

Your Name

Mr. Larson

Intermediate Computers

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## Saint Patrick's Day: 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 Tommy Makem 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.

### 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.

### The Celebration

About 41.5 billion pounds and 2.6 billion pounds of U.S. beef and cabbage, respectively, were sold in 2007. Corned beef and cabbage is a traditional St. Patrick's Day dish. The corned beef celebrants eat on St. Patrick's Day may very well have originated in Texas, which produced 6.8 billion pounds worth of beef, while the cabbage most likely came from California, which produced 581 million pounds worth, or New York (580 million pounds).

Irish Soda Bread gets its name and distinctive character from the use of baking soda instead of yeast as the leavening agent.

Lime-green chrysanthemums are often requested for St. Patrick's Day parades and celebrations.

### The Parade

The first St. Patrick's Day parade took place in the United States. Irish soldiers serving in the English military marched through New York City on March 17, 1762.

The New York City St. Patrick's Day parade marches up 5th Avenue from 44th street to 86th street. In 2009 the parade will be on Tuesday, March 17, and will begin at 11 a.m.

Over 100 St. Patrick's Day parades take place around the United States, but the parades in New York City and Boston are the largest.

The New York St. Patrick's Day parade does not allow automobiles or floats, but over 150,000 marchers participate in the parade.

### Places to Spend the Day

There are 4 places in the United States named Shamrock, the floral emblem of Ireland. Mount Gay-Shamrock, W.Va., and Shamrock, TX, were the most populous, with 2,623 and 1,841 residents, respectively. Shamrock Lakes, Ind., had 162 residents and Shamrock, OK, 125. (Statistic for Mount Gay-Shamrock is from Census 2000; the other statistics in the paragraph are 2007 estimates.)

There are 9 places in the United States that share the name of Ireland's capital, Dublin. Since Census 2000, Dublin, CA, has surpassed Dublin, OH, as the most populous of these places (39,328 compared with 34,964, respectively, as of July 1, 2005).

If you are still not into the spirit of St. Paddy's Day after stopping by one of the places named "Shamrock" or "Dublin", then you might consider paying a visit to Emerald Isle, NC, with 3,686 residents.

### 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, Mass., 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, Mass., 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.

“St. Patricks Day.” July 4, 1776. <http://www.history.com>.