

FEATURE

Book takes long look at history of St. Patrick's Day

By Robert Emmet Cullivan
Staff writer

What images come to people's minds when they think of St. Patrick's Day?

Irish poetry readings and traditional dancing performances? Controversial parades that exclude gay organizations or that include Irish republican paramilitaries? Or green beer and drunken faces painted with shamrocks?

Whatever images come to mind, they rarely have anything to do with the patron saint of Ireland, according to Mike Cronin, a British citizen and historian of Irish descent who has co-authored *The Wearing of the Green: A History of St. Patrick's Day* with Daryl Adair, an Australian historian. Cronin is currently touring various cities in the United States to promote the book, which was just published by Routledge, based in London, England.

As Cronin and Adair explain in their well-researched book, no historians before them have ever seriously examined St. Patrick's Day. The two historians probed beneath the surface images of St. Patrick's Day as simply a time for revelry, and found a day that annually highlights the worldwide Irish community's current concerns, past tragedies and future hopes.

In particular, St. Patrick's Day parades, which actually were begun by Irish Protestant emigrants to the United States in the 1800s, have served as times for Irish immigrants and descendants in the United States, Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom to celebrate and mourn events in their ancestral homeland, the authors wrote. In 1972, for example, only two months after 13 unarmed Catholic civil-rights demonstrators were killed by British paratroopers in Northern Ireland, many parades featured marchers wearing black armbands of mourning. More recent St. Patrick's Day parades have featured floats celebrating the Irish peace process and the Good Friday Agreement, which set up power-sharing structures in Northern Ireland (see related cover story on John Hume).

During a telephone interview from a hotel in Boston, where he was slated to

speaking March 7, Cronin said St. Patrick's Day is a day much like Christmas or Thanksgiving in that people do whatever they think most becomes the day. That can mean sitting at home with family members and sharing a quiet meal or dressing up in a silly costume and marching through the streets.

He added that there have been many attempts by the guardians of Christianity and Irish culture to make St. Patrick's a more serious day by stressing Irish spirituality and the Irish people's societal achievements. Such guardians keep running up against the fact that for many people, Irish and non-Irish alike, the day has become too closely associated with one word: fun. For example, Cronin said, although some Irish have strenuously objected to such exercises as sending St. Patrick's Day cards depicting drunken leprechauns, the Irish are more likely than not to be the ones doing the sending. For that matter, he said, while some ethnic groups such as African-Americans have campaigned to remove stereotypes from the public consciousness, some Irish will actually reinforce stereotypes by doing such things as dyeing their beards green on St. Patrick's.

"The Irish have been willing to embrace these kind of negative, or fun, images," he said. "You can't be running down a community if a large proportion of your community actually embraces these images."

Yet, far from being merely a day of mirth and merriment, St. Patrick's Day is actually the one day when many Irish people in the world feel a sense of genuine solidarity with one another and with their ancestral homeland. Hence, it is common for many Irish charities to focus their fundraising efforts around St. Patrick's Day events, Cronin and Adair wrote, as it is common for politicians to use the day to gain both Irish votes and the votes of other constituencies, particularly in America. Hence, politicians have both marched in St. Patrick's Day parades, and, in some cases, publicly boycotted them, as some New York leaders did over the exclusion of an Irish gay and lesbian group from recent St. Patrick's Day parades in New York City.



When Bill Clinton was president, he chose St. Patrick's Day to invite Gerry Adams, leader of Sinn Fein, the Provisional Irish Republican Army's political party, to a White House luncheon in 1995, Cronin and Adair wrote. Sinn Fein had been working for decades to end British rule of Northern Ireland, and Adams was seen as nothing more than a terrorist by his opponents. But Clinton's gesture allowed the unthinkable to happen, the historians noted.

"The same gathering also allowed the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Sir Patrick Mayhew, to hold informal talks with Adams," the duo wrote. "Such a meeting would have been difficult to stage in either Northern Ireland or Britain at this time."

St. Patrick's Day in Ireland itself, while long celebrated in some fashion or another, has waxed and waned in terms of the intensity of its public manifestations, according to Cronin and Adair. From the 1920s through the 1950s, pubs were closed throughout Ireland on the feast day of its patron saint, and the day was given to church services and military processions, much to the dismay of the *Connaught Telegraph*, which had this to report

in 1952.

"(In Ireland) St. Patrick's Day was very much like any other day, only duller."

That has certainly changed in Dublin, where Cronin said he plans to spend St. Patrick's this year. Ireland and all things Irish became "trendy" in the 1990s, he said, pointing to the prominence of the Dublin-based rock band U2 and the popularity of the high-stepping show "Riverdance." In turn, Dublin has become a tourist hotspot in Europe, and was more popular than Paris as a destination for Valentine's Day travelers this year, he said. Cronin added that St. Patrick's Day actually is now a week-long cultural festival in Dublin with an emphasis on local happenings, as opposed to the celebrations of previous decades, which were dominated by Irish-American imported bands and dance troupes.

