

Irish Culture is Illustrated Through the Designs on Saint Patrick's Day Postcards: 1904-1918

Impoverished unmarried young Irish immigrants came to North America totally alone. Poorly educated, they lacked the refined letter writing manners needed to obtain good jobs and to make new friends.

The purpose of this exhibit is to show which designs celebrated Irish culture and fostered friendships.

With poor literacy and communication skills, simple postcards with room for only a few words became perfect tools of communication for friendship. During the Golden Age of Postcards (1904-1918) sending postcards was the newest fad, like X is today. Postcards with colourful meaningful designs and sayings helped build a dynamic expat Irish community in North America which endures into the 21st century.

The most meaningful postcards came from German publishers with stunning images showcasing many facets of Irish life.

With green shamrocks in her hand and a bright Irish smile, this red-headed Irish 'Colleen' framed by a green Celtic shield, is welcoming you to enchanting Ireland with a toast to Saint Patrick and the Emerald Isle, the verdant land of spellbinding story tellers.



Narrow border, lightly embossed (paper raised up), chromolithography with gold accents, publisher is B and B Birin Brothers Ltd, London, part of a special Irish series No.P.9 printed in Germany. Mailed Mar 16 1914

Facets of Irish culture seen in the designs sent by the expats to each other:

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|--|-------|
| 1. Myths and Legends: goddess Eriu, giants, leprechauns, Saint Patrick, and castle mysteries | 2 -7 |
| 2. Irish symbols: shamrocks, Kelly green colour | 8 |
| 3. Music and dance: Irish harp, Irish bagpipe, Irish fiddle, Irish jig and Irish dancing | 9-11 |
| 4. Cottage crafts: Irish knitting and Irish lace making | 12 |
| 5. Patriotism: Words of dead rebels inspire an inclusive society | 13 |
| 6. Friendship: Building a community and travelling to Ireland | 14-15 |
| 7. Epilogue: Many wish to be Irish on Saint Patrick's Day | 16 |

* point of interest + message on the postcard

1. Myth: Welcome to a wee bit of Irish mythology: the warrior goddess: **Eriu**

* A firm handshake starts our adventure into Irish culture and history

Myths explain the world using gods and other supernatural beings like Eriu and leprechauns. Putting aside ethnic and religious differences, this handshake welcomes all to explore Irish culture.



The lonely immigrants reached out to each other in friendship. Success is celebrated each March 17th.

Narrow gilt border, lightly embossed, chromolithography, Raphael Tuck and Sons UK 1909 series 157 The Emerald Isle, set of 12 cards, printed in Saxony, for sale in Canada and the USA

** first use was March 14, 1909; this postcard mailed March 15, 1909*

* + Mythic warrior goddess **Eriu** gives her name to Ireland.

During the forgotten mists of time, **Eriu**, (aka Erin or Eire) the most powerful of three sister warrior goddesses, convinced invading Melesians of her power to grant them prosperity if they named the island after her: '**Ireland or Erin's land**'. They agreed!

+Message: My good luck health and happiness all fortune on you smile



This card shows that the underdog can be powerful enough to remind us to never give up.

Narrow gilt border, lightly embossed, chromolithography, Raphael Tuck and Sons UK 1909 series 157 The Emerald Isle, set of 12 cards, printed in Saxony, sold in Canada and the USA.

**Card mailed at 1:30pm March 13 1909, arrived the same day at its destination*

1. Myth: Two coastal giants appeal to the powerless and marginalized.

The Irish superhero Finn McCool created this stone Giant's Causeway across the sea to defend Ireland from the huge Scottish giant Benandonner



