3-14-2019

A Bit of Craic and a Few Facts About the Irish on Saint Patrick's Day

Mark J. Salling PhD, GISP
*Cleveland State University*, m.salling@csuohio.edu

A Bit of *Craic*[1] and a Few Facts About the Irish on Saint Patrick's Day

Mark Salling, Ph.D., GISP
Senior Fellow and Research Associate: m.salling@csuohio.edu

- Saint Patrick's Day (March 17th) celebrates the traditional date of the death of Saint Patrick. Although it is impossible to verify many facts about his life, tradition states that Saint Patrick was born in Roman Britain sometime in the fourth or fifth century. After reputedly being captured by Irish pirates at the age of sixteen and forced to work as a slave Patrick escaped back to Britain and became a Catholic priest. He later returned to Ireland and devoted his life to converting the Irish from ancient Celtic religious beliefs to Christianity. The actual date of his death was sometime between 460 and 493.

- Saint Patrick's Day did not become an official religious Feast Day celebrated by Christians until the 17th century. Today it is recognized by the Catholic Church, the Anglican Communion, the Lutheran Church, and the Eastern Orthodox Church.

- Over the last two centuries Saint Patrick's Day gradually became more than a minor date on the Christian calendar. The spread of the British Empire across the globe, and continual social turmoil, poverty and famine in Ireland, created a steady stream of Irish immigrants throughout the world. Celebrations of Saint Patrick's Day became a secular way for Irish ex-pats to assert their own culture.

- The figure below shows the rate of immigration from Ireland to the United States from the decade of the 1820s to the 2000s. Saint Patrick's Day celebrations in the U.S. became major events with parades, festivals, parties, and political events. On Saint Patrick's Day, it is said, everyone is Irish!

Irish Immigrants to the United States, by decade.
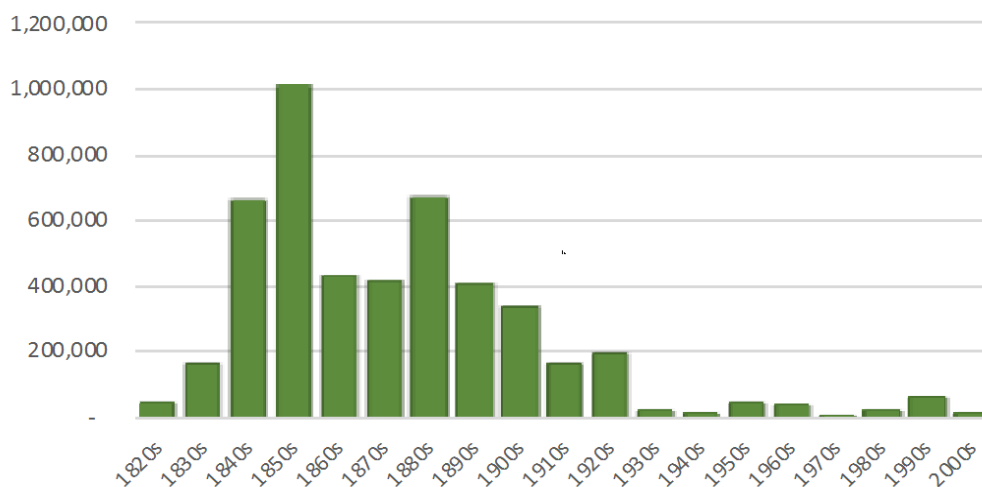
Source: 2015 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics

---

[1] Craic is an Irish expression for "having some fun."

- Truth be told, in one way the United States is more Irish than Ireland, having an estimated 32.5 million persons who reported some Irish ancestry in 2017, compared to only 6.7 million in Ireland itself! That is a lot of Irish lads and lasses in this country but it only constitutes a little more than 10 percent of the nation's population. So it's a *Seanchai's* exaggeration (an Irish storyteller's) on Saint Patrick's Day that everyone is Irish.

- Closer to home, in 2017 there were an estimated 1.5 million persons in Ohio reporting some Irish ancestry. Although Map One may represent Ohioans who claim to be Irish on Saint Patrick's Day, Map Two uses actual data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau to dispel the blarney that "everyone is Irish on Saint Patrick's Day."[2]

Map One: Those Who May Claim To Be Irish On Saint Patrick's Day	Map Two: Census Bureau Estimates All The Other Days of the Year
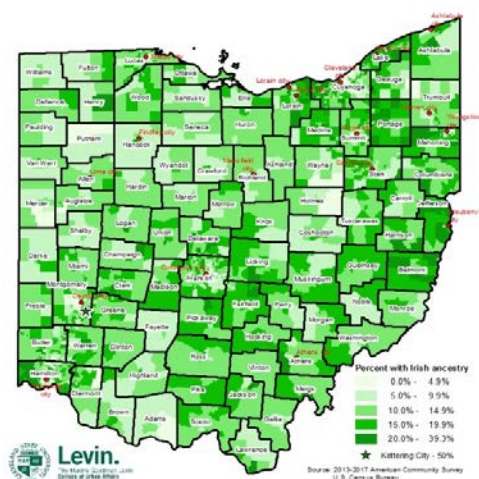
- With 13.2 percent of the population Ohio is a bit more green than average. An interactive, online map can be found at http://arcg.is/1a1njq. But Ohio can't match the Irish of Massachusetts who were 20.7 percent of that state's population in 2017. Nor most of the New England states, e.g., New Hampshire with 20.6%, Rhode Island with 18.0%, and Vermont with 17.3%. Apparently, the Irish still like cold, damp, and rocky places more than most.

- Among Ohio's counties, populous Cuyahoga County may be able to brag that it has the largest Irish population (156,515), but with only 12.5 percent Irish it pales in its greenness in comparison to the proportions in Jefferson (19.4%), Belmont (18.7%), Portage (18.2%), Lake (18.0), and Medina (17.4%) counties.

- It is not surprising that the state's largest cities also have the most Irish. Columbus leads with 88,480, followed by Cleveland (34,011), Toledo (30,375), Cincinnati (28,977, Akron (21,358), and Dayton (12,735). But with an estimated 50 percent of its population claiming some Irish ancestry, the city of Kettering, can probably claim to have seen the most leprechauns.

---

[2] Data are from estimates using the 2017 one-year American Community Survey (ACS). Data for municipalities, however, use the five-year estimates for 2013-2017 since one-year estimates for smaller places are not available. These estimates, because they are based on a sample, have margins of error not reported here.