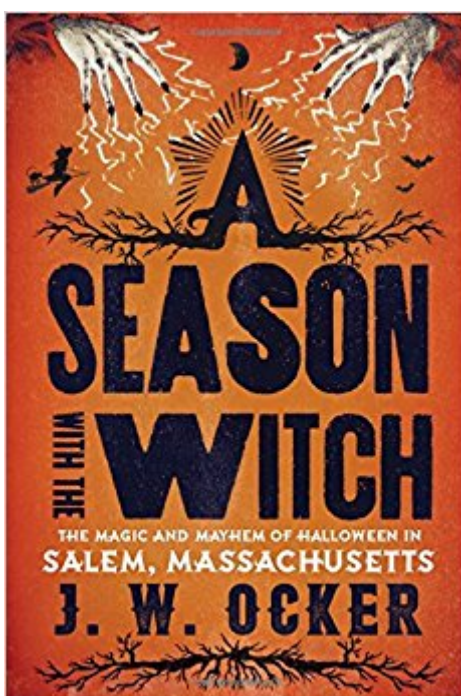


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A Season With The Witch: The Magic And Mayhem Of Halloween In Salem, Massachusetts



Synopsis

Edgar Award-winning travel writer spends an autumn living in one of America's spookiest tourist destinations: Salem, Massachusetts. Salem, Massachusetts, may be the strangest city on the planet. A single event in its 400 years of history—the Salem Witch Trials of 1692—transformed it into the Capital of Creepy in America. But Salem is a seasonal town and its season happens to be Halloween. Every October, this small city of 40,000 swells to more than a quarter million as witches, goblins, ghouls, and ghosts (and their admirers) descend on Essex Street. For the fall of 2015, occult enthusiast and Edgar Award-winning writer J.W. Ocker moved his family of four to downtown Salem to experience firsthand a season with the witch, visiting all of its historical sites and macabre attractions. In between, he interviews its leaders and citizens, its entrepreneurs and visitors, its street performers and Wiccans, its psychics and critics, creating a picture of this unique place and the people who revel in, or merely weather, its witchiness. 25 b/w photographs

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Customer Reviews

“[A] lively chronicle—part travel guide, part history lesson—Ocker moves easily among the archivists, historians, and performers he interviews, and he describes the carnival atmosphere that descends upon “Witch City” with enthusiasm and vividness.” —Publisher’s Weekly (starred review) “What better place to celebrate Halloween than Salem, Massachusetts? Festivities begin with a parade on October 1 and end with

Halloween parties and costumed celebrations on October 31. In between, Ocker, a travel writer with an Edgar Award, and family stay the entire month, exploring Salem's many attractions. Although the witch trials in 1692 only lasted for nine months, Salem has been branded "Witch City," overshadowing its maritime history. Ocker samples everything: cemeteries, museums, gift shops, performances, wax museums, and more. He talks to street performers and street preachers as he tries to understand the appeals of the city. He interviews curators, haunters, costumed tour guides, a policeman, the mayor, and cemetery caretakers. Ocker devotes whole chapters to real witches, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and TV shows and movies set in Salem. His comic asides lighten the details of haunted houses, hangings, and hysteria without disrespecting the history. The result is a fresh, fun glimpse of a town that has come to grips with its sordid history and prospered. Armchair travelers will enjoy the trip. - Booklist "An entertaining and historical guide to the varied sites of Salem, with Ocker interviewing everyone from the mayor to local archivists to men in scary costumes, covering burial sites of witch trial judges, and perhaps the most awesome Halloween street party ever described in print, with Ocker's good humor and touch of sarcasm marking his readable style. - Library Journal

J. W. Ocker is the Edgar Award-winning author of *Poe-Land: The Hallowed Haunts of Edgar Allan Poe*. He runs the website OTIS: Odd Things I've Seen (Oddthingsiveseen.com), where he chronicles his visits to various oddities of culture, art, nature, and history. His first two books, *The New England Grimpendium* and *The New York Grimpendium* are personal travelogues of his visits to deathly sites in those regions. Both won Lowell Thomas Awards from the Society of American Travel Writers. His work has appeared in *Rue Morgue Magazine*, *The Boston Globe*, *CNN*, *The Atlantic*, and other places people stick writing. He's from Maryland, but has lived in New Hampshire since 2008.

