

Consuming St. Patrick's Day

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By

Jonathan Skinner and Dominic Bryan

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JS and DB, February 2015
(London and Belfast)

INTRODUCTION

JONATHAN SKINNER AND DOMINIC BRYAN

St. Patrick's Day is a truly global phenomenon. Celebrations of the 17th of March can be found throughout the world: from Dublin and Belfast in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland; to Irish diaspora cities in the United States, such as Boston, Chicago and New York; to the migration centres Melbourne and Perth in Australia; and even as far afield as Tokyo, Lagos, and the tiny island of Montserrat in the Eastern Caribbean. "Everyone is Irish on St. Patrick's Day" advocates the genius marketing slogan found throughout the world, even in the Guinness Storehouse in Dublin, an international tourist attraction shaped and topped like a pint, a brilliant semiotic spin-off from the brewing itself. There, tourists, returnees, and locals can consume a drink in the 360-degree panoramic Gravity Bar above the exhibition, drinking in the sights and tastes of the city.

St. Patrick's Day is an official public holiday in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, where Saint Patrick is reputed to have brought Christianity to the island and banished the snake; is a semi-official provincial holiday in Newfoundland and Labrador, where over 20 per cent of the population class themselves as being of Irish descent; and is a newly created public memorial day on Montserrat, where they commemorate a failed slave uprising (see Skinner, this volume). In these locations, the national day has transitioned from a day in the Catholic liturgical calendar into a day simultaneously – and not a little bit contentiously – symbolizing national and diasporic identity (see Cullen, this volume). On Montserrat, a British Overseas Territory, the Queen's Birthday sits in the calendar below St. Patrick's Day as a rival festival day off work: the week leading up to 17th March, the end of the St. Patrick's Day festival, and a chosen Saturday in June for Queen Elizabeth II's official public celebration (the Queen's 'actual' birthday is on 21st April and is celebrated privately). In fact, for the latter, the island has a week-long set of events to rival, and differentiate from, other St. Patrick's Days around the world. Most commonly, St. Patrick's Day is not a public holiday, though it is still a day

of parading, drinking, dancing and celebrating ‘all things Irish’ to all people.

The St. Patrick’s Day parade, as Bryan (2009) notes, is an example of the use of civic space (see figure 0.1). The public event is about legitimacy, just as much as it is about protest (Skinner 2009). It is most contentious in Belfast where St. Patrick has been harnessed as a symbol not just by the church but also by Unionists and Nationalists, and in particular as a carnivalesque public event contrasting with the Orange Order pseudo-military parades around the 12th July. The Irish diaspora has a centuries-old tradition of expressing embodied identity on the streets, and festive parades and celebrations of Irish identity are found throughout the world, most especially in migrant-orientated destinations in the New World from St John’s (Montserrat) to Chicago, Boston and New York. These parades are not without their masquerade politics, to evoke a related use of migrant space with sound systems and dancing at London’s Notting Hill Carnival (Cohen 1993; see also Conrad, this volume).



Figure 0.1 St. Patrick’s Day Belfast 2012 parade (photo by J. Skinner, 2012)

Consuming St. Patrick’s Day is divided into three unequal parts, moving from proposing a consumption approach to contemporary and historical St. Patrick’s Days, through to a particular insight into the celebration of the day from an applied academic position on a management committee. In between these chapters we present an extensive range of examples, case studies or *consumption axes* as we refer to them. In Belfast, Tokyo, Dublin and New

York, St. Patrick's Day is packaged, presented, consumed, resisted, accepted, co-opted and enjoyed (see figure 0.2). Or, in the words of our contributors: converted, negotiated, reconciled, transformed, ruined. As the case studies go to show, St. Patrick's Day is a prism, and a classic event through which identity-politics debates are played out, social theory tested, marketing strategies refined. Tradition clashes with modernity, Plastic Paddies with Real Hibernians, the 'Redskins' of the Black Irish with the *faux* red hair of the Irish dancer: all on and during St. Patrick's Day.

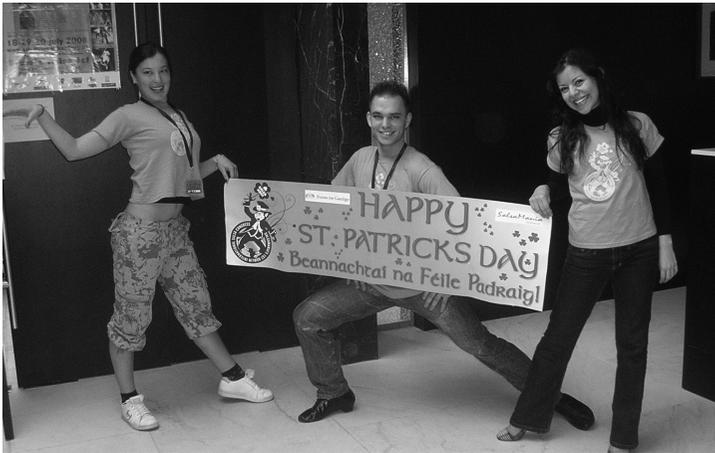


Figure 0.2 St. Patrick's Day Dublin Salsa Festival 2003 (photo by J. Skinner, 2003)

