

## The History Of St. Patrick's Day

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{mosgoogle}St. Patrick's Day has become a celebration of all things Irish. Most public celebrations include quite large quantities of alcohol. Many families serve corned beef, cabbage, and mint chocolate pies every year on March 17th. And some cities like Chicago turn large bodies of water green to commemorate the life of St. Patrick.

But who was St. Patrick? St. Patrick is the patron saint of Ireland and is one of the most celebrated figures in modern Christianity. He was born to British aristocrats in the late fourth century; as in most aristocratic families at that time, Patrick as a later son was destined for the priesthood in order to bring tax incentives to his wealthy family. When he was 16 years old, he was captured by Irish raiders and held for six years. During this time, he became much more spiritual as he was a lonely shepherd and required his faith to keep him strong.

After six years in County Mayo, Patrick heard a voice, that he believed to be God's, telling him to leave Ireland (as was indicated in his writings many years later). He walked hundreds of miles to the coast where he was able to escape to Britain. He was then ordained into the priesthood. He returned to Ireland as a priest, as the majority of Irish were at that time Pagan.

Patrick's time in captivity in Ireland had influenced him greatly and he brought many Irish customs to his parishioners. He began celebrating Easter with a large bonfire, following the Irish practice of honoring their gods with fire. And he created the Celtic Cross by superimposing the image of a sun onto the cross. St. Patrick died in 460 AD, and it is largely believed that he died on March 17th.

As time went on, St. Patrick's legend grew throughout the United Kingdom and particularly in Ireland. He became a figure that was larger than life, and it is believed he completed many near-impossible feats, including the driving out of the snakes and abolishment of the Druids at Tara. His influence on everything Christian in Ireland; however, is unmistakable. He can be singularly credited for spreading Christianity throughout all of Ireland.

The first St. Patrick's Day was celebrated in New York City on March 17, 1762. Irish soldiers serving in the British Army in the American Colonies marched through the streets of New York to celebrate their Irish homeland from which they had long since been away. St. Patrick's Cathedral stands in Manhattan as a majestic reminder of the history of Irish people in New York City.

As America grew, so did its Irish population. Throughout the late 18th century, Irish Aid societies like the Friendly Sons of Saint Patrick would hold annual parades celebrating St. Patrick's Day. These parades came to include bagpipes and drums, even though bagpipes were known more as a Scottish custom than Irish.

When the Great Potato Famine hit in 1845, almost a million poor Irishmen streamed into America. Unlike their middle-class Protestant predecessors, these immigrants were Catholic and often uneducated. They found great difficulty in finding work, and were ridiculed in public and in the press as drunken monkeys with undecipherable accents. During this time, St. Patrick's Day celebrations grew decidedly more subdued.

By the early 20th century; however, the Irish population in the United States came to realize that they were large in number and thus had voting power. They began to court public opinion and became quite a political machine. When Harry S. Truman attended the New York City St. Patrick's Day parade in 1948, many Irish-Americans knew that they were at last an accepted part of American culture.

In Ireland itself, St. Patrick's Day was traditionally a religious holiday. In fact, until the mid-1970's, Irish law dictated that all pubs and bars had to be closed. By 1995; however, the Irish government began to use St. Patrick's Day as a driver for tourism as people all over the world clamored for all things Irish. St. Patrick's Festival in Dublin now draws over 1 million people in a multi-day celebration with parades, concerts, and fireworks.

In homes throughout the world, St. Patrick's Day is celebrated without alcoholic excess. Many Irish Catholic families celebrate with a day of prayers. Families cook the traditional Irish feast of corned beef (also known as Irish bacon), cabbage, and soda bread. Many of these families end the night with some coffee with Irish crême, and a chocolate pie or cake liberally saturated with mint flavoring. These traditions are passed from generation to generation, and are revered as much as if not more so than the alcoholic debauchery that is known so well.

About The Author: Jane S. Roseen is the Owner and President of Harmony Sweets, an international gourmet chocolate shop. Harmony Sweets's mission focuses on individual consumers, as well as corporate gift-giving and wholesale

sales to retail stores throughout the United States and Canada. Website: <http://www.harmonysweets.com>