

Going green

St. Patrick's Day comes to town on **March 17**

By Lisa Evans



Rolling green hills, green shamrocks, and stories of fairies and leprechauns are all images you might think of when you think of Ireland. With Canada's long history of Irish immigration — the Irish were Canada's largest ethnic group for most of the 19th century — it's no wonder that most Canadians get into the spirit of St. Patrick's Day, the annual celebration of the patron saint of Ireland. An Irish national holiday and still a public holiday in Newfoundland and Labrador, St. Patrick's Day is celebrated across the country on March 17.

Canadians celebrate the Irish holiday by dressing in green and heading out to the local Irish pub to drink green beer. In the larger cities of Toronto and Vancouver, thousands attend the annual St. Patrick's Day parades.

Irishman Ian McAteer says while he's not sure where the tradition of drinking green beer comes from, the parade is what he most fondly remembers of his childhood celebrations of St. Patrick in Ireland. "My first memory of St. Patrick's Day was when I was eight years old. My family went

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to mass early on Sunday morning, my mum gave me a shamrock to wear and all the kids were put in the car and driven into Dublin city centre to watch the annual parade. This became an annual tradition for the family," says McAteer.

Nearly every town on the island nation hosts a parade with the support of the local community. Irish immigration caused these traditions to spread to other countries around the world, including Canada. Irish immigration to Ontario was huge during the Irish Famine from 1845 to 1849. During this time, the Irish became the largest ethnic



group in Toronto — so large, in fact, that in 1920 Toronto gained the title "the Belfast of Canada." Even Toronto's hockey team, the Maple Leafs, were first known as the Toronto St. Patricks from 1919 to 1927. The Irish still hold dominance in Canada's major cities including Vancouver, where McAteer currently resides.

"We have always been a nation who has travelled, due to employment needs or the need to explore the world," says McAteer. As one of 15 out of 36 cousins who are now living abroad, McAteer is proud of the fact that St. Patrick's Day is celebrated

internationally. "It is an annual day where Ireland gets the opportunity to promote all that is great about our nation. I can't think of any other nation in the world where celebrations take place around the globe for them," he says.

While some customs such as dyeing rivers green, as has been done in Chicago for the last 40 years, and drinking green beer are things only done by people outside of Ireland, McAteer is pleased with the way St. Patrick's Day is celebrated in his new country.

While the country has seen a growing diversity, St. Patrick's Day has remained a holiday that has become just as Canadian as it is Irish. "The fact that the day is a fun family day and an excuse to go out and meet friends and celebrate Ireland's achievements has led to its success. Throughout the world, many people claim Irish descent and I believe the day internationally lets people reconnect with home," says McAteer.

"I believe the Irish phrase Cead Mile Failte, one hundred thousand welcomes, lets this annual festival be all inclusive and successful," he adds, inviting everyone to come out in March and celebrate.

In the Greater Toronto Area, that means coming out to the 25th annual Toronto Patrick's Day Parade, March 11. The festivities will begin at noon with the parade starting from Bloor Street and St. George Street (near old University of Toronto Varsity Stadium). The parade will continue along Bloor Street down Yonge Street and finish on Queen Street at Nathan Philips Square. See stpatrick.com for more details. 🍀