



Geddy Garden News



Issue #72

March 2000

*"'Tis fine to see the Old World,
and travel up and down
Among the famous palaces
and cities of renown,
To admire the crumbly castles
and the statues of the Kings
But now I think I've had enough
of antiquated things,
So it's home again, and
home again, America for me!"*

Henry Van Dyke

I did enjoy every minute of my visit to Ireland and I was impressed with the beauty of the country of my ancestors. I was very surprised to see Palm trees growing there but then was reminded that the gulf stream is responsible for that.

I arrived in the Emerald Isle on my birthday, which fell on Ash Wednesday this year. Originally, the Council of Nicaea, in A.D. 325, said Easter was to be celebrated on the Sunday that followed the full moon after the vernal equinox, but since 1582 Pope Gregory XIII introduced the calendar we use today. The dates for Easter and Ash Wednesdays vary. Ash Wednesday, being the first day of Lent, is a day of fast and abstinence, which for me meant there was to be no big steak dinner to celebrate my birthday. But just being in Ireland was celebration enough!

These religious Lenten practices were followed in 18th-Century Virginia. In fact, the agricultural calendar is closely linked to the liturgical calendar. Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays after the first Sunday of Lent were called ember days, days of fast. The word ember goes back to the 9th and 10th centuries and refers to the burning off of the fields. The Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday before Holy Thursday were known as Rogation days, which is another agricultural term for planting. The emblem of Ireland is the Shamrock, which is symbolic of the Blessed Trinity, and the Shamrock grows wild throughout Ireland.

All this interlocking between agriculture, or nature, if you will, and religion is very evident in Ireland.

In the 1770s, many of the tens of thousands traveling on the great Philadelphia Wagon Road, which was the most heavily traveled road in America, were people from the city of Ulster in Northern Ireland, who were seeking freedom from poverty. I found it was fun and interesting relating these puzzle pieces together between America and Ireland.

Upon my return, I enjoyed attending the Garden Symposium. There was an informative garden walk with Wes Greene which focused on the art of tree pruning in which he gave us instructions on the proper methods which will produce the best results. I also enjoyed the lecture on Helbores. Helbore, in Greek, means food to kill, which is a clue to the fact that these plants are poisonous. There is the Christmas Rose, *H. Niger*, and the Lenten Rose, *H. Orientales*. These are winter bloomers and shade plants that prefer a humus-rich, limey soil. Although the Hellebores appear to be beautiful and delicate when in bloom, they are deceptively tough and can withstand cold weather and storms. We, attending the symposium, were each delighted to receive as gifts at the end of the symposium, small Lenten Roses, which I have in my garden at home.

The Shad bush is blooming, and the blossoms of the Shad Bush herald the spawning run of the Shadfish. Its berries attract song birds. Perhaps, Phillip Fithian was near some Shad bushes on April 10, 1774, when he wrote in his diary, "This morning is extremely pleasant, full of flowers, and the branches full of lovely singing birds."

Janet Guthrie