J.W. Ocker doesn't do things halfway. His previous book, *Poe-Land: The Hallowed Haunts of Edgar Allan Poe*, won an Edgar Award for his travels up and down the east coast, visiting locations significant to Edgar Allan Poe, and explaining why they are significant to those associated with the area. This time, Ocker took the opposite approach - he moved his apparently very patient wife and children to Salem, Massachusetts, and stayed for the entire month of October. October is to Salem what Mardi Gras is to New Orleans - a frenetic collection of eclectic people, places, and activities that build momentum and culminate in a

concentrated release of weirdness. And instead of going to Salem, the Ockers lived downtown, totally immersed at Halloween. It's ground zero. Ocker isn't looking to do a travelogue on which haunted attractions are tourist traps and which bookstores are the creepiest. He is looking for what makes Salem so uniquely Salem by experiencing it firsthand. A Season with the Witch does that by chronicling his travels among the shops, sites, and gravestones, carefully interspersed with chats with the denizens, critics, and characters of Salem. From carnies and occultists, to archivists and elected officials, to street preachers and shop owners, Ocker carefully records their often conflicting observations. Be it ghost tours, cemeteries, historical sites, filming locations, museums, gift shops, street performances, parades, haunted houses, or wax museums if it happened in Salem, Ocker sampled it, and then wrote about it in his deceptively casual style with the appropriately gentle humor and side comments. Can it be used as a travel guide to Witch City? Absolutely, but you risk missing the sites because you are engrossed in the book. Better to read it first and use a mundane travel guide. There are not many books that can gracefully segue from Cotton Mather and The Scarlet Letter to Elizabeth Montgomery and Laurie Cabot, but this is Salem, where oddness is a lifestyle, and J.W. Ocker is a masterful observer of the foibles, frailties, and fears of the human condition.

Amusing and challenging, J.W. Ocker explores the fun and history of modern Salem Massachusetts. I was born in New England, of a family settled there since the early 1600s. The narrative that winds through this travelogue is of the theology and superstition of my ancestors' contemporaries. At the same time, the Ocker family has a great time exploring haunted houses, museums, street entertainment, and the bars, pubs and restaurants of a modern American community. A really thoughtful and worthwhile read for Yankees.

Biggest problem with this book is the printing of photographs. VERY bad contrast, some almost so dark you can't make them out! It makes the book look cheaply done! The history of the town is OK though. I've been visiting Salem yearly for 30 years.

For tourists and Salem residents alike, and I now live in downtown Salem after visiting here yearly, this is an in depth analysis of the annual phenomenon known as Haunted Happenings. Or perhaps it can better be described as a love story. The author's personal impressions and his interviews with key Salem figures hook the reader right into his story and his humorous takes had me laughing frequently. My only question after finishing the book is, when are you and your family moving to

Salem, Mr. Ocker? It certainly has cast its spell over you.

A great read, as are each of J.W. Ocker's other books, mainly because it is obvious that he is passionate about the subject matter & dedicated to conjuring up the enchantment of what makes these destinations extraordinary. As a curious fan of odd & unusual places, things, & experiences; gravity pulls me to his work because he continues to show me something I may have missed or to point me in unfamiliar directions. I also just really enjoy reading his books. A Season With the Witch delivers both the historic & present day mystique of Salem to the reader in a way that will really connect with anyone. There's a magic blend of history, horror, and humanity that will delight the annual Haunted Happenings attendee, inspire fond memories in a former tourist, or inform the virgin newcomer of Salem's charm. Bewitching from cover to cover!

While growing up hearing about Salem & the Witch Trials and then visiting with a bus tour twice in October, I was fascinated with the 'little' town (as I saw it). I knew there had to be so many more stories there and wondered about the 'normal' months. This book gave me a lot of that insight. Reading more about the places & names that I recognized was truly fascinating; and reading about places & things I missed makes me want to visit Salem at least one more time. I recommend this book, therefore, to both people who have visited as well as people who haven't yet, but are curious to know more.

Everything you ever wanted to know about Salem...J.W. Ocker gives a whirlwind tour of Salem, an intimate glimpse of a city and history you thought you knew. He goes above and beyond, taking the reader up and down into the very heart and spirit of Salem. Somewhere between a blog and a travelogue, you'll feel like you've lived there too. A fascinating book I simply couldn't put down... you'll love reading this too. There's no place like Salem for the Halloween season and there no author who takes you there quite like J.W. does. Do yourself a favor and get this book!!!!

I love this book about October in Salem, Massachusetts. I read this book, which was written exactly one year earlier, during the time I was working the Information Booth at Haunted Happenings. I found it to be extremely informative and interesting, exploring many different aspects of the city I live in. The author has a very curious mind and delved deep in a serious and humorous way into many of the very unusual characters that make up the whole of this crazy and wonderful city.

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