



ANCIENT ORDER OF HIBERNIANS SAINT PATRICK'S DAY PARADE

From the St. Louis Post-Dispatch

March 17 is St. Patrick's Day and St. Louisians always celebrate in style.

The first St. Patrick's Day celebration St. Louis ever held was a dinner in 1820. The annual dinner continued for several years until the parades began.

The Irish have always been a part of St. Louis. The first Irishman reached St. Louis in 1779. His name was Kennedy and he was killed as he ran from an Indian attack. He died on the threshold of the city.

By 1790, Irish had mingled with the French and Spanish already in St. Louis. James Rankin, an Irish native, was the first sheriff of St. Louis. From 1806 to 1820 another Irishman, Jeremiah Connor, was town sheriff. Connor later served as collector and treasurer. He donated the land on which St. Louis University was built.

In 1808, Joseph Charless founded the Missouri Gazette, the first newspaper west of the Mississippi. Charless was an Irishman who had fled Ireland after the Irish Rebellion in the late 18th Century.

The Irish have always played a part in St. Louis politics. The first governor of Missouri was Alexander McNair. The first state senator was David Barton. Both were of Irish ancestry.

In 1823, Dr. William Carr Lane, a native of Ireland was elected the first mayor of St. Louis. He was re-elected eight times.

By 1820, one out of every seven St. Louisians was a native of Ireland, second in number only to the French.

The Irish came to St. Louis in those early days for many reasons. Some were trying to escape the fighting in Ireland. Others came to fight in the American Revolution- anything to fight the English. Most of the early settlers landed in New Orleans and came upriver to St. Louis.

In 1845, famine struck Ireland and by 1850, three-fifths of the million immigrants arriving in America were Irish.

Many of these Irish came to St. Louis. They did not blend into the city as quickly or as quietly as their predecessors. They were extremely poor, uneducated and clannish. They worked at unskilled jobs at first. As their status improved older St. Louisans feared their numbers.

An anti-immigrant group called the Nativists was formed around 1840. It was opposed to both Irish and German immigrants, especially those who were Catholic.

By 1844, they were a political force--the Know Nothing Party. There were riots in St. Louis. One group of Nativists attacked St. Louis University Medical School and caused extensive damage.

In 1851, the militia had to be called in to help stop a mob that was destroying homes in the Irish section of St. Louis. An attempt to burn the Old Cathedral was stopped by an old Irishman (a former artilleryman), who moved a brass cannon in place outside the Cathedral doors. The mob backed away.

The Know Nothing Party eventually lost its hold on the city. The Irish community settled down and blended into the mainstream of St. Louis life.