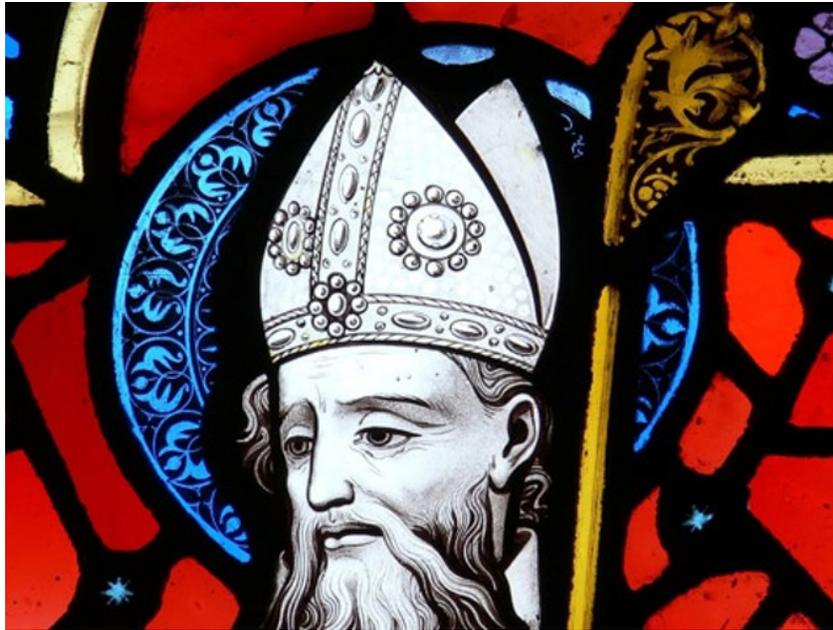


Luck of the Irish

Éirinn go Brách. Ireland Forever!

by Dorothy Raffo



The gig's up – St. Patrick was actually a Welshman.

The biography of St. Patrick is a hard one to research. Legend is lovingly intertwined with fact, and securing precise dates for his birth and death, and where he grew up, is a hard task. This leaves us with mystical tales of a man who has become known across the globe, uniting everyone with even the smallest drop of Celtic blood every March 17.

That's because Patrick died back in approximately AD 461 on March 17, and has since become the principal Christian champion of the Irish Church. Why? Well he brought Christianity to the Irish people for one; for an encore he also drove out all the snakes.

What the feck, you say. Snakes? On the plains? Legend has it that Patrick stood up on the hillside and banished the snakes, using his wooden staff to drive them into the sea. That Ireland is free of snakes to this day is either because

of this legendary man's skill, or because it's an island where they are not indigenous – you decide.

Many people may not know this, but Patrick was the son of a Roman soldier, and not native to Ireland. Some people believe he was a Scot, others a Welshman. In his early teens he was the prisoner of Irish raiders, who took him across the Irish Sea and sold him into slavery. Patrick spent the next six years as a Christian shepherd amongst a Pagan society made up of warring tribes and clans. He learned their ways and language, which would come to serve him well in the future. Legend has it that one night he heard God's voice telling him to return to his homeland. Finally escaping his captors he spent the next fourteen years of his life training to be a priest in France.

He then received a visit from an angel who told him to go back to Ireland, and teach the word of God. He was not the first person to attempt this, but he was by far the most successful. For the next 30 years, until his death, he roamed

Ireland spreading the faith while avoiding angry Celtic Druids. He set up churches, schools and monasteries. Some historians claim that his success came from expressing how important education was for everyone, and he had a knack for persuasion – even managing to get a few of the Celtic heavies on his side.

"Not without reason has the name of St. Patrick been held in veneration through these many generations. There is nowhere a teacher whose services for learning exerted so wide an influence in a time so critical for all culture. There is nowhere a statesman whose activity so completely reformed the character of any people. There is nowhere such a national hero whose fame is sounded across fifteen centuries and can still stir emotions of enthusiasm far beyond his nation's shores. There is nowhere a saint whose teachings are blended like his with the destinies of his nation." Nashua Reporter

Nashua, Chickasaw, Iowa

March 15, 1917

Every year on March 17 we celebrate St. Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland. Originally a Christian holy day, it has become more of an all-encompassing Irish Day and an ingrained part of Irish culture and heritage. Irish monks copying texts, far away from the wars and library burnings that went with the long dark ages on Mainland Europe, are credited for preserving much of the world's knowledge and culture that would otherwise have been lost, so it's a big part of the world's culture as well. The comment "everyone's a little bit Irish on March 17" sums it up nicely.

What's with all the green?

The green that is associated with this day doesn't come from Patrick, whose colour was actually blue – but from the colour of the shamrock he used to teach with. It's also the predominant colour of Ireland itself, dubbed The Emerald Isle after its lush green countryside. Watch any tourism advert for Ireland and it's rolling green hills will be well showcased, maybe with a pint of Guinness in the foreground as an additional incentive to visit.