In section one, Mike Cronin explores the question of fake food on St. Patrick's Day. His chapter combines nicely with Moore Quinn's historical investigation into the Irish verbal art of the toast. In developing a thesis on eating as identification in his consideration of Irish American projections to do with food, Cronin revises his *The Wearing of the Green* with Daryl Adair (2002), an heritage-orientated overview of the development of the day. Previously stressing notions of heritage and homeland, diasporic identity and dual allegiance – shown by Irish Americans on 17th March and 4th July – Cronin shows how the consumption of corned beef and cabbage takes on the import of a distinct ethnic identity. Annually, one distances oneself from the multicultural melting pot of Americanness by what one eats. This connection between food and identity can be found in the religious Soul Food practices – the macaroni and cheese, collard greens, fried chicken, potatoes, okra, curried lamb, corn bread, black-eyed

peas – of modern day African American Sunnis (Rouse and Hoskins 2004). Amongst the Sunni, cooking is an expression of religious duty, love of community and Allah. By eating St. Patrick’s Day fare, Irish Americans consume a sense of place – Ireland (see figure 0.3). This is in the same way that an Irish-American drinker of a Guinness import takes a sip and imbibes “God’s country”. This consumption landscape is communicated even more explicitly in Moore Quinn’s chapter that shows the heteroglossic nature of St. Patrick’s Day social life and allegiances of old, from king to saint to pledge. There is ritual licence in the toast to make political comment with absolution – *sans humanité* as the calypsonian would say at the end of their satirical social commentary. The “speech play” is, in Quinn’s case, followed by the collective communion of the drink. The toast, the drink, and the feast have all been part of the rhetorics available to the Irish immigrant since the early eighteenth century.



Figure 0.3 St. Patrick’s Day sausages (photo by J. Skinner, 2013)

As we shift from green sausages and green pints to shamrock and rainbow cookies, the second section in this volume – The Consumption Axes – provides contemporary, if less literal, examples from around the world illustrating how the use of public space is consumed on 17th March each year. Katie Conrad critiques the degree of openness, inclusivity, and multiculturalism in the celebration of St. Patrick’s Day in New York.

Everyone can be Irish for the day, so long as they do not deviate from a prescribed heteronormative orientation or typecast support practice. Daniel Nunan and MariaLaura Di Domenico show just how branded and marketed St. Patrick's Day has become, as the St. Patrick's Day diaspora celebration model is adopted by Scots seeking to establish their own Tartan Day. The commemoration of the 6th April, date of the signing of the Declaration of Arbroath in 1320 signifying Scotland's sovereign independence, is an exercise in building the nation's brand so as to raise the consciousness "other" countries' publics and elicit a return of "settlers" back to their motherland. The danger, as McCrone et al. (1995) have observed, is that the semiotic kitsch, the Warrior Heritage stereotype and the brand typologies turn Scotland the Brave into a Scotland the Brand, as signifiers are kept static and the host population is encouraged to live up to tourist imaginaries (see Salazar 2010). Greenwood (1977) expressed this earlier as "selling culture by the pound" in his study of personal investment in the Alarde festival of Fuenterrabia.

The marketing and consumption of St. Patrick's Day is further complicated when it takes place in a location where the society is divided by an ethnonational conflict over sovereignty. St. Patrick's Day can hardly be plural and shared in a divided society, according to John Nagle in the fifth chapter of this volume. Nagle compares and contrasts the celebration and contest for the day in Belfast and London where different state sponsorship initiatives exist and mean different things to the local citizens: cultural recognition and a shared space in the former, civic municipal socialism in the latter. In Belfast, where cultural exclusion has been the order of the day for those raising "provocative [i.e. Irish] emblems", the use of public space around City Hall is charged with particular significance, and is open to differing interpretations and trenchant criticism. Katharine Keenan adds to Nagle's insights in her chapter with an analysis of the composition of the St. Patrick's Day parade in Belfast. Notably, the carnival arts organization awarded the parade contract in 2011, the BEAT Initiative, was 28 per cent Protestant in composition. With 270 participants from "the other side", and a corresponding statistic in the breakdown of the audience, St. Patrick's Day is becoming a "mixed" public event. Keenan suggests that in Belfast the St. Patrick's Day celebration is a carnival (see figure 0.4), less about Irishness and more about re-imagining a troubled city. And yet, she quotes Conor Maskey, a former Sinn Fein councillor in Belfast City Hall, on his sense of reclaiming the space: "So I remember being on a parade, the sense of taking back, not of overtaking." Whilst the symbolic stockpiling of parades might be softening, there is still the impression that St. Patrick's Day

carnival parade is a counterweight to the recently rebranded Orangefest (12th July) of the Orange Order.



