



CELEBRATING WITH ST. PATRICK

By Lorraine Payette

On March 17, almost every good Canadian becomes Irish. Guinness is available at most watering holes, tonnes of corned beef and cabbage are boiled up to be served with thick slices of tasty soda bread, green wardrobes come out of every closet and a hearty “Erin go Bragh!” (meaning roughly “Ireland Forever!”) is heard throughout the land as we celebrate the anniversary of the death of St. Patrick.

St. Patrick was not born an Irishman. Son of an aristocratic family in Britain, he was born around 390 AD. He enjoyed a country villa, a townhouse, and numerous slaves to fulfill his every whim. A spoiled child, he had little interest in Christianity in his youth.

According to tradition, he was seized by kidnappers when he was 16-years-old and sold into slavery for seven years in the Irish highlands. He suddenly found himself penniless, forced to tend sheep in all kinds of weather, praying constantly for kindness from his masters.

Somewhere during that time, he re-discovered his religion and became a devout Christian. He found an inner strength that would sustain him through every trial. Legend has it that one night he heard a voice in a dream telling him to escape and

return to Britain. Slipping away under cover of darkness, he took passage on a pirate ship and found his way home to his family.

He was ordained as a priest, eventually declaring himself a bishop. He heard the voice again, this time telling him to go back to Ireland where he would bring Christianity to his former captors, offering them salvation through the love and mercy of the Church and a chance to find undying strength within themselves.

This would be no easy task. Irish royalty would harass him, he would be beaten and abused by many of the citizenry, and even his superiors in Britain would look down upon him. At his death on March 17, 461, he would be considered a foolish little man with great delusions, quickly buried and forgotten.

Time and memory work in mysterious ways, and slowly stories were spread about Patrick and what he had accomplished. He was said to have driven the snakes from Ireland (which never had snakes to begin with, but it is a good allegory for his replacement of paganism with Christianity, where the snake is considered to be evil), and to have used the 3-leaved shamrock to teach lessons of the Trinity.

Although he was never officially canonized, Patrick’s fame grew and he became the patron saint of Ireland. When Irish immigrants began coming to North America to settle, they brought him with them, and the celebration of St. Patrick’s Day took on a whole new meaning.

While a holy day in Ireland celebrated with reverence and solemnity, here it became a day of feast and frolic.

Originally, the day was celebrated by Irish charitable organizations, holding banquets to recognize their Irish heritage and that they had never let hardship defeat them. In the eighteenth century, Irish soldiers fighting with the British in the US held the first St. Patrick’s Day parade. The boiled dinners, green beer, and wearing of official green clothing were all established here by those wishing to honour these great people.

On St. Patrick’s Day, be proudly Irish. Shout “Erin Go Bragh!” and celebrate the undying strength and promise of Ireland’s patron saint. **LH**

Editor’s note: In Brockville and Area there is a large Irish cultural community that celebrates their heritage. The Brockville Irish Cultural Society’s Mission Statement is to promote the music and culture of Ireland in Brockville and area. You can check out their facebook page for events and information and you can join the Society for \$5 for a one year membership.