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From Our Readers

Yankton Set To Get Its Irish On For St. Patrick's Day

By Robert F. Lyons Kennebunkport, Maine

Although Yankton does not celebrate St. Patrick's Day with a parade, the sons and daughters of Ireland can pay tribute to their patron saint with a bike ride and a game tournament. The St. Patrick's bike ride and game tournament on March 16 starts at Ben's Brewing Company (1-7 p.m.).

Maps will be provided for the 20-mile ride which is hosted by Team Road Booty, a Cycling team consisting of Prime Grade cyclists. For non-bicycle riders, a bus will be available to wend its way around to the five designated bars which offer a wheel of a deal games with trophies to winners. Plenty of corned beef and cabbage will be served throughout the city as long as supplies last, along with the usual beverages at O'Malley's Irish Pub, at Stringers Bar & Grill (March 16-17), and at Cottonwood and Shipwreck Bar with live Irish music (March 17).

This annual wearing of the green celebration goes back to America's pre-independence era in New York City in 1762 when the first parade honoring Ireland's patron saint was held by Irish soldiers serving in the British army. After our successful American Revolution, the celebration of St. Patrick's Day would become a demonstration of Irish-American patriotism.

American independence would not have been achieved without the Irish. When the shot heard round the world was fired, 147 Irishmen were among the minutemen at Lexington and Concord. After the smoke cleared on April 19th, 1775, twenty-two Irishmen would have given their lives in America's initial bid for independence.

Gen. George Washington proclaimed March 17th a day of rest for his Continental Army in 1780, acknowledging the cause of Irish freedom and the Irish-American alliance against the British Empire. Americans were not going to allow themselves to be ruled as Ireland was. Forty-five percent of Washington's Continental Army was Irish.

Alan Lomax, American folk song collector, observed: "If soldier's folk songs were the only evidence, it would seem that the armies that fought in the early American wars were composed entirely of Irishmen."

In New York City, the "Fighting Irish" 69th Infantry regiment leads off its 168th St. Patrick's Day Parade with two shaggy Irish wolfhounds strutting up Fifth Avenue. This Irish brigade, organized by Irish Revolutionary and Civil War Union General Thomas

Meagher from Co Waterford, was invited in 1851 to lead the St. Patrick's parade to protect the Irish from violence orchestrated by anti-immigrant "Know-Nothings."

In the Siege of Yorktown sequence of Lin-Manuel Miranda's smash hit musical, Alexander Hamilton asks: "How did we know that this plan would work? We had a spy on the inside. That's right!"

The chorus shouts: "Hercules Mulligan!"

Mulligan, Irish born tailor and agent of the Patriot's spy network replies:

"A tailor spyin' on the British government! I take their measurements, information and then I smuggle it.

To my brother's revolutionary covenant I'm runnin' with the Sons of Liberty and I am lovin' it!"

The morning after the British evacuated New York City, November 26, 1783, Gen. Washington invited Mulligan to breakfast. The city was returned to the victorious Patriots and declared the capitol of the United States.

Lord Mountjoy lamented in Parliament on April 2, 1784: "America was lost by Irish emigrants.... I am assured from the best authority, the major part of the American Army was composed of Irish and that the Irish language was as commonly spoken in the American ranks as English. I am also informed it was their valor that determined the contest."

After Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown, Oct. 19, 1781, at the surrender ceremonies, the British regimental band played the familiar march, "The World Turn'd Upside Down." The Irish in the Continental army accelerated the pace of that downward turn.

The Irish, skilled at verbal arts, raised a glass to their dual identity at the centennial celebration of Boston's Charitable Irish Society, March 17, 1837: "To Ireland and America. May the former soon be as free as the latter, and may the latter never forget that Irishmen were instrumental in securing the liberty they now enjoy."

Irish participation in the American Revolution helped give birth to a new nation. Irish-Americans returned the favor after the 1916 Easter rising when, "Ireland ... supported by her exiled children in America ... strikes in full confidence of victory." Ireland's war of independence ended with the Anglo-Irish Peace Treaty in 1921 and, "Ireland, long a province, A Nation once again!"

For all those wearing the green in my hometown, I lift a toast: Erin go Bragh! [Ireland till the end of time!]. America forever!

A native Yanktonian, Robert F. Lyons of Kennebunkport, Maine, teaches Irish Studies in the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, University of Southern Maine. His County Waterford ancestors found their way to Chicago and homesteaded in Dakota Territory in the 1880s.