Figure 0.4 Rory McIlroy in the Belfast St. Patrick's Day parade (photo by J. Skinner, 2013)

Both Dominic Bryan and Therese Cullen point to St. Patrick's Day events as a negotiation between civic, religious, political and commercial interests. Regarding the maple leaf, the rainbow and the tricolour, Bryan notes that it is possible to lead the parade in Belfast with a Canadian flag, but certainly not the flag of the Irish Republic; and that unlike the parade down Fifth Avenue in New York, Belfast's parade encourages lesbian and gay groups. In this way, Belfast's parades strive for multiculturalism rather than Irishness. Cullen makes a similar point in her contrast between parades in Dublin and Downpatrick – the spiritual and literal/mythological resting place of St. Patrick in Northern Ireland. Cullen concentrates upon the memorialisation of the Saint and how this has become subsumed by “paddywhackery” (the packaging and selling of “tacky” or “fake” items that claim to represent Irishness). The commercialised St. Patrick's Day parades represent a “new world” (driven by commercial interest). The “old

world” barely peeps through in the more traditional church-related parades, ancillary consumers in a market economy. This deterioration of the religious in favour of the civic is evinced through the parallel case of Guinness’s capitalisation on invented traditions with their creation in 2009 of “Arthur’s Day”, 23rd September, the 250th anniversary of the foundation of the company – and the drink, of course.

In the last two chapters in this section, we see how St. Patrick’s Day is constructed in South East Asia (Japan) and the Caribbean (Montserrat). First, Tomoko Kamimura compares and contrasts St. Patrick’s Day parades in Ireland with those developing in Japan. He associates the late-twentieth-century Celtic Tiger years of economic boom in the mid-1990s with the rise of an industrial scale of celebration of floats and the copying of American-style parades in Dublin. This new packaging of Ireland and Irish culture is not found throughout the country, but it has popped up as an export, such as in Japan where the parades have evolved from a small group of members of the Irish Network Japan parading near the Irish Ambassador’s residence in 1992 to a several-thousand-strong throng with Irish dancing groups, pipe and US Army bands and a visiting Irish Minister by 2001. In this way, in less than a decade, St. Patrick’s Day in Japan has gone from a not-for-profit expatriate event to a commercial and diplomatic mission. This contrasts with the tensions surrounding St. Patrick’s Day on Montserrat, a British Overseas Territory in the Eastern Caribbean considered by Jonathan Skinner. There, St. Patrick’s Day developed in the 1980s as a commemoration of a failed slave uprising against the British and Irish planters on 17 March 1768 rather than for the promotion of Irish culture. It has survived the volcanic destruction of St. Patrick’s Village and gone on to become a week-long set of island events including a Freedom Run, Slave Feast, Kite Flying Tournament, St. Patrick’s Day lecture, and tour of the ruined capital. There are tensions and there is ambivalence concerning St. Patrick’s Day on Montserrat as it is promoted for tourism, involves a very local community, and markets an “auto-Orientalist” version of islanders as “the Black Irish” of the “Other” Emerald Isle.

Finally, we present a concluding chapter by Mary J. Hickman with insights into the St. Patrick’s Day festival in New York, as well as London from the position of a member of the organizing committee. Hickman is well placed to discuss in detail the politics of parading, the celebration of a diaspora’s place, and the tensions with the “homeland”. Completing this volume, Hickman engages with Nagle and Cronin by suggesting that the event is hybrid rather than multicultural, and diversely dependent upon age, gender, location, class, and migrant generation rather than vacuous self-congratulatory consumption. St. Patrick’s Day is as differentiated and

complex as the fractured nature of the Irish diaspora itself. Some might remember it as a party day inseparable from the consumption of cabbage and corned beef after church; others might associate it with bullying at school for being different by wearing the green on the lapel; in Scotland, the Presbyterian Church defines Irish difference as sectarian; and in England, street parades only became a possibility after the 1998 Good Friday Agreement defused Anglo-Irish tensions. Although there had been small church-led processions in London on St. Patrick's Day, Hickman notes that the Festival was launched in 2002 by Mayor Ken Livingstone who had made it a campaign pledge. The sponsored London St. Patrick's Day Festival emerged through layers of political manoeuvring between church, state and community, with different groups represented in different London sites. In this way, Hickman suggests that for all the large-scale national parades and festivities, the consumption of St. Patrick's Day remains *à la carte*.

