**St. Patrick's Day**

**Who Was St. Patrick? Was there really a St. Patrick? Did he really drive the snakes out of Ireland? Probably not, since snakes weren't native to Ireland.**

**St. Patrick was born in Britain as Maewyn Succat. At age 16 (around AD 400), he was kidnapped from his home on the west coast and carried off to Ireland to become a slave who worked as a shepherd. After six years, he escaped; upon returning home, he received his call (in a dream) to preach the Gospel. He spent the next 15 or so years in a monastery, preparing for his missionary work. When he became a priest, his name was changed to Patricius, and eventually, Patrick. Although some Christians lived in Ireland at the time, it was Patrick who spread Christianity throughout the land and brought an organized church into existence.**

**The Shamrock**

**We wear a shamrock on St. Patrick's Day because, legend says, St. Patrick used its three leaves to explain the Holy Trinity. (The Trinity is the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, as three divine persons who are one divine being (God). The truth of the St. Patrick legend, however, is in question, as there is no direct record that the saint actually used the shamrock as a teaching tool.**

**St. Patrick's Day Facts, Fun, and Folklore**

**Blue was the color originally associated with St. Patrick's Day, but green is now favored.**

**St. Patrick's Day is the traditional day for planting peas.**

**Cabbage seeds are often planted today, too, and old-time farmers believed that to make them grow well, you needed to plant them while wearing your nightclothes! *(The Old Farmer's 2019 Almanac)***

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**St. Patrick's Day**

**Green wasn't always the color of St. Patrick's Day. Paintings show the patron saint wearing blue robes, and the official color of the dormant Order of St. Patrick was sky blue. In 1541, British monarch Henry XVIII declared himself the king of Ireland and gave the country a royal-blue coat of arms. But as disenchantment with British rule grew over the centuries, the Irish adopted green as a symbol of rebellion. *(Jen McCaffery, in Reader's Digest)***

**March 17 ranks fourth on the list of booziest holidays in America, behind New Year's Eve, Christmas, and the Fourth of July. The drink of choice around the world: Guinness. In 2019, revelers are expected to down 13 million pints of it. *(Jen McCaffery, in Reader's Digest)***

**Big cities try to claim bragging rights for the day's top celebrations, but they aren't the only parties in town. Montserrat, aka the Emerald Isle of the Caribbean, throws a St. Patrick's Festival that lasts more than a week. *(Jen McCaffery, in Reader's Digest)***

**The patron saint of Ireland isn't actually Irish. According to some accounts, St. Patrick'sa real name was Maewyn Succat and he was born in what is now Britain (gasp!) around the end of the fourth century. He was kidnapped by Irishmen when he was 16, found religion in captivity, and ultimately became a proselytizing priest. *(Jen McCaffery, in Reader's Digest)***

**After noticing the sign “St. Patrick’s Church,” Billy says to his Mom: “That church should have GREEN windows!” (Bil Keane, in The Family Circus comic strip)**

**Corned beef and cabbage is the quintessential St. Patrick's meal, right? Actually, in pre-famine Ireland, beef was a rare delicacy -- the commoners typically ate pork. But when Irish immigrants came to the United States, they reportedly noticed their Jewish neighbors and fellow immigrants buying brisket from kosher butchers and followed suit. The Jews even slow-cooked their Passover meal with potatoes. (The Irish threw in the cabbage.) *(Jen McCaffery, in Reader's Digest)***

**On St. Patrick's Day there are many different customs that people do. One of the most widely known customs is to wear green. One famous saying is that on St. Patrick's Day everybody is Irish. Every year on March 17 more than 100 U. S. cities have a parade for this festive holiday. The largest parade is held in New York City. Another custom takes place in Chicago. The custom is dyeing the Chicago River green. The tradition started in 1962 when some city pollution control workers used dye to trace some illegal sewage discharge and realized that the green dye might provide a unique way to celebrate St. Patrick's Day. On that year they released 100 pounds of green vegetable dye into the river. That much dye made the river green for a whole week. Today only 40 pounds are used so the river stays green for several hours. Another custom is that people wear shamrocks on their shoulders to remember St. Patrick. (Judy Mackenzie and David Milster, in LakeCrestPark Messenger)**

**St. Patrick did convert many pagans to Christianity, but the story of his driving all the snakes out of Ireland during his 40-day fast on a hilltop is bunk. Biologists think the reason Ireland is snake-free today is that the reptiles never migrated to the island in the first place. The legend of the snakes is probably just a metaphor for St. Patrick's having driven evil out of Ireland. *(Jen McCaffery, in Reader's Digest)***

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**More than 10,000 Catholics took to the streets of Belfast in 1988 to hold the first St. Patrick's Day Parade in the long-divided Northern Ireland city. In hope of encouraging Protestant involvement, the parade organizer told the fife-and-drum bands not to play any anti-British music. *(Jen McCaffery, in Reader's Digest)***

**Boston and New York both claim to have hosted the first St. Patrick's Day Parade in the 1700s (though they quibble over the definition of a parade). That said, the first procession honoring the Irish saint may have taken place in 1601, when residents of the Spanish-speaking settlement of St. Augustine, Florida, marched through the streets in recognition of St. Patrick -- or San Patricio, in this case -- whom they considered the official protector of their fields of maize. *(Jen McCaffery, in Reader's Digest)***

