

THE IRISH INFLUENCE

Today is the 1,570th anniversary of the birth of St. Patrick, patron saint of the Emerald Isle and of the thousands of Irish who have spread from that small spot on the globe to all parts of the world. Most of those Irish immigrants came to the United States and New Albany received its share all during the years of the Nineteenth Century. The story of the Irish and their influence on New Albany and Floyd County is the topic of this St. Patrick's Day look into the history of our community.

The famous old Silver Band, New Albany's leading musical organization for many years during the last century, probably didn't need to read the notes when it played "St. Patrick's Day In The Morning". That piece of music, dear to the hearts of New Albany's Irish citizens, was in constant demand.

At Democratic election rallies it was always on the program for the Irish were stalwarts of the party. On St. Patrick's Day the Irish staged yearly parades and the Silver Band was always in the line of march playing "St. Patrick's Day In The Morning". And whenever the Irish gathered at festive occasions throughout the year, the Silver Band was likely to liven the proceedings with the strains of the familiar music that brought a swell of pride to Irish hearts.

Though in later years most Irish newcomers to this area settled in New Albany, the first Irish settled in the county in the St. Mary's neighborhood where they took up farming. It was the Irish who established St. Mary's Church, the first Catholic Church in Floyd County. The first of the Irish to come to the county seems to have been Thomas Piers in 1817 or earlier. Soon he was followed by

the Duffys, McCutchens, Emmonses, Byrnes, Daileys, Colemans and many others.

The Irish in New Albany began to reach significant numbers in the middle 1830s when the mammoth Internal Improvement program was launched by Indiana. Though this plan to build railroads, canals and highways in all parts of the state ended in financial disaster, it served as a stimulus in attracting large numbers of Irish who sought work in building these improvements. A booklet of advice to Irish immigrants published about 1837 recommended eight Indiana cities with job opportunities. One of the eight was New Albany.

They came as laborers on the road to Vincennes and other projects and rose to respected positions in the community; another wave of Irish newcomers followed the "Potato Famine" of 1848 in Ireland. The Monon Railroad, being built, attracted many to New Albany. The census of 1870 showed over 600 local residents who were natives of Ireland, and second-generation Irish swelled the total even more.

The St. Patrick's Day parades, first held in New Albany about 1870, were always the high point of the year for the local Irish residents. Sometimes there were as many as 2,000 marchers, including delegations from Jeffersonville and Louisville and representation from New Albany's German organization.

The green flag of Ireland and the American flag were carried proudly at the head of the parade, along with the harp of Erin, and the marchers wore shamrocks. The Silver Band and St. Patrick's Brass Band provided stirring Irish music.

The parades followed a special St. Patrick's Day Mass at Holy Trinity Church and were organized by St. Patrick's Benevolent Society, a local Irish group which shared quarters with the local chapter of the Ancient Order of Hibernians at 616 East Market Street.

The area around East 4th to about East 10th Streets contained the greatest concentration of New Albany's Irish and the area north of the Monon Railroad yards was known for many years as Limerick Hill.

With the passage of the years, third and fourth generation Irish dropped many of the customs and distinctive institutions which the natives of the "Ould Sod" had brought with them. St. Patrick's Day parades continued on a dwindling scale until about 1920 when they disappeared from the city scene. The Ancient Order of Hibernians disbanded about the same time and St. Patrick's Benevolent Society had vanished earlier – about 1910.

But the Irish names in the New Albany city directory attest to the Irish influence here, and there's a New Albany hen which still believes in the old tradition. Appropriately named Patty, the hen lays green eggs. Owner John Hubbuch has received a scientific explanation of the phenomenon from Purdue University, but Col. Jack Reilly, who invited Patty to have a place of honor in today's St. Patrick's Day parade in Chicago, had a different explanation.

With an Irish twinkle in his eye, Reilly says Patty is the last descendent of the famous hens which laid green eggs in Ireland and escaped from the halls of Blarney Castle generations ago.

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