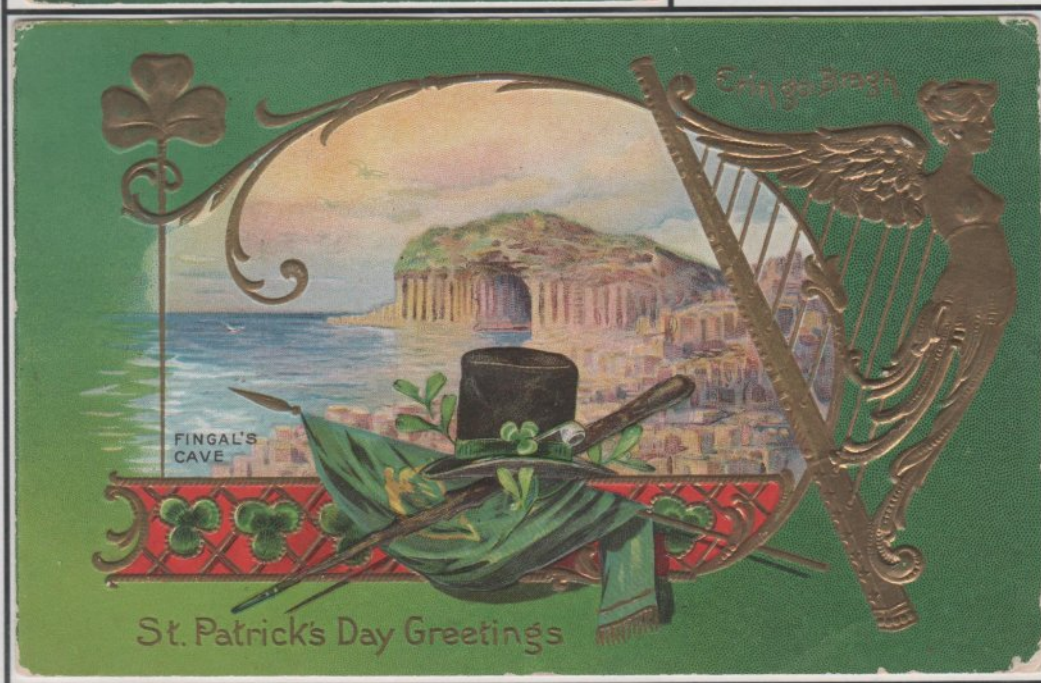
The causeway is volcanic rock from ancient eruptions not created by a superhero. Legend says that upon seeing the size of Finn McCool's 'baby', the Scottish giant ran back to Scotland to Fingal's Cave, destroying Finn's causeway in retreat.

This card tells the disadvantaged to remember that power can come in being prepared for adversity.

Green border, lightly embossed,, chromolithography, many gold accents E. Nash Co, NY

+The Scottish giant Benandonner, retreated to this musical sea cave never to attack again. Ireland was saved when this cowardly giant ran away.

+Written message: "This is to remind you of old Pat the Irishman".



The expats loved this fanciful tale of chasing away the oppressor hoping to soon successfully gain Ireland's independence.

No border, lightly embossed, gilt accents, chromolithography, series 125 mailed Mar 16 1910

1 Myth: Where did the Iconic leprechauns come from?



* +Leprechauns are mythic Irish symbols

These supernatural tiny shoemaker tricksters for eons outwitted greedy mortals, but if caught, granted a wish. They were hard to catch and didn't like granting wishes.

This caricature of a monkey-like leprechaun was done on purpose to ridicule the Irish.

+Written message: Hoorah for Ireland

Narrow gold border, barely embossed, red lettering with, chromolithography. Raphael Tuck and Sons, printed in Saxony marked set 106 which has white border, (set 4136 same design has gold borders), mailed March 16 1909

*artist is likely Frances Brundage, not signed

+ Expats wanted more than this. Is a better life only a mythic dream?

This card reminds all to aim for a better life.

Really poor peasants who owned one pig had to sell it to pay the landowner the yearly rent. It is said that less poor peasants who owned 2 pigs, one to sell and one to keep, were said to be 'living high off the hog' a well known Irish expression.