The symbol of the shamrock is associated with Patrick as well. It's believed he used the three-leafed

clover to explain the concept of the Holy Trinity – the combination of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I am sure many people, as a child, may have hunted for a four or five leaf clover. Rumour has it they bring good luck – the famous Luck of the Irish perhaps?

"If you had the luck of the Irish, you'd be sorry and wish you were dead"

– John Lennon

The idiom "Luck of the Irish" has several possible connotations, some heart warming and others heart wrenching. The history of Ireland is one marred with stories of invasion, famine, rebellion and general hardship. Some feel this phrase is pure sarcasm, that if you have the luck of the Irish then you are actually unlucky. It can be spoken in a tone of derision; that it's only by luck that these people have succeeded. Other people relate it to the tight family bonds the Irish have. In all that the Irish face – including hundreds of years of pure bigotry for Irish immigrants – they remain steadfast, finding strength through friends and family.

It might also have a more American origin, as several of the most successful miners during the gold and silver rush days had Irish roots.

Folklore also has it that if you manage to catch a leprechaun then you get three wishes – lucky indeed!

Now about those leprechauns; apparently these fellas are not related to the figure on the side of a Luck Charms cereal box. They are the mischief-makers of Irish folklore; shoemakers by trade, they love a good practical joke.

I am going to move swiftly on before people get annoyed by the mentioning of pots of gold at the end of rainbows and other twee tourism driven trivialities.

The Blow-in Canadian Irish

Between 1825 and 1970, over 1.2 million Irish immigrants arrived into Canada. Statistics Canada's 2006 census revealed that 14 per cent of Canada's population had full or partial Irish descent. That makes the Canadian Irish the fourth largest ethnic group in Canada today.

Newfoundland is where Irish fishermen from Cork arrived back in the 1500s. There was another large influx during the War of 1812 (many of them conscripted soldiers fighting for both sides), and again during the Great Irish Hunger of 1845–1852 (also known as the Potato Famine after a blight killed off a large portion of that nation's tubers).

Ontario, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick – and especially Saint John, NB – also became popular destinations. Canada was a cheaper option for the destitute Catholic Irish than the U.S. or New Zealand.

Most got work on the railroads, canals and in the forestry industry. To attract workers, free land grants were given out in certain areas. Many communities still carry the Irish place names given to them like Ballyduff, Dundalk, Limerick, Ripley, and Westport.

Many Quebecois have Irish ancestry, some say as many as 40 per cent. The journey to Canada was horrific and a lot of the passengers did not survive. The Catholic Church found the subsequent orphans new homes with French Canadians. They often kept their Irish last names, but took French Canadian as their first language.

Annually attracting a crowd of over 60,000 people, Montreal's St. Patrick's Day Parade is the oldest in Canada, dating back to 1824. In 2004, the Ontario Legislature proclaimed March 17 as Irish Heritage Day to recognize the Irish contribution to the development of the Province. The Flag of Montreal features the shamrock in its bottom right corner, representing the Irish.

Newfoundland, or Talamh an ...isc ("the land of fish"), is often thought of as the most Irish place in the world outside of Ireland. The Irish gave them their music, accent, and the still recognizable family names of Southern Ireland. Newfoundland and Labrador is the only Canadian jurisdiction where St. Patrick's Day is an actual holiday – come on B.C., we can do it too.

St. Paddy's Day Fun Facts

- New York's first St. Patrick's Day Parade was in 1762, making it the longest running civilian parade in the world. This year 3 million spectators, and approximately 150,000 participants are expected to join in the festivities!
- Chicago celebrates St. Patrick's Day

by dying the Chicago River green! This stretches for 156 miles (251 km) all the way through Chicago, and requires at least 40 pounds of green food colouring.

- In Dublin this year over 15,000 pounds of fireworks will be released into the Irish skies.
- The British Queen Mother used to have bowls of shamrocks flow in from Ireland to present her Irish Guard. They still wear a shamrock today. Shamrocks are worn as a symbol of remembrance thus predating the red poppy of Flanders fields.
- Montserrat, known as the "Emerald Island of the Caribbean," was founded by two Irish refugees, and is the only place outside of Ireland and Canada where St. Patrick's Day is celebrated as a public holiday.
- For 67 years the Irish had to put up with closed pubs on St. Patrick's Day. It was viewed as a religious holiday; this law was thankfully overturned in 1970.
- Guinness is the best selling drink in Ireland. However, in 2006 more Guinness was served in Canada!
- "Drowning the Shamrock" has a rather obvious meaning – knocking back a few drinks in the name of St. Patrick! It comes from the 18th century British custom of giving the Irish troops an extra ration of grog on March 17 to boost their morale.

What's the craic?

