

# GOING GREEN FOR ST. PATRICK'S DAY

Originally published in *The Blade* on Sunday, March 15, 2009

BY RYAN E. SMITH  
BLADE STAFF WRITER

Everyone makes it sound as if going green is such a new thing these days, when in truth the Irish — and all of us who like to pretend for a day — have been doing it for years and years on St. Patrick's Day. We wear green clothes; we drink green beverages. In some cities, we even dye our river green.

Too bad the original color assigned to St. Patrick was blue. Maybe the mix-up occurred over the years because of the shamrock — which the saint allegedly used to explain the concept of the Holy Trinity — or Ireland's famous emerald colors or because green came to be associated with nationalist efforts.

In a way, there couldn't be a better example of the melding of fact and fiction that accompanies this festive holiday. There are plenty of others associated with St. Patrick, such as the idea that he banished all the snakes from Ireland. (There were none there to begin with, but it does make a nice metaphor for his work driving out pagan ideology.)

That's why it sometimes helps to have a guide. You may not be one of the 36.5 million Americans who claimed Irish heritage in 2007 — more than eight times the population of Ireland itself, according to the U.S. Census Bureau — but if you study up before Tuesday, no one has to know.

## ST. PATRICK'S DAY FAVORITES

- Corned beef and cabbage: A traditional meal of Irish Americans on St. Patrick's Day. The corned beef took the place of Irish bacon around the turn of the 20th century when Irish immigrants living on New York City's Lower East Side learned about the cheaper alternative from their Jewish neighbors.
- Erin Go Bragh \air-in go bra\: Irish for "Ireland Forever."
- Leprechauns: Tiny, cranky figures of Celtic folktales whose duties usually included fixing the shoes of other fairies; known for their trickery, which they used to protect their treasure. The idea of a cheerful, friendly leprechaun was introduced in the 1959 Disney film, *Darby O'Gill and the Little People*.
- Shamrock: A traditional, green symbol of Ireland that symbolized the rebirth of spring. It is associated with St. Patrick because according to legend he used the plant's three leaves to explain the Holy Trinity.
- Slainte \slawn-cha\: The way the Irish say "cheers!" It means "health."
- Make yourself a green beer: In a chilled pint-size glass pour 16 ounces golden Irish lager, add 3-6 drops green food coloring, and mix. Enjoy

## ST. PATRICK'S DAY TIMELINE

- Late 4th Century: St. Patrick is born in Britain to wealthy parents. He arrives in Ireland after being kidnapped at age 16 by Irish raiders and sold as a slave. Escaping after six years, he returns later to convert the Irish and minister to Christians.
- circa 461: St. Patrick dies on March 17.
- 1762: New York City holds its first parade for the holiday, featuring Irish soldiers serving in the English military.
- 1962: The tradition of dyeing the Chicago River green begins when 100 pounds of vegetable dye is poured into the river. The water stays colored for a week. (Today less dye is used and it lasts only several hours.)
- 1970s: With St. Patrick's Day traditionally seen as a religious occasion, Irish laws still require pubs to close on March 17.

## MOVIES TO WATCH TO GET YOU IN AN IRISH MOOD

- *Odd Man Out* (1947) A chase movie set in Northern Ireland starring James Mason as part of an underground rebel organization.
- *The Quiet Man* (1952). John Wayne in a love story in Ireland? Believe it!
- *The Dead* (1987). Check out John Huston's final film. Or you could just read the short story by James Joyce in his book *Dubliners*.
- *The Commitments* (1991). Putting together a soul band in Dublin has never been so gritty — or inspirational. Based on the Roddy Doyle novel.
- *In the Name of the Father* (1993). If it's an Irish movie, it must star Daniel Day-Lewis. This time, he's a Belfast man falsely accused in a bombing in England.

Contact Ryan E. Smith at: [ryansmith@theblade.com](mailto:ryansmith@theblade.com) or 419-724-6103.

[< previous](#)

[next >](#)