

# st. patrick's day

**L**et's get something straight — the honorable St. Patrick did not chase the snakes from Ireland back in the 13th century.

That story, dear friends, is allegorical. The snakes, in Catholic Church lore, represent pagans.

St. Patrick, did, though, live a pretty strange life. He was born in about 390 A.D., kidnapped by pirates and made a slave at 16. He admits in his "Confessio" that he was "a sinner, most unlearned, the least of all the faithful and utterly despised by many."

Patrick decided to enter the Catholic Church as a vowed member of the religious community after a stint as a swineherd. Around 432, he returned to Ireland as a bishop, where he converted nearly the entire

country to Catholicism, eliminated the slave trade and did away with such grisly pagan rituals as human sacrifice.

So how did this saint, who died on March 17, 461, end up being so closely associated with leprechauns, shamrocks, green clothes, parades, green beer and binge drinking? You can blame Boston. Or New York. Or Chicago. Or anywhere the Irish settled in this country.



**HOW DID THIS SAINT END UP BEING SO CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH LEPRECHAUNS AND BINGE DRINKING?** BY MARK LUCE

The Irish brought St. Patrick and his day to the New World. Instead of the traditional quiet celebration of his life, they turned the day into a more secular celebration of their homeland. On March 17, 1737, in Boston, some Irish drank heavily at the formation of the Irish Charitable Society. Then, on March 17, 1762, Irish soldiers (under British command) marched through the streets of New York with banners and music.

Little did those soldiers know that their rag-tag parade would launch a thousand floats and seal politicians' plans on the feast of St. Patrick (March 17th) for hundreds of years.

We now wear green, drop massive amounts of food coloring into harbors, kiss people on their cheeks and generally spend the day in pubs thanks to those early party pioneers. Once installed in the comfort of your favorite watering hole, Guinness follows singing, which follows Jameson, which follows singing,

which follows Bushmills. Tradition says you repeat that ritual as often as possible to toast the Irish.

Although most St. Patrick's Day parades are morning affairs, I've seen far more interesting pageants after the bars close, when portly fellows in leprechaun outfits say they'll keep the party going 'til the "wee hours, laddie."

Then they usually lead the cavalcade in a slurred version of *My*

*Wild Irish Rose*. Later, these same chaps will claim that the narrow neck of whiskey bottles is "to keep the bottle from being emptied in one swig." They're forthcoming chug-a-lug belies their previous statement.

If you are not looking to jump on the careening St. Patrick's party wagon, there are plenty of ways to celebrate the Irish. We suggest reading James Joyce's excellent collection of stories, *The Dubliners*, while sipping a bowl of watercress soup and chomping on corned beef and cabbage slathered in horseradish.

If you choose to revel on St. Patrick's Day, please keep in mind the less fortunate by repeating this Irish wisdom first thing on March 18: "Pity the sober in the morning. How they are feeling then is the best they will feel all day."

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PHOTODISC

GOLFDOM, Volume 58, No. 3, (ISSN 1526-4270) is published monthly by Advanstar Communications Inc., 131 W First St., Duluth, MN 55802-2065. Subscription rates: One year \$30 (U.S. and possessions), \$49 (Canada and Mexico) and \$78 (all other countries). Air expedited service is available in countries outside the U.S. and Canada for an additional \$45 per year. Current issue single copies (prepaid only) \$5 (U.S. and possessions), \$7 (Canada and Mexico) and \$8 (all other countries). Back issues (if available, prepaid only) \$10 (U.S. and possessions), \$14 (Canada and Mexico) and \$16 (all other countries); add \$6 per order shipping and handling for both current and back issue purchases. Periodicals postage paid at Duluth MN 55806 and additional mailing offices.



POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to GOLFDOM, 131 W 1st St, Duluth, MN 55802-2065. Canadian G.S.T. Number: R-124213133, Publications

Mail Agreement number 1436694. Printed in the U.S.A.

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