



## St. Patrick's Day

By WBro. Mark Campbell, LEO of Cataract Lodge No. 2  
Minneapolis, MN

Presented by WBro. Alvin Benemerito  
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Long Pine, NE

We will shortly don our green, display our shamrocks and many will drink green beverages in celebration of St. Patrick. Why? How did this celebration of Irishness, Catholicism and all things green come to happen? Who did it and why?

The story of St. Patrick begins in 385AD in Wales when Maewyn a pagan worshipper was born. As a youth Maewyn was sold into slavery and became the slave of Irish Marauders. While in servitude, Maewyn converted to the Roman Catholic faith and after six years escaped to the European continent. He entered Marmoutier Abbey, a monastery at Gaul (Tours, France) and studied under St. Germaine for twelve years.

While at the monastery he came to accept his calling to convert other pagans to Christianity. He desired to return to Ireland but was passed over in favor of Palladius, the first Bishop of Ireland. After two unsuccessful years Palladius was transferred to Scotland and as Patrick, Maewyns adopted Christian name, he became the second Bishop of Ireland.

Patrick traveled Ireland for thirty years, establishing monasteries, schools and churches and successfully converting the Irish to Christianity. His efforts angered the controlling Druid priests and resulted in frequent arrests and persecution. Patrick prevailed and retired to County Down where he died on March 17, 461 at the age of 76.

The anniversary of his death has been adopted as a catholic holiday since as was the custom prior to formal canonization by Rome. As such it was originally a religious holiday acknowledging his efforts and success in converting the pagan Irish clans to Christianity.

Many folk tales have been spread of St. Patrick but few can be substantiated. One tells of Patrick's use of the three-leafed shamrock to teach the holy trinity of Christianity – the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

His followers adopted the wearing of the shamrock to celebrate their saint on his day.

How does a pagan youth become of interest to Freemasons in the 21st Century?

The first American instance of celebration of St. Patrick's Day was in 1737 in Boston. Boston – then as now had a large Irish population and they desired to celebrate their heritage. No regular practice of secular celebration was established outside the church until 1756.

Lt. Col George Washington attached to the British Army had pushed his troops to exhaustion during the French and Indian war. They had labored for days without rest or recreation, and Col Washington, recognizing the large numbers of Irish among the infantry, declared the holiday as a day of celebration to allow the troops rest. In 1756 a celebration and feast was held at the Crown and Thistle Tavern in New York.

As a secular holiday, the first recorded event was when General Washington issued a proclamation declaring March 17, 1780 a holiday for the Continental Army then quartered at Morristown, New Jersey.

This was reportedly the first holiday in two years and was designed to honor those troops of Irish ancestry. Washington is said to have remarked that the holiday was an “act of solidarity with the Irish in their fight for independence.” This may have led to adoption of the holiday as an act of Irish nationalism more than the honoring of a catholic saint.

In Modern Ireland, the holiday remained a largely Christian religious event until 1995. Up to that time, the religious nature of the day caused a law closing all pubs and bars on March 17 to allow proper time for prayer and contemplation. In the interests of promoting tourism, Irish law was changed and parades and pub-focused celebrations were introduced to capture additional travel dollars.

Today, there are 33.7 million Americans of Irish ancestry, Catholic and Protestant together, nine times the population of Ireland at 3.8 million.

So as masons, we have one more thing to thank General Washington for the American adoption of an ancient druid celebration by a pagan turned Christian Bishop, to commemorate his success in converting the Druids and celebration of Irish-American troops efforts to achieve independence in the 18th century.

**Erin go Bragh!**

Ireland Forever / Long Live Ireland

*Courtesy of*

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Ed Halpaus  
<http://www.halpaus.net>

Paul M. Bessel  
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