As editors of this volume, Dominic and I, joined by the other contributors, hope that you enjoy this feast of learning about the complexities and challenges of Irish diasporic space on and around 17th March each year.

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PART I:
CONSUMING ST. PATRICK'S DAY

CHAPTER ONE

FAKE FOOD? CELEBRATING ST. PATRICK'S DAY WITH CORNED BEEF AND CABBAGE

MIKE CRONIN

Come to Ireland and ask anyone about corned beef. They are likely to say “what?” Corned beef has no corn in it, and unless you go to a superstore with German and American food, you're unlikely to find any in Ireland. You won't find much corn on the cob or canned corn here either. The only place you'll find corn is on pizza. So for the sake of the old country, how about some corned pizza? (journaltimes.com, 17 March 2006)

For all their shared heritage, it is clear that the Irish living in Ireland and their Irish American counterparts often fail to recognise each other's version of Irishness. As the blogger quoted above made clear to his American readers, anyone wishing to sample the delights of corned beef and cabbage on St. Patrick's Day in Ireland would have their work cut out. Put simply, corned beef and cabbage is the St. Patrick's Day meal for those who celebrate the day in America, but it is not a dish that is often digested at home, that is in Ireland. For most people in Ireland, their idea of corned beef is a grainy, brown coloured meat that comes surrounded in a film of fat and is sold in tins. Irish tinned corned beef, which has often been associated with health scares, is not what Americans would understand their corned beef to be, namely a cured brisket of pink coloured beef (Smith et al. 2005). The aim of this chapter is to explore the current research issues that relate to studying a national day such as St. Patrick's Day, before moving onto a discussion of how corned beef and cabbage became the meal for Irish Americans celebrating St. Patrick's Day, the complex meanings that emerge when people digest a symbol of their identity, and the issue of how consumption can be used as an approach to issues of national identity.

St. Patrick's Day

In 2002, along with Daryl Adair, I published *The Wearing of the Green: A History of St. Patrick's Day* (2002). The book was the result of a late-night conversation about the great Irish history topics that had never been written about. The 17 March seemed too obvious a topic, but one that did offer a fascinating way of exploring many elements of the history of Ireland, its diaspora, and more recent trends of globalisation. It would, or so we thought, also allow us to tackle issues relating to the control of public space, commercialism, stereotyping, and performance. But surely, we told ourselves, it must have been done before. What was startling about the whole project was how little has ever been written about St. Patrick's Day, although this situation has begun to change in recent years (Nagle 2004 2005; Bryan 2006; DeMicco 2006, and Marston 2002). Compared to work that had been undertaken on other national or annual holidays, such as Halloween, Christmas or the 4 July, the literature that explored the history and meanings behind 17 March was relatively small, and dominated by studies of local (and usually North American) parades (Travers 2006). As a result of this, we felt that our primary purpose, as historians, was to track and record the development of the celebration of St. Patrick's Day in Ireland and four countries of major Irish emigration: Britain, America, Canada, and Australia. Our major focus, after reconstructing the historical development of the parading tradition, was to understand what St. Patrick's Day meant and symbolised at different times and in various places.

The book was largely well received, but the locations of the various reviews revealed much about the scholarly uncertainty of what to do with studies of national celebrations. Effectively, which discipline had control of studying national celebrations? The book was reviewed in journals about religion, race, history, Irish Studies, and geography. Every single review came at the topic from a completely different angle and, while applauding the endeavour and the usefulness of a single history, all argued that there was something we had missed, failed to interrogate, or overlooked, such as reading 17 March as theatre, as spectacle, as a marker of place, or as a symbol of diaspora identity. All the criticisms were fair, and opened up a whole host of potential areas for studying St. Patrick's Day.

With a few years distance from the project, and a good deal of hindsight, I want to outline briefly the state of St. Patrick's Day studies, put down a marker for some of the work that I feel needs to be undertaken, and move onto one specific area I have begun engaging with recently:

corned beef and cabbage, and the relationship between food and national celebration.

One of the problems that we faced at the outset of the book project was our conception of studying St. Patrick's Day as an event that could explain Irishness across the globe. In the initial analysis we believed that a global sense of Irishness could be analysed through a study of St. Patrick's Day precisely because it was a shared, generic celebration on a single day. That is, I think we would now argue an untenable and overly simplistic position. Beyond the concept of the 17 March – as a single arbitrary date in the calendar – and the common theme of Irishness, St. Patrick's Day is not a shared, generic celebration across the globe. Like recent debates around the very question of globalisation, I would tend to now understand celebrations – wherever they are held on 17 March – as a product of glocalisation (Featherstone et al. 1995). In these celebrations there is a long standing and historic global pulse behind St. Patrick's Day that is underpinned by over two centuries of emigration and Irish involvement with the British imperial project – that itself has been continued by global commercial entities of consumption-based Irishness, be they Diageo/Guinness or Riverdance – but all St. Patrick's Day events, celebrations, and acts of participation are the product of local customs, forces, histories, and narratives (Casey 2002; Murphy 2003). I would argue that there is no one St. Patrick's Day, and historically there never has been. There are a plethora of local celebrations shaped by local circumstances: Belfast is different to Dublin, which is unique when compared to Boston, that itself diverges from celebrations in Montreal, which in turn is at odds with practices in Montserrat, that shares little with Lagos, a place that has not be dogged by the controversies and problems of Melbourne. The key to understanding an ethnic event such as St. Patrick's Day will not be to consider it as a global commonality, but to study it as comparative entity that exists across and between the Irish diaspora (Kenny 2003).