+Written message: I am sending you a card for the 17th

No border, lightly embossed, figures outlined in black, chromolithography, gold accents. B.B London Birin Brothers, series 1600, printed in Germany, mailed March 15, 1911



1. Myth: origin of small single-use clay pipes, stout shillelaghs and top hats



* Smoking white clay pipes was part of Irish life

Mythic leprechauns smoked small clay pipes in ancient times. In the early 20thC these white clay pipes were smoked at wakes with a jug of good whisky in which to dip the stem. They were called 'Lord ha' mercy' pipes



Narrow gold border, chromolithography, two tone metallic gold accents, barely embossed ribbon, Painting was copyrighted in 1907, International Art Pub. Co, printed in Germany

* artist is Ellen H. Clapsaddle, signed

+ Shillelaghs and top hats are Irish icons

Leprechauns carried stout walking sticks now called shillelaghs to defend their riches from evil spirits. The Irish shillelagh was replaced by swords for duels and then evolved to become the police baton.

Myths also tell us that green top hats worn by rich leprechauns indicated their wealth. The Canadian beaver pelt top hats were worn by rich Irish gentry.

The poem instills pride in a colourful Irish history.

+ Written message: May you have many many happy 17^{ths}

Silver border, 'Dear Irish Memories' inside shamrock, chromolithography, silver accents, St Patrick Series - 2- (with gold accents), mailed March 13 1911

1. Legend: Saint Patrick used shamrocks to convert the pagan Irish and created the Celtic Cross uniting pagan Druid and Christian values

+ In the early 5C, at age 16, Saint Patrick was captured in Wales by Irish pirates



Legends are about real people or places but exaggerated. Patrick was enslaved by the well educated Druid high priests in Antrim Ireland, from whom he learned their highly sophisticated religious tenets.

After studies in France, he returned to Ireland in 432 AD as a Christian bishop to convert the pagans

In spite of a history of acceptance, the first North American Irish immigrants who became rich, rejected these new marginalized Irish Catholics.

+ *Written message: 'The Irish are all right after all don't you think so'*

No border, embossed, gold accents, chromolithography, multilingual back mailed March 17 1908

**Almost all postcards are secular making St Patrick himself on a postcard like this one rather hard to find*

The Celtic cross blends circular pagan Druid sun worship with the Christian cross shape. This card is chosen so isolated expats will keep their faith



In the 1850s these crosses became common grave stones for the Irish diaspora worldwide

Narrow gold border, lightly embossed only around the central design, chromolithography, mailed on March 3 1910

1. Legend: Castles tell exaggerated dazzling stories



+ The Blarney Stone is high up in Blarney Castle and kissing it conveys gifts of eloquent public speaking and flattery

Kissing the legendary stone requires an act of bravery.

One legend says the Blarney Stone itself may have been brought to Ireland by the crusaders. A second legend says it is the very same stone Moses struck providing water to the Jews escaping slavery in Egypt. Blarney Castle remains a huge tourist destination.

Commonly sent, many castle legend cards were chosen to tug the heart strings helping to unify their growing community. This card was sent by a priest.

+Written message from a priest: 'sister by grace', 'to please Him and to rejoice in the Lord'

No border, gold accents chromolithography, lightly embossed, St Patrick Series 1, mailed March 1910

Dunluce Castle has ghosts of dead kitchen staff who scream during stormy nights



In the 17th century the busy kitchen of Dunluce Castle collapsed into the sea where it is still seen

Storytelling at kitchen parties was the main way Irish culture was passed on so, scary ghost stories provided a topic of conversation.

White border, light embossing with more on the ribbon beads, series 247 C

2. Irish Symbols: Shamrocks and green dresses recall the verdant vistas of Ireland

+For centuries, the **shamrock** has been a recognizable symbol of Ireland



Legend has it that Saint Patrick used shamrocks with 3 leaves to convert the Druids to Christianity.

+Front message:
Hoorah for St Patsy

Early 20th C simple green card stock with gold lettering, no border or embossing, "This Side for Address" in gold on the address only side. Mailed on March 15 1906

*gold accents are in uncommonly good condition



Wearing **Kelly green** on Saint Patrick's Day reminds expats of the rich green Irish countryside.