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**Saint Patrick's Day is the Irish feast day that celebrates Saint Patrick (386-461), the patron saint of Ireland. It is a legal holiday in the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, the overseas territory of Montserrat and the Canadian province of Newfoundland and Labrador. It is celebrated worldwide by the Irish and those of Irish descent (and increasingly by many of non-Irish descent). A major parade takes place in Dublin and in most other Irish towns and villages. The four largest parades of recent years have been held in Dublin, New York City, Manchester, and Savannah. Parades also take place in other places, including London, Paris, Rome, Munich, Moscow, Beijing, Hong Kong, Singapore, Copenhagen and throughout the Americas. As well as being a celebration of Irish culture, St. Patrick's Day is a Christian festival celebrated in the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of Ireland (among other churches in the Anglican Communion) and some other denominations. However, as a Christian festival, St. Patrick's Day sometimes is required to give way to a more important feast. The day always falls in the season of Lent, and it may fall in Holy Week. In church calendars if St. Patrick's Day falls on a Sunday, it is moved to the following Monday. If it falls in Holy Week, it is moved to the second Monday after Easter. In Ireland it is traditional that those observing a Lenten fast may break it for the duration of St. Patrick's Day. (Judy Mackenzie and David Milster, in South of the Lake Messenger)**

**Slightly less popular but with its own rabid fan base: McDonald's Shamrock Shake. The Restaurant chain created a "McDonald's Finder" app last year to help customers track down the minty green confection -- and it is a confection, a large Shamrock contains 800 calories and 113 grams of sugar. *(Jen McCaffery, in Reader's Digest)***

**The longest running St. Patrick's Day parades in the U.S. are:**

**\* Boston, Massachusetts, since 1737**

**\* New York, New York, since 1762**

**\* Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, since 1780**

**\* Savannah, Georgia, since 1813**

**\* Carbondale, Pennsylvania, since 1833**

**\* Chicago, Illinois, since 1843**

**\* New Haven, Connecticut, since 1845**

**\* San Francisco, California, since 1852.**

**The longest running St. Patrick's Day parade in Canada takes place in Montreal, which began in 1824. (Judy Mackenzie and David Milster, in South of the Lake Messenger)**

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**Long May Your Shamrock Shine: Shamrocks, worn on St. Patrick's Day in Ireland, tend to wilt by the end of the day. But a team of scientists at University College of Dublin have developed a method of growing shamrocks in a polymer gel solution that produces wilt-free plants. However, they note, the seeds were imported from New Zealand. *(Farm and Food, the Irish agricultural journal, as it appeared in Catholic Digest, March, 1998, page 24)***

**The festivities reach the highest echelons. Ireland's prime minister gives the U.S. president an Irish cut-glass bowl filled with shamrocks, the three-leafed sprig that is one of the state's emblems. The tradition dates back to 1952, when the first Irish ambassador to America, John Joseph Hearne, reportedly dropped off a box of shamrocks for Harry Truman (who was out of town). *(Jen McCaffery, in Reader's Digest)***

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**St. Patrick's Day used to be a solemn commemoration of the day he died. In 1927, Irish officials even banned the sale of alcohol as his name day (as well as on Christmas and Good Friday), partly at the insistence of the Catholic Church. Until the early 1960s, one of the only places you could buy a beer in Ireland on St. Patrick's Day was the well-attended Royal Dublin Dog Show. Commercial pressure led to the lifting of the ban in 1960. *(Jen McCaffery, in Reader's Digest)***

**Something From Home: For St. Patrick's Day, I asked the five-year-olds in my Sunday-school class to bring "something green that you love." The next Sunday, they brought the usual green hats, green sweaters and green books. But one boy entered with an especially big grin. Behind him, wearing a green dress, came his four-year-old sister. (Vickie Lucas, in Catholic Digest)**

**St. Patrick's testing ground: Forget the green beer, said Helen O'Neill in the Associated Press. Anyone serious about honoring St. Patrick tries to make a pilgrimage to Ireland's Croagh Patrick, a "remote, rugged" mountain that overlooks the Atlantic. The story goes that the fifty-century preacher who converted Ireland to Christianity fasted and prayed on the peak for 40 days as he wrestled with demons and eventually banished snakes from the entire island. Visitors climb to the summit year-round, often barefoot, including on the saint's feast day, March 17.. Though the mountain is just 2,500 feet high, "even seasoned hikers are surprised by its steepness and difficulty." On the day I climbed to the top last year, many hikers were barefoot, and "all around, thick Irish brogues mingled with languages and accents from around the world." In County Mayo, "St. Patrick is big business," but it is the mountain -- "majestic, mysterious, and a little foreboding" -- that remains the main draw. (The Week magazine, March 13, 2015)**

**Why we refuse to speak Irish: I went to the trouble of becoming fluent in Gaelic, said John O'Dwyer, and now I have almost no one to speak it with. Across the Irish Sea in Wales, the people "proudly embrace Welsh" as a symbol of their national identity. But here, few of us can competently converse in our own native tongue. Evidently, "any sentimental attachment to the language by Irish people was immediately defenestrated after independence." Perhaps that's because we are all forced to toil away at the intricacies of Irish grammar in school., After all, Irish people have a long history of rejecting whatever others try to impose upon us: "Norman Conquest, Protestant Reformation, Act of Union, Guinness Light." Making Irish compulsory made it distasteful. Even students leaving Gael Colaisti -- Irish immersion schools -- "will almost inevitably revert to England beyond the school gates." It might help if the government did more to promote Gaelic, perhaps by designating bilingual conversation spaces in libraries or by encouraging people to pepper their everyday speech with Gaelic phrases. If that doesn't work, "I'm afraid we must invoke the nuclear option and entirely ban the language." That should ensure that the rebellious Irish psyche will thrill to the challenge of total mastery. (The Week magazine, March 19, 2021)**

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