So while there are common elements in St. Patrick's Day celebrations that we can identify and recognise, it is the elements of divergence, local adaptation, regional and historic circumstance, and concepts of difference that are far more important. But if we acknowledge this local/global mix on 17 March, how do we then move forward in studying and making sense of the biggest Irish-related day in the calendar? I am not advocating a rush towards local/area studies – although these are important – as we still need to keep one eye on the comparative and common elements contained within St. Patrick's Day celebrations. In effect, what I am advocating are three main connected steps forward:

- to move away from a specific concentration on the parade as the single embodiment of 17 March celebrations;
- an aggressive investigation of the questions of locality, authenticity, and the ever problematic (and multifaceted) concept of Irishness; and
- a larger research net that allows us to move beyond the public space and into the private, allowing for a greater focus on areas such as the reception of commercialism, processes of consumption, and the use of various restricted spaces and places on St. Patrick's Day.

To illustrate some of these themes, I want to take, as the issue at the heart of this chapter, the Irish American conception of what constitutes St. Patrick's Day food. Irish America has developed, for many reasons, its own cuisine for 17 March, which would, as already discussed, be largely unrecognisable to the Irish themselves. This is precisely the kind of local adaptation that produces localised traditions and ways of celebrating. The Irish American menu also challenges concepts such as a shared Irishness on 17 March, raises questions of authenticity, and sheds light on the dichotomy of exclusion versus inclusion.

St. Patrick's Day food

A mainstay of the modern St. Patrick's Day experience has been seasonal cooking. In 1930 the American magazine *Good Housekeeping* was assuring its subscribers that "the celebration of St. Patrick's Day has become a universal custom" (Casey 1998, 104). The common awareness of St. Patrick's Day had been promoted beyond the Irish community, in part by American women's magazines such as *Ladies Home Journal*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Delineator*, and *Women's Home Companion*. Since 1906 these magazines, with a largely middle-class readership, had been encouraging women to try out different St. Patrick's Day menus, and to decorate their table with an Irish theme. This tradition of advice was continued in the 1950s, in particular, with mass circulation of women's magazines and the inclusion in many newspapers of a "woman's page" where there was a focus on recipes and cooking skills at specific moments in the social calendar. In North America, especially, the development of easy-to-follow – but thoroughly impressive – recipes was also the by-product of new kitchen technology and the ready availability of ingredients in supermarkets. The mouth-watering dishes that emerged from suburban kitchens were not only supposed to delight the families that consumed them, but also honour St. Patrick in a stylish way. Whereas traditional St. Patrick's Day fare in the United States had centred on corned beef and cabbage, the 1950s, and the rise of women's magazines

and newspaper cookery pages, signalled a potentially more sophisticated culinary world that might sit alongside or compete with the customary meal. *The Irish Independent* in March 1950 suggested that the housewives of Ireland create a three-course meal for the national festival under the heading “Dining off a shamrock leaf”. It began with a cream of tomato soup, followed with a roast of both chicken and ham, accompanied by creamed cauliflower and potatoes. The meal culminated in a chocolate meringue and a selection of Irish cheeses.