Meanwhile, in Northern Ireland, both Protestants loyal to Britain and Catholics desiring reunification with the southern Irish Republic claim St. Patrick's as their own. Hence, some shared celebrations have begun to emphasize the saint's meaning to both Christian communities, Cronin said, although they have been attended with some contention over displays of Irish nationalism. And in his homeland, Britain, where St. Patrick's Day was once celebrated in a low-key manner by Irish communities afraid of being associated with terrorism in Northern Ireland, St. Patrick's Day parades and festivities have risen in number over the last decade and have become events attended by many non-Irish as well.

"The 17th of March is a day for the Irish," the authors conclude in the book's final chapter. "It offers, however, a multitude of different views about what it means to be Irish and host of ways in which people celebrate their Irishness."

The authors end their book on a hopeful note.

"The anniversary is, indeed, the product of the shackles of many histories: the Irish 'homeland' that has shaped it, and the setting, traditions and circumstances of local and host communities abroad. May the future bring us a world in which St. Patrick's Day is celebrated everywhere peacefully."

COURIER CLASSIFIEDS

EMPLOYMENT

Help Wanted

PRINCIPAL

St. Michael's Elementary School - Newark
St. Michael's has over 300 students in grades Pre-K-8. It has an excellent reputation for academic excellence with strong Catholic traditions and spirituality. Students are bussed from 9 surrounding school districts with the majority of students coming from the Newark area. There have been many recent improvements to the building and to the computer lab. The faculty community is mixed with new as well as seasoned faculty members. Parent support is excellent with parents active in many committees within the Parent-Teacher Organization. **Qualifications:** Candidate needs to be a practicing Catholic with a Master's degree and New York State Certification. Administrative Experience would be preferable. Salary according to the degree and experience in education. Please send cover letter and resume to: Sr. Elaine Englert, SSJ, 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, NY 14624. Phone 585/328-3210 Ext. 252. e-mail: Englert@dor.org.

Lifetime Assistance Inc.
We offer a variety of Programs and Positions:
Residential Counselors • Community Living Instructors • Life Skills Assistants
• Drivers • Service Coordinators
• Community Integration Specialist
• RN & LPN • As needed Job Coaches
Visit our website at www.lifetimeassistance.org
For more information or to apply on line!
You may apply in person at
Lifetime Assistance Inc.
425 Paul Rd. Rochester, NY 14624
Phone 585-426-4120 ext. 3121
Fax 585-426-4755
Minorities are encouraged to apply

Miscellaneous

Wigs

for a Fashion convenience or medical necessity
Call for a FREE Consultation Appointment
Karen Ann Hair Fashions
1258 Latta Rd. (near Dewey)
621-8020
A professional look in minutes

MERCHANDISE

Wanted to Buy

OLDER ACCUMULATIONS PURCHASED. Single item or entire estate. Courteous, professional, confidential. Cash paid. 265-9516.

Marylin's Antiques

We buy all antiques & household goods for highest cash prices. One item or entire estate. Complete estate services. Appraisals, sales conducted.
585-647-2480
Home # 585-872-2239

Health Exercise

FRIZZUTTI'S Classes for any age
• Spencerport • Brockport • Hilton
Over 25 classes weekly
No contracts or membership fees.
New Student Special:
6 weeks for \$36.00
Call 352-7700

SERVICE

Ceiling Repair

TEXTURED/SWIRLED CEILINGS: 9' x 12' ceiling only \$59! Water damaged, stained, poorly textured/swirled ceilings repaired, re-textured, re-painted, or made flat again. Any size drywall/plaster wall repairs. No job too small. 585/392-5076.

Moving & Hauling

K-D Moving & Storage, Inc.
Experience in office, household moving and deliveries.
Big or Small, We do them All!
473-6610/473-4357
23 Arlington St. Rochester NY 14607
NYDOT#9657

Painting & Wallcovering

AL MEYVIS, JR.: Interior painting. Basement walls repaired/painted. All types home repairs. Small jobs welcome. NYS certified. 392-4435, 323-2876.

BURG-MASTER PAINTING/PAPERHANGING, textured ceilings, walls, ceilings repaired, rugs shampooed. Insured, powerwashing. Dan Burgmaster, 585/663-0827.

Plaster Restoration
Wallpapering Painting

Free Estimates
585-482-3243 • 585-703-8245
Terry & Nina McCullough
A Couple That Care

GENERAL

Announcements

ADOPTIONS The Catholic Courier does not publish adoption advertising. To obtain a list of agencies that serve birth mothers and adoptive parents, call 585-529-9530. Agencies wishing to be included on this list may send information to the Catholic Courier.

Card of Thanks

TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY for all favors received regarding health matters. Thank you. JMP

www.catholiccourier.com

Classifieds
get the job done!