

St Patrick's Day - What's It All About

compiled by David Bull



History

St. Patrick's Day is celebrated on March 17, his religious feast day and the anniversary of his death in the fifth century. The Irish have observed this day as a religious holiday for over a thousand years.

On St. Patrick's Day, which falls during the Christian season of Lent, Irish families would traditionally attend church in the morning and celebrate in the afternoon. Lenten prohibitions against the consumption of meat were waived and people would dance, drink, and feast—on the traditional meal of Irish bacon and cabbage.

The first St. Patrick's Day parade took place not in Ireland, but in the United States. Irish soldiers

serving in the English military marched through New York City on March 17, 1762. Along with their music, the parade helped the soldiers to reconnect with their Irish roots, as well as fellow Irishmen serving in the English army.

Over the next thirty-five years, Irish patriotism among American immigrants flourished, prompting the rise of so-called "Irish Aid" societies, like the Friendly Sons of Saint Patrick and the Hibernian Society. Each group would hold annual parades featuring bagpipes (which actually first became popular in the Scottish and British armies) and drums.

Population Distribution Of Irish Americans

- There are 36.5 million U.S. residents who claim Irish ancestry. This number is almost nine times the population of Ireland itself (more than 4 million). Irish is the nation's second most frequently reported ancestry, trailing only those of German ancestry.
- The nation as a whole claims 12% of residents as having Irish ancestry. In Massachusetts this number doubles to 24 percent!
- In Middlesex County, Massachusetts 348,978 residents are of Irish ancestry. Among the 54 counties where Irish is the largest observed ancestry group, Middlesex had the highest population of Irish-Americans, with Norfolk County, Massachusetts second, with 203,285.
- There are three states in which Irish is the leading ancestry group: Delaware, Massachusetts and New Hampshire. Irish is among the top five ancestries in every state but two (Hawaii and New Mexico).
- There are 54 counties where Irish is the largest observed ancestry group. Forty-four of these counties are in the Northeast, with 14 in New York, 11 in Massachusetts and five in New Jersey.
- A total of 4.8 million immigrants from Ireland have been admitted to the U.S. for lawful permanent residence since fiscal year 1820, the earliest year for which official immigration records exist. By fiscal year 1870, about half of these immigrants were admitted for lawful permanent residence. Only Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom and Mexico have had more immigrants admitted for permanent residence to the United States than Ireland.

Symbols and Traditions

The Shamrock

The shamrock, which was also called the "seamroy" by the Celts, was a sacred plant in ancient Ireland because it symbolized the rebirth of spring. By the seventeenth century, the shamrock had become a symbol of emerging Irish nationalism. As the English began to seize Irish land and make laws against the use of the Irish language and the practice of Catholicism, many Irish began to wear the shamrock as a symbol of their pride in their heritage and their displeasure with English rule.

Irish Music

Music is often associated with St. Patrick's Day—and Irish culture in general. From ancient days of the Celts, music has always been an important part of Irish life. The Celts had an oral culture, where religion, legend, and history were passed from one generation to the next by way of stories and songs.

After being conquered by the English, and forbidden to speak their own language, the Irish, like other oppressed peoples, turned to music to help them remember important events and hold on to their heritage and history. As it often stirred emotion and helped to galvanize people, music was outlawed by the English. During her reign, Queen Elizabeth I even decreed that all artists and pipers were to be arrested and hanged on the spot.

Today, traditional Irish bands like The Chieftains, the Clancy Brothers, and the Corrs are gaining worldwide popularity. Their music is produced with instruments that have been used for centuries, including the fiddle, the uilleann pipes (a sort of elaborate bagpipe), the tin whistle (a sort of flute that is actually made of nickel-silver, brass, or aluminum), and the bodhran (an ancient type of framedrum that was traditionally used in warfare rather than music).

The Snake

It has long been recounted that, during his mission in Ireland, St. Patrick once stood on a hilltop (which is now called Croagh Patrick), and with only a wooden staff by his side, banished all the snakes from Ireland.

In fact, the island nation was never home to any snakes. The "banishing of the snakes" was really a metaphor for the eradication of pagan ideology from Ireland and the triumph of Christianity. Within two hundred years of Patrick's arrival, Ireland was completely Christianized.

Corned Beef

Each year, thousands of Irish Americans gather with their loved ones on St. Patrick's Day to share a "traditional" meal of corned beef and cabbage. Though cabbage has long been an Irish food, corned beef only began to be associated with St. Patrick's Day at the turn of the century. Irish immigrants living on New York City's Lower East Side substituted corned beef for their traditional dish of Irish bacon to save money. They learned about the cheaper alternative from their Jewish neighbors.

Corned Beef and Cabbage Recipe

- 5 pounds corned brisket of beef
- 6 peppercorns, or packaged pickling spices
- 3 carrots, peeled and quartered
- 3 onions, peeled and quartered
- 1 medium-sized green cabbage, quartered or cut in wedges
- Melted butter (about 4 tablespoons)

Place the corned beef in water to cover with the peppercorns or mixed pickling spices (in supermarkets, these often come packaged with the corned beef). Cover the pot or kettle, bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer 5 hours or until tender, skimming occasionally. During the last hour, add the carrots and onions and cover again. During the last 15 minutes, add the cabbage. Transfer meat and vegetables to a platter and brush the vegetables with the melted butter. Serve with boiled parsley potatoes, cooked separately. (The stock can be saved to add to a pot roast or stew instead of other liquid.)

The Leprechaun

The original Irish name for these figures of folklore is "lobaircin," meaning "small-bodied fellow."

Belief in leprechauns probably stems from Celtic belief in fairies, tiny men and women who could use their magical powers to serve good or evil. In Celtic folktales, leprechauns were cranky souls, responsible for mending the shoes of the other fairies. Though only minor figures in Celtic folklore, leprechauns were known for their trickery, which they often used to protect their much-fabled treasure.

Leprechauns had nothing to do with St. Patrick or the celebration of St. Patrick's Day, a Catholic holy day. In 1959, Walt Disney released a film called *Darby O'Gill & the Little People*, which introduced America to a very different sort of leprechaun than the cantankerous little man of Irish folklore. This cheerful, friendly leprechaun is a purely American invention, but has quickly evolved into an easily recognizable symbol of both St. Patrick's Day and Ireland in general.



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OPEN HOUSE

March 18th
6:00 to 8:00 p.m.

The City of Kettle Falls would like to invite area residents to an open house which will be held at the Kettle Falls Police/Fire Departments located at 415 S. Larch Street in Kettle Falls. All city department heads such as the Chief of Police, Fire Chief, Public Works Superintendent, Clerk and Mayor will be on hand to answer any questions you may have concerning city services. There will be fire trucks and police cars to look through, and possibly even a ride if you want one. So, come on in and meet the people that work for you and get to know us.