As with many forms of festive celebrations, the preparation and consumption of food is an important part of St. Patrick’s Day. Such meals, usually held after church attendance, a drink at the pub, or viewing a parade, are an essential part of the day. Research that was collected for *The Wearing of the Green*, through an internet-based questionnaire posted on Irish diaspora network pages, produced evidence of how Irish people related to 17 March through food (Cronin and Adair 2002): Judy O’Leary Anderson recalled that her mother, an emigrant to America from Rathmore, Co. Kerry, invited a congregation of friends and neighbours for a St. Patrick’s Day feast in her adopted home. Anderson wrote: “Every St. Patrick’s Day, after the parade, we would have about thirty people squeezed into our little flat for a ham and corned beef and cabbage dinner with Irish soda bread and tea”. The anticipation and enjoyment of Irish gourmet food was heightened by the location of St. Patrick’s Day within the period of the Lenten fast. Diarmaid Casey of Leicester remembered that as a child he had to attend mass with his mother, after which he was “allowed to eat sweets”. This was the only day prior to Easter when Casey was allowed to break his Lenten promise. The staple foods of St. Patrick’s Day appear little changed, and so-called “traditional dishes” are a feature of celebrations in America. The main dish on a St. Patrick’s Day dinner table was either bacon or corned beef and cabbage, though it is common to combine vegetables so that the dinner plate features a mixture of orange (carrot) and green (peas). Indeed, in America the corned beef and cabbage dish is unrivalled as the meal for St. Patrick’s Day. This is despite New Yorker Timothy O’Sullivan’s view, which is shared by many others, that Irish Americans are mistaken to maintain that “it’s an Irish dish”. He insisted that “growing up in Ireland I never heard of it – only bacon and cabbage”. The quandary over what food, if any, is authentic for St. Patrick’s Day can stretch the imagination, though some purveyors frankly admit that theirs is a hotchpotch effort. In Tennessee, Melissa Ford organised a St. Patrick’s Day tea at her college that included “‘traditional’ food such as scones, shortbread and Irish breakfast tea”, as well as what she admits were some “utterly unauthentic things: Irish crème flavoured

coffee, a green punch, and some horrible crème de menthe brownies that someone ordered because the icing was bright green”.

Corned beef and cabbage

Clearly St. Patrick’s Day is now celebrated in various venues and spaces (the home, street, bar, and restaurant), in numerous ways (parades, concerts, and parties), and by many different agencies (family groups, county associations, commercial entities, and nation states), but one core theme has always been a constant: food. This chapter does not seek to investigate how and why food emerged as such a central part of the day’s celebration (but the process does bear much in common with other festivals such as Christmas, Thanksgiving, and Halloween), or the linkage of certain specific types of food and drink with the 17 March (see Moore Quinn, this volume). What this chapter will do is accept that “the” St. Patrick’s Day food par excellence in America is corned beef and cabbage. The origins of this dish, and the reasons it established its dominance are multiple and complex, but pre-eminent it is. It is clear that the Irish version of the dish was bacon and cabbage. As St. Patrick’s Day was such a key religious holiday, and also a traditional marker of the beginning of spring, two foodstuffs that were readily available, and in season, became the traditional Irish meal. Beef was simply too expensive for most Irish people to eat, so this never featured as part of the St. Patrick’s Day meal. This occurred despite the long tradition of salting beef, as a way of preserving it, in Ireland. Indeed, during the colonial era, there was a steady transatlantic trade of salted Irish beef, from ports such as Cork, being shipped to America (Anon. *Charelston Morning Post and Daily Advertiser* 1787). Upon emigration to North America, especially in the great wave that followed the mid-nineteenth-century famine, much of the transplanted Irish population turned from rural dweller to urban resident. As a result of this transition, their feeding patterns changed dramatically. Rather than relying on what they could grow themselves, the Irish in America became consumers of food that was only available in stores and at markets. Corned beef was readily available (especially from Jewish stores), and it was cheap. For example, in 1854 the Washington market was selling steak at 16 cents per half pound, roasting beef at 12 cents per half pound, and mutton at 12 cents per half pound. By comparison, corned beef was very cheap, costing only 8 cents per half pound. Not only was it cheaper than other meat, it was sold at a lesser price than most fish and game, or even a half head of white cabbage (Anon. 1854b). Corned beef was such a cheap foodstuff that it regularly appeared as the basis of charitable meals to feed

the poor (Anon. 1879). In the mid-nineteenth century, for example, a correspondent to the *New York Times* congratulated the enterprise of one Mr Lindermueller for feeding the city's poor. His charity meals included "a third or a quarter of a pound of the best corned beef (without bones of course)" (Anon. 1854a). The relative cheapness of corned beef, for an immigrant and at times a marginal community such as the Irish in America, is also evinced by the fact that the meat regularly appears as a foodstuff eaten by nineteenth-century America's most marginalised group, African Americans (Anon., *Christian Recorder* 1861).