Kelly is an Irish family name with roots deep in legendary mythology.

An Irish colleen proudly carries a spray of green shamrocks as she goes to march in the Saint Patrick's Day parade.

'**Dear Irish Memories**' instills hope for a bright new future with cherished new friends, a good job and decent housing.

Green border, chromolithography, embossed with lavish silver accents, mailed Feb 5 1910

As our flag floats out on the breeze
Memories fly back to me keen
For again I'm a lass, gathering shamrocks
In a frock all made in green.

3. Music and dance: Exquisite Irish harp music graces Irish gatherings

The harp embodies Irish nationalism, story telling and traditional musical culture

The oldest Irish harp symbol was carved into stone crosses in Ireland during the 8thC.

British King Henry VIII chose a gold Irish harp with a British crown as Ireland's national symbol in 1531.

A gold harp is on the flag of Ireland.

Elizabeth I banished all harps to eliminate Irish culture. This created enmity toward the British.

Harp music promotes oral musical traditions and keeps Irish culture alive.

Narrow gold border, embossed with extra gold accents, chromolithography, Julius Bien & Co New York, Series 7406, copyright 1908, mailed March 14 1911



Irish harpers and minstrels were the envy of elite Europeans during the 1600s

In every aristocratic Gaelic home lived a renowned harper who was a gifted poet and an exciting story-teller. Highly sought after, these rigorously trained harpists taught music and entertained at social events.

Irish music was used for dancing and tunes were learned from the music master and passed orally as little was written down.

Narrow striped border, lightly embossed, chromolithography, note colour distribution on embossed part is badly aligned, design copyrighted, part of a series, possibly E. Nash Co., mailed Mar 15 1913

3. Music and Dance: Bagpipe tunes and fiddle melodies promote Irish friendships

This piper's tunes recall the happy musical gatherings of peasant life



While he plays the fiddle, she dances an Irish specialty: the popular **Irish jig**. It is sure to get all toes a` tapping.

The fiddle is identical to a violin but played differently. They were common in Ireland in the 1700s. Tunes and their words were passed to the next generation **by ear, not by paper scores**.

The expats knew all the music and steps by heart.

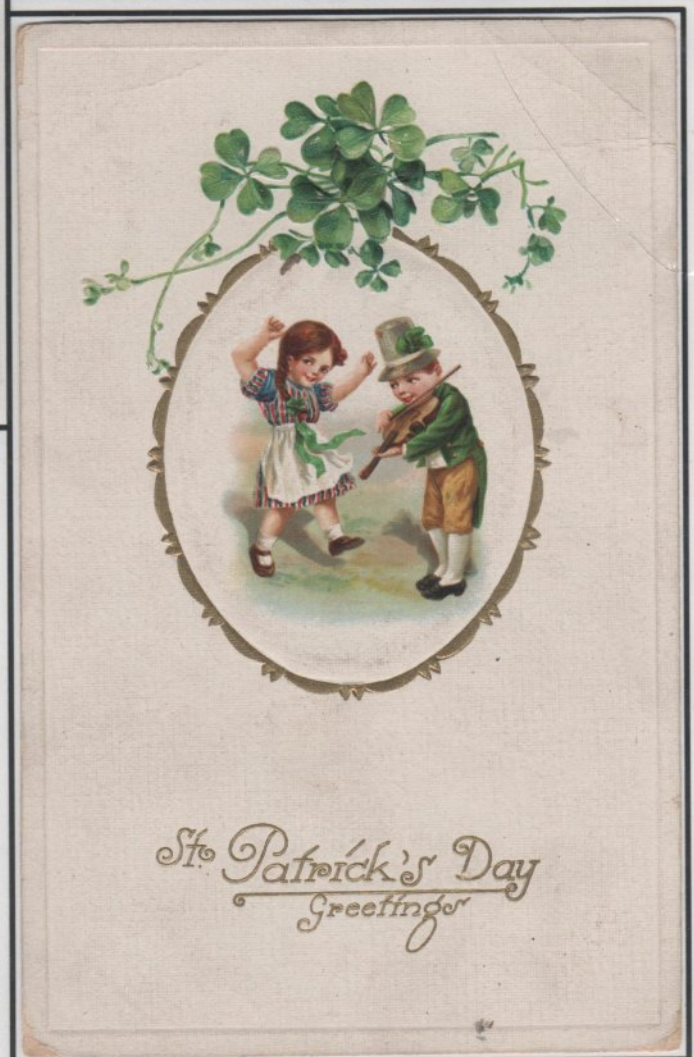
Simple stamped border, lightly debossed, gold framing around couple, plus fine gold lettering, No. 4353 Printed in Germany, John O. Winch Co, Stapleton NY