Unless you're a feckin' eejit, the Dubh Linn Gate is the obvious place to be this St. Paddy's Day. The pub was literally relocated from Ireland, piece by piece and reassembled in its current location. The original décor gives it that authentic feel, with old Guinness ads, brass clocks, harps and pictures lining the walls. I ask manager, Brad Skerrett, what their plans are for this St. Patrick's Day, but he simply says all they do is turn up the volume.

The Dubh Linn Gate prides itself on offering the hospitality of the Irish every day of the week, not just on the 17th. However, their seven Irish front-of-house staff will be on the schedule, and five bands are on the list for St. Patrick's Day this year.

Some friends and I were chatting about why the Dubh Linn is such a great venue; no one could put their finger on it. Is it the awesome beer list, the Celtic tunes, the location, the kilts?

Then a wise friend nailed it; "It's a just a gathering." A good ol' fashioned gathering of friends and good people. I really think that speaks to why Irish pubs are so reliable wherever you go in the world."

Irish pubs are renowned for being the liveliest pubs around and let's face it, we all enjoy a good pub every day of the year. Adding live entertainment just adds to the experience. Damien Brennan is the front man for Murphy's Lagh, which is made up of Damien on guitar and vocals and Shamma Sabir on the fiddle. I interview them right after their first set of the day. They invite me for dinner and drinks as if they are at home, and I am a close friend coming to call.

Damien grew up just outside of Belfast; he is one of 10 children and was a musician from an early age. His family finally moved across to Canada after a few too many close calls with "The Troubles" in his home country. He casually jokes about his childhood, and although he recounts stories as if they were a Monty Python sketch, the underlying story is terrifying. Shamma comments that she often hears this dark humour. She believes it's unique to the Irish, the way they cover dramatic events with a thin veil of humour.

Shamma is actually Canadian and a classically trained violinist. She learned the fiddle after entertaining at a nursing home in the Prairies. Instead of sheet music, she learned by ear and fell in love with the collaborative style of playing the fiddle. She comments that although Irish music has always been popular in North America, it was the release of the show "River Dance" that really propelled Irish music to the forefront. Damien comments that Irish pubs and bars outside of Ireland itself, often portray a Hollywood version of an Irish pub, but he comments that the Dubh Linn Gate has got it just right.

"It's like sitting in someone's living room. I've played here for 12 years and the hospitality is amazing. They have a knack for hiring great staff. It's a place where people can come and relax – forget their troubles and laugh amongst friends. A little bit of cheeky Irishness goes a long way. This is a bar full of characters, and that's why people will come back time and again."

The Dubh Linn Gate supports live music, and embraces the Irish culture instead of slipping it in-between sports shows or DJs. People enjoy Damien's banter, he loves hecklers and can often be found chatting to people just before

he goes on so he knows just who to pick on during the show.

And where will he be this St. Patrick's Day? Why, he'll be making his six-hour commute (he lives in Kelowna) to his favourite Irish pub, and tucking into some famous Irish fare; that's if Shamma doesn't make him order a salad. I say goodbye as they need to warm up before their second set, and I decide to stay for one more Guinness – be rude not to.

I can't help my foot from tapping along with music, and when Shamma breaks out her fiddle the crowd claps along and an inebriated snowboarder takes to the floor for a short jig. As I look around the room, the crowd is incredibly international; they even have a Mexican groupie who casually shouts out, "I love you guys!" every time they break.

Apart from having an Irish boyfriend, I don't have much claim to Irish heritage. However the warmth that I feel as I watch the band play is infectious, and I know that come St. Paddy's Day I'll be drinking with the best of them. So hats off to you Ireland, and thank you for giving us March 17. What a great excuse to get absolutely banjaxed!

If the line up outside the Dubh Linn Gate is a little off putting, don't despair, you'll find the St. Patrick's Day spirit celebrated all the way through the village. Check out: Earls, Elephant & Castle, The Longhorn and Blacks, to name but a few. So enjoy drowning the shamrock, and remember to raise your pint and say "Slainté!" (pronounced SLAN-cha) for "health."

<http://www.murphyslagh.com/>

St. Patrick's Day Drinks

The politically incorrect 'Car Bomb': is a beautiful combination of Bushmills Irish Whisky (0.5oz) and Baileys (0.5oz) dropped into a glass of Guinness (4oz).

Emerald Isle Martini: For those sex in the city types, mix 1oz gin, 1 tsp green crème de menthe and two dashes of bitters.

Beer concoctions: Half and Half is equal parts Guinness and Harp Lager, and Black and Tan is equal parts Guinness and Smithwicks Ale.

Here's to a long life and a merry one.

Irish Eyes: (An Irish White Russian) Mix
1oz Irish whiskey, 1/4 oz green crème
de menthe and 2oz cream in a cocktail
shaker with lots of ice. Garnish with a
cherry.

A quick death and an easy one
A pretty girl and an honest one
A cold beer – and another one!

St. Patrick's Day Toast:

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