Corned beef therefore became the most easily accessible meat for the Irish in America, and was certainly the one that could be bought for the celebration of St. Patrick's Day. Clearly the eating habits of working-class Irish Americans were radically different to their wealthier counterparts. While poorer Irish Americans relied on home-cooked or diner/bar-served corned beef and cabbage, the wealthy, in organisations such as the Charitable Sons of St. Patrick or the Ancient Order of Hibernians, celebrated St. Patrick's Day with sumptuous feasts at the best restaurants and hotels in town, such as at Delmonico's on Wall Street, New York. At such restaurants the elite sat down for five and six course meals featuring the best cuts of meat cooked in the most fashionable contemporary styles (Steinberg and Prost 2008). However, given the social mobility of Irish Americans, and their folk memories of corned beef and cabbage as the meal for St. Patrick's Day, elite eating habits changed slowly during the twentieth century. By way of celebrating shared historic roots, the Irish American community, of whatever class, ate corned beef and cabbage: the elite dining of the nineteenth century disappeared. The process was personified in the form of the cartoon character Jiggs, from the comic strip *Bringing Up Father* (Soper 2005). First appearing during the First World War, Jiggs was an Irish American bricklayer who had won a fortune on the sweepstakes. Although gentrified by his wife and children as a result of his new wealth, the cartoon strips regularly featured Jiggs returning to his roots, namely Dinty Moores restaurant, where he ate corned beef and cabbage. The strip continued under different cartoon artists until 2000. Its importance, with respect to corned beef and cabbage, is that many websites and news articles refer to Jiggs' love of the meal as the inspiration for the standard American St. Patrick's Day fare. This seems unlikely given the long heritage of the meal, but it is clear that Jiggs' love of the "traditional" Irish American dish mirrored the culinary choice of many of his fellow countrymen (Soper 2005). A sign of the omnipresence and upward mobility of corned beef and cabbage also came from the

addition of this combination for the St. Patrick's Day meal of choice at the White House.

Given the accepted dominance of corned beef and cabbage as the meal in America on 17 March, from the local bar through to the table of the White House, this chapter will now move on and explore three key issues associated with this development:

1. why food is such an important part of national celebrations;
2. the processes involved in constructing and presenting corned beef and cabbage as the Irish American dish;
3. how the consumption of corned beef and cabbage links Irish America with the American "other", and sustain a generic Irishness on 17 March rather than a separate Irish American culinary identity.

Why food is such an important part of national celebrations

National foods (or at least what is proposed and standardised as foods representative of the nation) draw on regional and ethnic cultures, and in doing so co-opt and homogenise the local so that it becomes recognised as representative of the national. Accepting origins in regional specialisation of food, in this case the Irish bacon and cabbage, often leads to national standardisation – the American corned beef and cabbage – and food emerging as the "national" food of industrial and postcolonial nations in general (Appadurai 1998). The national nature of food is critical to the arguments in this chapter, as it is through food and its traditions that nations seek (consciously or otherwise) differentiation from other national cultures. As Bell and Valentine note, "like a language, food articulates notions of inclusion and exclusion, of national pride and xenophobia, on our tables and in our lunchboxes" (Bell and Valentine 1997, 168). As such, on one day every year Irish Americans can potentially differentiate themselves from the rest of American society by embracing what they consider "their" national food.

In light of work that has been undertaken in the sphere of drink culture, it is clear that food and its consumption play a key role in the imaginings of the nation and other cultural and political formations (Heath 1987; Hunt and Barker 2001). This leads us, then, to a key argument put forward by David Sutton, namely, that "we are what we eat" and "we are what we ate" (Sutton 2001, 7). As such, food and eating play a key role in identity formation and reproduction, which, despite the passage of time and the historical movement from the pre-modern to modern and onto (and beyond) the postmodern, allows for a ritualistic preparation, consumption,

and digestion of food that develops and maintains ethnic sameness. Structures and rituals are built around food, the poignancy of which is increased when linked to nation and ethnicity, and combined with the celebration of an ethnic holiday. But there is more here than simply the food: we have to consider the act of eating and the context of the act of consumption. As Lockie (2001, 239) has argued:

The consumption of food is both intensely personal and profoundly social. Through the act of eating, we both incorporate the elements of food into our bodily organisms, and are incorporated ourselves into a host of social networks... eating carries with it potentially enormous social and environmental significance.

In this spirit, food, and its eating, embodies and constructs “selves”, “communities”, and “regions”, and, as humans construct their identities spatially by virtue of their place, they also do so through the foods they construct. Thus while national or regional dishes may be connected to a place, through the act of consuming them *in situ* (e.g. Italian food in Italy) they can also embody and construct themselves and their fellow diners by consuming food that is nation or region specific in a way that their non-localised identity does not allow for. By eating corned beef and cabbage on St. Patrick’s Day – a dish that has been constructed as being genuinely Irish – Irish Americans, removed though they are from the actual space that is Ireland, consume a virtual spatial identity marker and therefore construct themselves as Irish.

Eating then is an act of identification (Oyangen 2009; Phillips 2009). Through the consumption of the same food, groups (in this case the Irish Americans) identify with each other, differentiate themselves with anyone not partaking in their celebration, and integrate those non-Irish Americans who chose to dine with them or in a similar fashion. The consumption of what is commonly agreed and recognised as a “national” food allows for the production and projection of homogeneity and heterogeneity in terms of Irish American ethnicity and national identity.