Only unmarried young Irish immigrants came to Canada and the USA as laborers, waiters and domestics, never to return to Ireland. They were homesick and longed for comforting Irish music.

The Irish pipes have a softer sound and play more than two chromatic octaves compared to one for the Scottish bagpipe.

Old style Celtic music celebrations where myth, wisdom, literature and history were passed orally from the old to the young were recreated in North America to help ease the pain of separation.

Narrow gold border, with gold accent lightly embossed, chromolithograph, written March 11 1911



3. Music and Dance: Irish dancing goes viral throughout North America

+ The Irish jig requires very intricate, fast lively footwork



This red headed couple happily dance the 'Irish breakdown', a type of jig in traditional costumes.

As sun worshipers, druids danced in circles around oak trees. Norman invaders in 1169 introduced folk dancing reels, dancing in circles .

Dancing masters taught both the elite and the peasants to dance so this card is a nostalgic reminder of home. Irish dance lessons continue to be popular today.

+Written message: Very good exercise but don't try it on Sunday night

Lightly embossed, chromolithography, gold printing and gold accents copyright on design, artist unknown, M.W.Taggart Co. NY, 1908, series X802, also features other couples and activities, mailed March 16, 1910.

Celtic and Irish jigs influenced North American folk dancing styles

Immigrants brought reel and step dancing to NA.



It contributed greatly to African American, Cajun French, Zydeco and spirited square dancing.

Irish dance festivals developed into the ongoing popular Irish dance shows seen in Canada and the USA

Narrow embossed border, design is only lightly embossed, chromolithography, St. Patrick's Series No 42, mailed March 13, 1915

4. Cottage crafts: knitting and crochet lace provide essential incomes for peasants

+ Stranded Spanish sailors taught the Irish fishermen to knit: an Irish needlework tradition was born

This peasant is spinning either flax or wool into yarn.

Muslim knitters working in the Spanish royal court, taught Spanish sailors to knit their own stockings.

After the Spanish armada crashed on Irish shores in 1588, the sailors taught the Irish to knit.

Irish knitting became a crucial source of income for peasants by the late 19th C. The expats sent their salaries home to help the relatives they left behind.

+ *Written message: Good luck to yez all on St Patrick's Day*

Striped border, embossed, gold accents, chromolithography, design copyrighted, possibly E. Nash Co. No.21 mailed March 17 1913, received the same day

* French nuns create Irish crochet lace

Irish crochet lace, a type of Venetian lace, which borders this card, began in Ireland when French Ursuline nuns taught rich and poor in the 1700s.

During the potato famine of 1844-1849, poor Irish peasants sold their lace to rich women in Europe.

Less poor peasants kept some lace for their windows and were enviously called 'Lace Curtain Irish'.

Celtic heraldic shield, no embossing, fine silver accents, chromolithograph mailed in March 1912

** Hard to find border with delicate Irish lace edges.*



5. Patriotism: Inspired by poets and patriots, postcards simmer with Irish history



Thomas Moore dressed as a gentleman with quill, ink, book and torch, is ready to fight for universal human rights and for Irish independence from England

Thomas Moore 1779-1852, a Catholic poet fluent in 3 languages, married a Protestant actress and actively resisted union with Great Britain.

