

“Halloween in Wartime”

Personally, I would abolish Halloween, but the city council has taken other steps that we hope will be effective.

--Walter Cooper, San Diego City Manager.

“S.D. DIMS OUT HALLOWEEN” proclaimed a headline in the *San Diego Union* on October 25, 1942. The upcoming holiday would be the first Halloween under World War II “dim-out” conditions, which required the shielding of outdoor lights. Authorities knew that this year would have to be different.

Traditional “trick or treating” was clearly out. Children would not be walking house-to-house in government-imposed darkness. Nor would the usual Halloween pranks be tolerated. Police Chief Clifford Peterson warned that adult “hoodlums” risked jail sentences and juveniles faced severe penalties for “cute tricks.”

As the holiday approached, police officers spoke in school assemblies, stressing to teachers and children the need for a quiet Halloween. Harmless peacetime stunts of previous years could now be hazardous to the war effort, they warned. Turning on fire hydrants would threaten the precious water supply. Piling trash in the streets could lead to traffic accidents in the dim-out conditions. Broken glass in the street could puncture the tire of army truck.



A newspaper cartoon warned that Halloween pranks could be unpatriotic. *San Diego Union*, Oct. 25, 1942

The warnings led to a Halloween “under wraps.” While double police shifts and volunteer auxiliary officers patrolled the darkened streets, San Diegans celebrated indoors. Neighborhood block parties were popular and the Parent-Teacher Association hosted entertainment at school sites throughout the city.

The quietest Halloween in years was greeted as “very gratifying,” by City Manager Cooper, the official who had advised the holiday’s abolishment earlier in the week. With no incidents of trouble reported by the police, Laurence Klauber, vice-chairman of the Civil Defense Counsel, praised San Diego youths for their self-control and patriotism. “Our children came through in such a splendid manner,” Klauber announced. “Their restraint is a genuine contribution to the war effort.”

The next year, Halloween fell on Sunday, meaning most celebrations came on Saturday night. Police officers and county sheriff’s deputies worked 10-hour shifts on both weekend nights, and a new 10 p.m. curfew ordinance was enforced in San Diego. Once again, there were block parties in neighborhoods and housing projects, and the PTA helped arrange afternoon and evening carnivals at seventeen city elementary schools.

By the fall of 1944, dim-out rules had eased in San Diego. City-wide celebrations now included bonfires, along with band concerts, carnivals, and costume parades. Police officers and sheriff's deputies still enforced a curfew and continued to counsel against destructive pranks, warning "patriotism should intervene against vandalism."

But rules against costumed children on the streets in the evening had relaxed. The *Union* reported that early on Halloween night "a tiny voice came over the telephone" to the downtown police desk. "Is it all right to go and push bells on houses and say: 'Treat, Treat?'" "Aw, I guess so," replied on sergeant on duty.

With the end of war, Halloween in 1945 included community bonfires and celebrations at 26 city sites. Pauline des Granges, San Diego's supervisor of playgrounds and community centers, estimated that 20,000 children attended the parties.

Trick or treating had returned for good. Civic authorities who once warned against pranks on the grounds of patriotism now urged care on neighborhood streets. "Light-colored ghosts stand a better chance of survival than dark-colored devils," they cautioned. "They show up better in front of auto headlights."

Originally published as "HALLOWEEN DURING WAR YEARS LACKED TRICK OR TREATING" by Richard Crawford" in the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, Oct 28, 2010. p. CZ.2