The processes involved in constructing and presenting corned beef and cabbage as the Irish American dish

The processes of differentiation in which food and its consumption are so important are themselves processes of globalisation. Foods are regularly understood as being national dishes, and yet are consumed, via restaurants and supermarkets, on a global scale (Wilson 2004, 4). Thus, Irish American food is in origin primarily a product of British Imperial

emigration processes that were part of nineteenth-century globalisation – the movement of the Irish to the United States – and this movement is validated by an annual reaffirmation of an Irish American identity on St. Patrick's Day by the embrace of corned beef and cabbage as a distinctly ethnic meal. This singularity of 17 March fare is in sharp contrast to the regular eating habits of Irish Americans, which are affected by global food trends and the standards of consumerist McDonaldisation in the food market. By recognising the Irish (Americanness) of St. Patrick's Day, and by dining "nationally", the Irish Americans recognise their identity (at least fleetingly) and position themselves as distinct from the multicultural melting pot of Americanness and the forces of global homogeneity. The identity is one that is evanescent, and may not surface at any other time of the year. It is a fleeting and short-term engagement, through the celebration of 17 March and the food it entails, of ethnic heritage that marks out an historical and hyphenated identity, while not challenging their often dominant Americanness. Through the historic process of inventing corned beef and cabbage as their national or ethnic dish, Irish Americans also allowed themselves to be identified as a distinct group in a new country. They did this by embracing a cuisine that rejected the colonial (i.e. British), and yet set them apart from the dominant assimilationist model of the United States. As there is no genuine national food per se, corned beef and cabbage was adapted from an historically staple food by the Irish in America and evolved to become "the" Irish American dish. To understand how corned beef and cabbage became the Irish American dish on St. Patrick's Day is to accept the absence of any essential national food, but to embrace instead the idea that foods which "we think of as characterising a particular place always tells stories of movement and mixing, as 'deconstructions' of individual food histories" (Bell and Valentine 1997, 169). It therefore ceases to matter whether or not corned beef and cabbage is an authentic Irish dish. The seminal importance of its consumption on 17 March is that it is a product and symbol – a cultural signifier – of the history of the Irish community in America.

As Wilson notes, "all cultures and identities are based on notions of common ideas, values and practices, in shared pasts, presents and futures" (Wilson 2004, 3). It follows, therefore, that Irish American culture depends a great deal on St. Patrick's Day and the customs associated with it to sustain identities and a common narrative of Irishness. It matters not that there is a disjuncture between Irish and Irish American culture. What matters is the perception that Irish Americans, by dining on corned beef and cabbage, are embracing what they see as a common Irish and Irish American culture. This is for them at once authentic and real, tying them,

as the consumers of the food, to the Irish that have come before them to America, and also to their contemporary local settings of associational, family or friend-based gatherings. They are literally consuming their past. Yet, for all this, identity is a socially constructed product. The 17 March dining habits of the Irish American (and indeed, the broader American nation which chooses to celebrate the holiday) are shared for one day only. This sharing of a common Irish American food ritual is enough, given its long though mysterious origins, to convince all those that partake that they are actually sharing and constructing a common culture and identity: a process mirrored in other national holidays in the United States, such as Thanksgiving, Cinco de Mayo or Hanukkah, all of which invite a myriad of ethnicities to celebrate a specific cultural and ethnic/national identity. This sharing of identity is produced by an act of social construction that is reliant on the social specificity of the history of the Irish in America, and their sense of place, space, and social structure. What matters is that St. Patrick's Day food customs have a long enough history of Irish American specificity, of shared social construction; that they feel, and can be justified and consumed as, an authentic act of group identity and cultural sharing.

Given the trends of identifying and defining national identity in recent years, it is clear that the concept of the imagined community and the invented traditions of the nation, or the ethnic group, are key in the context of St. Patrick's Day food (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992). In a nation such as America, where allegiance to the concept of the state is paramount, yet where ethnic allegiances are allowed, and even encouraged, the ideal of the imagined ethnic community or the shared invented tradition is significant (Doob 2004). These allow the members of a particular group to embrace both historical and contemporary processes of identity formation, and in doing so allow the specific Irish American community, through its consumption of St. Patrick's Day food, to continue with, and highlight, processes of maintaining, reproducing, and transforming what it is to be an Irish American.

It is clear that "the phenomenon of eating, of dining, is replete with cultural meaning. That we put food into our body is important, but how we do this is the principal source of semiotic significance." (Domzal and Kernan 1993, 5). Given this broad bodily distinction, Girardelli went further, and argued, "In contemporary consumer societies, the food and its package should be regarded as one unique and inseparable entity that is consumed in both a concrete and a symbolic manner. I define such an entity as a food package." (Giradelli 2004, 311). Traditional St. Patrick's Day fare in America is, as has been argued, a product of a local adaptation