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GEDDY GARDEN NEWS

"A windy day is not the day for Thatching"

Old Irish Proverb

March weather is notorious for being unpredictable. This year has proven to be no exception. For awhile it seemed as though we were really back in March of 1774, because in that year Virginia planters were enduring a severe draught and suffering great losses. We had been experiencing quite a similar situation until this past week when some very welcome rain began to fall. Since then my peas, onions, spinach, and radishes have started to grow in the Geddy Garden.

I love March, regardless of its fickleness. I love the windy days and the way the weather comes as a complete surprise each day. There is seldom any monotony in March.

I also love it because it is the month in which we celebrate St. Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland.

St Patrick was born not in Ireland, but in Wales in AD 385. At the age of sixteen he was abducted and sold as a slave by some Irish marauders. During the period that he was enslaved, he went from being a pagan to a believer in God. After six years he managed to escape from slavery and at the age of twenty-two he went to study in Gaul for twelve years. He was then sent to Ireland as a bishop to convert the pagans there. He successfully established schools, churches, and monasteries. He used the shamrock, which grows wild in Ireland, to explain the doctrine of the Holy Trinity to the pagans.

The shamrock is the white clover, *Trifolium repens*, and authorities agree that this white flowering perennial is the original shamrock. The shamrock had been used by the Celts in Wales as a charm against evil spirits, but after St. Patrick used it, it became an icon for the day we honor St. Patrick. March 17 is the day that he died in AD 461. As early as the 1100s the people of Ireland were wearing the shamrocks on that day and at the day's end they put it in a glass of whiskey and drank it!

In the thirty years in which he served as a missionary in Ireland, he became so successful that he became the patron saint of Ireland and many myths and legends surround him. One myth is that he was responsible for driving the snakes out of Ireland, but there never were any snakes in Ireland. Snakes is simply a metaphor for the pagans that he converted.

St. Bede, who was called the Venerable Bede, wrote about Ireland in AD 700. He wrote, "Ireland is far more favored than Britain by latitude and by its mild and healthy climate...no need to store hay in summer...snow rarely lies more than three days...nor reptiles, no snake can exist there...milk and honey...no lack of vines..." The early missionary monks that went to Ireland from the 6th through the 12th centuries took plantings and seeds from Europe to Ireland. The scribes used blue dye made from woad to write their manuscripts. There is still a wonderful and uniquely Irish word used in Ireland to describe the landscape that surrounds a manor house. The word survives from medieval times. It is 'demesne' and it refers to the property that the lord of the manor reserved for his own use.

The Irish people celebrated the feast day of their patron saint for thousands of years, originally as a holy day and with feasting. It evolved into the celebration that we are more familiar with today

which includes the traditional St. Patrick's Day parade. The first parade took place not in Ireland, but in Boston in 1737. There were so many Irish who had immigrated to Massachusetts that it is not too surprising. By the 1760s there were Irish soldiers marching on St. Patrick's Day in troop marches in New York City displaying their Irish patriotism.

John Rowe, a Boston merchant, mentioned dining with the Sons of St. Patrick, an organization founded to help Irish immigrants adjust socially to the new environment, on St. Patrick's Day with other military officers in 1767.

In 1775 he described another St. Patrick's Day when the officers marched "in Procession with a Chosen Band of Musick to Kings Chapel where a sermon was preached by the Rev. Mr. Nicholls. They returned in the same manner and Dined at Colo. Ingersoll's in King Street."

Our *Virginia Gazette* printed in the May 6th issue of 1773 how London celebrated St. Patrick's Day, "*Yesterday being St. Patricks Day, The same was observed at Court, when the Knights Companions of the Most Noble Orders of the Gartor, Thistle, and Bath, appeared in the Collars of their respective Orders, The court was very brilliant, and the Drawing Room much crowded.*"

So we find the observance of the day is taking place in Ireland, England, and in other colonies of our country. We find celebrations taking place from Charleston, SC to Boston, and also in between. Nicholas Cresswell in his journal tells of how it was celebrated in Alexandria, Va. in 1775. He wrote, "Went to a Ball made by the Irish Gentry in commemoration of St. Patrick, the titular saint of the Irish. Conducted with great decorum. Just going to bed at two o'clock in the morning."

A newspaper article in 1763 reported that 200 settlers from Ireland had arrived in Pensacola, Florida, and that same newspaper reported in 1766 of an annual St. Patrick's Day celebration in New York that was "ushered in at dawn with fifes and drums." Now that is beginning to sound like the parade I know and love.

In 1778 General Washington told us that he loved St. Patrick's Day too. At Valley Forge some of the Pennsylvania Germans ridiculed the Irish on St. Patrick's Day. It almost became an ugly scene when General Washington stepped in and save the day with these words, "*I, too am a lover of St. Patrick's Day and must settle the affair by making all of the army keep the day.*" He then ordered extra drinks of ale for his men in his command, thus making peace.

St. Patrick's Day was alive and well in Colonial America and was a celebration of national pride and freedom.

Janet Guthrie