He disliked the parallels he saw between the peasantry in Ireland and the black slaves in the USA

No border, embossed, gold accents, chromolithography, mailed March 1 1910

Three dead Irish heroes still inspire Irish expats to create an inclusive community

Robert Emmett (1778-1803) led a rebellion against Great Britain. He was executed for high treason.

Wolfe Tone (1763-1798) got France to support the Irish rebellion. He died in prison by suicide.

Lord Ed FitzGerald (1763-1798) an Irish aristocrat wounded in the War of American Independence,

was saved by a black slave. He was later killed escaping arrest by the British.

All 3 were inspired by successful revolutions in France and the USA



Narrow gold border, gold accents, series 157 chromolithography, 'The Emerald Isle' series, Raphael Tuck and Sons printed in Saxony, mailed March 13 1911

6. Friendship Builds Community: enduring bonds of friendship develop among lonely expats



* + This dapper chap proudly doffs his top hat to welcome new friends in his best clothes with his pipe a'ready.

Celebrating March 17 quickly spread around North America where events were largely secular.

During big Saint Patrick's Day parades people met. The parade in Montreal was 200 years old in 2025.

+Written message: This is the day I will attend the meeting in Galt but it must be on the 17th of Old Ireland

Green deckled border, embossed, chromolithography reverse printing is black, International Art Publishing Co, mailed March 16 1908 *Ellen H. Clapsaddle, signed

* Offering shamrocks is an Irish invitation to become friends.

Exchanging such nostalgic postcards helps build strong deep bonds that cemented new friendships.

Extending the hand of friendship to all folks was necessary to build a welcoming community.

Green deckled border, embossed, chromolithography, reverse printing is brown, International Art Pub Co, mailed March 16 1908 addressed to a person different from above * Ellen H. Clapsaddle, artist signed



6. Friendship and Community: travelling to Ireland fulfills an expat's lifetime dream

With a map, and famous landmarks on their minds, a few wealthy expats and many tourists make Ireland a travel destination for its beauty, heritage and joyous parties



This postcard encourages expats to dream of returning home to see their loving families.

Fortunately luxury ocean travel became possible.

Narrow gold border, chromolithography, barely embossed, Julius Bien & Co New York, part of St Patrick Series number 7403, copyright 1906, mailed March 1911

***New luxury cruise ships make a dream trip easy but dangerous during WWI**

The luxurious ***Cunard RMS Lusitania**, illustrated on this card, favoured by the Irish, was torpedoed and sunk in 18 minutes by a German submarine on May 7, 1915, only 12 miles off County Cork, Ireland contributing to the decision by the United States to join World War I.



Loosing 70 Irish staff and 70 Irish passengers to war, boosted Irish nationalism thus aiding the allied war effort

***discovered through personal research**

Decorative green and white border, embossed, gold accents, chromolithography, series No 2410, Gottschalk, Dreyfus & Davis Co. Ltd, London, printed in Germany, mailed March 10 1910

7. EPILOGUE: Keeping in touch on Saint Patrick's Day spreads friendships

To maintain new friendships in North America the expats sent lots of postcards



A reminder to put pen to paper is never without merit. Humour is always welcome.

Being inclusive in our friendships with others is needed more than ever today to bring peace to our conflict filled world

No embossing, narrow gold border, gold edges around boxes, chromolithography, A.M. Davis Co Boston series 507 COPY'T 1912

* When it is said 'All creatures want to be Irish' on March 17', here is one proof. Man's best friend, a clay pipe smoking Irish setter, is part of the Irish community too!

This proud dog in a shamrock collar feels he too is part of this joyous occasion.

'Tis true not all accept this invitation to discover Irish culture but happily, many do.



Flat, no embossing gold accents on frame, writing, chromolithography, by the Valentines & Sons Publishing Co Ltd, Mtl, Toronto, and Winnipeg, mailed March 15 1911 *A Canadian postcard expert had never seen this postcard design

Happy Saint Patrick's Day March 17th