THE HISTORY OF ST. PATRICK'S DAY

ST. PATRICK'S DEATH AND THE FIRST ST. PATRICK'S DAY PARADE

Saint Patrick, who lived during the fifth century, is the patron saint and national apostle of Ireland. Born in Roman Britain, he was kidnapped and brought to Ireland as a slave at the age of 16. He later escaped, but returned to Ireland and was credited with bringing Christianity to its people. In the centuries following Patrick's death (believed to have been on March 17, 461), the mythology surrounding his life became ever more ingrained in the Irish culture: Perhaps the most well-known legend is that he explained the Holy Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) using the three leaves of a native Irish clover[1], the shamrock.

More than 100 St. Patrick's Day parades are held across the United States; New York City and Boston are home to the largest celebrations.

Since around the ninth or 10th century, people in Ireland have been observing the Roman Catholic feast day of St. Patrick on March 17. Interestingly, however, the first parade held to honor St. Patrick's Day took place not in Ireland but in the United States. On March 17, 1762, Irish soldiers serving in the English military marched through New York City. Along with their music, the parade helped the soldiers reconnect with their Irish roots, as well as with fellow Irishmen serving in the English army.

GROWTH OF ST. PATRICK'S DAY CELEBRATIONS

Over the next 35 years, Irish patriotism among American immigrants flourished, prompting the rise of so-called "Irish Aid" societies like the Friendly Sons of Saint Patrick and the Hibernian Society. Each group would hold annual parades featuring bagpipes[2] (which actually first became popular in the Scottish and British armies) and drums[3].

---

[1] Clover: trèfle
[2] Bagpipe: cornemuse
[3] Drum: tambour

In 1848, several [New York](#) Irish Aid societies decided to unite their parades to form one official New York City St. Patrick's Day Parade. Today, that parade is the world 's oldest civilian parade and the largest in the United States, with over 150,000 participants. Each year, nearly 3 million people line the 1.5-mile parade route to watch the procession, which takes more than five hours. Boston, [Chicago](#), Philadelphia and Savannah also celebrate the day with parades involving between 10,000 and 20,000 participants each.

THE IRISH IN AMERICA

Up until the mid-19th century, most Irish immigrants in America were members of the Protestant middle class. When the Great Potato Famine hit Ireland in 1845, close to 1 million poor and uneducated Irish Catholics began pouring[4] into America to escape starvation[5]. Despised for their alien religious beliefs and unfamiliar accents by the American Protestant majority, the immigrants had trouble finding even menial jobs[6]. When Irish Americans in the country's cities took to the streets on St. Patrick's Day to celebrate their heritage, newspapers portrayed them in cartoons as drunk, violent monkeys.

The American Irish soon began to realize, however, that their large and growing numbers endowed them with a political power that had yet to be exploited. They started to organize, and their voting block, known as the "green machine," became an important swing vote for political hopefuls. Suddenly, annual St. Patrick's Day parades became a show of strength for Irish Americans, as well as a must-attend event[7] for a slew of political candidates. In 1948, President Harry S. Truman attended New York City 's St. Patrick's Day parade, a proud moment for the many Irish Americans whose ancestors had to fight stereotypes and racial prejudice to find acceptance in the New World.

---

[4] To pour: ici, « affluer ».
[5] Starvation: famine
[6] Menial job: emploi subalterne
[7] Must-attent event: événement incontournable

THE CHICAGO RIVER DYED[8] GREEN ON ST. PATRICK'S DAY

As Irish immigrants spread out over the United States, other cities developed their own traditions. One of these is Chicago's annual dyeing of the Chicago River green. The practice started in 1962, when city pollution-control workers used dyes to trace[9] illegal sewage discharges[10] and realized that the green dye might provide a unique way to celebrate the holiday. That year, they released[11] 100 pounds of green vegetable dye into the river–enough to keep it green for a week! Today, in order to minimize environmental damage, only 40 pounds of dye are used, and the river turns green for only several hours.

Although Chicago historians claim their city's idea for a river of green was original, some natives of Savannah, Georgia (whose St. Patrick's Day parade, the oldest in the nation, dates back to 1813) believe the idea originated in their town. They point out that, in 1961, a hotel restaurant manager named Tom Woolley convinced city officials to dye Savannah's river green. The experiment didn't exactly work as planned, and the water only took on a slight greenish hue[12]. Savannah never attempted to dye its river again, but Woolley maintains (though others refute the claim) that he personally suggested the idea to Chicago's Mayor Richard J. Daley.

ST. PATRICK'S DAY CELEBRATIONS AROUND THE WORLD

Today, people of all backgrounds celebrate St. Patrick's Day, especially throughout the United States, Canada and Australia. Although North America is home to the largest productions, St. Patrick's Day is celebrated in many other locations far from Ireland, including Japan, Singapore and Russia.

In modern-day Ireland, St. Patrick's Day has traditionally been a religious occasion. In fact, up until the 1970s, Irish laws mandated that pubs be closed on March 17. Beginning in 1995, however, the Irish government began a national campaign to use interest in St. Patrick's Day to

---

[8] To dye: teindre
[9] To trace: traquer
[10] Sewage discharge: déversement d'eaux usées.
[11] To release: ici, dégager.
[12] Slight greenish hue: teinte légèrement verdâtre.

drive tourism and showcase[13] Ireland and Irish culture to the rest of the world. Today, approximately 1 million people annually take part in Ireland's St. Patrick's Festival in Dublin, a multi-day celebration featuring parades, concerts, outdoor theater productions and fireworks[14] shows.

<div align="right">
Source: History,

http://www.history.com/topics/st-patricks-day/history-of-st-patricks-day

[retrieved in 2017]
</div>

Questions

Reading:

1. Was St. Patrick born in Ireland?

2. When and where did the first parade of St. Patrick's Day take place?

3. What happened in Ireland and in the US in 1845?

---

[13] To showcase: présenter (*a showcase* : une vitrine)
[14] Fireworks: feu d'artifice

4. What occurs in Chicago and in other cities of the US every 17th March? What do you think about that?

5. Where is St. Patrick's Day celebrated today? What about the festivity in Ireland?

Speaking

6. Now, would you like to celebrate St. Patrick's Day? Where? Why?