co-wrote the "Halloween" script with Debra Hill, sprinkled in several Kentucky references.

Perhaps most notably, Myers is confined to the (fictional) Smith's Grove Sanitarium in the movie – a nod to the Warren County town, with an apostrophe added to the name.

Wallace, as a director on other projects, would also utilize local references in his work, such as Chestnut Street and Lampkin Park in the 1990 TV miniseries "IT," based on the Stephen King book."

Remembering our role in Halloween history is always a highlight this time of the year.

Happy Halloween!

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