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Forget the Norsemen, Columbus —the Irish found America first

Thought the Vikings and Christopher Columbus "discovered" America? Think again.

Persuasive Irish historians have placed the date their ancestors landed in Canada centuries before the Norsemen, Columbus and the French. They say St. Brendan, an Irish monk and navigator, arrived in what is now Canada in 545 A.D., stayed here for seven years in the company of 12 other monks.

Unconvinced? St. Brendan's voyage is preserved in Irish legend song and story, particularly in County Kerry, his birthplace. Evidence has been uncovered that show Irish settlements existed in the St. Lawrence valley between 875 and 900 A.D.

Dr. Gustav Lanctot of Montreal, a retired Canadian archivist, reported peaceful Irish Celts living in Iceland were driven from their homes by Norsemen in the 10th century. They sailed west until prevailing winds blew them along the coast of Labrador and into the Gulf of St. Lawrence. It is believed they landed in the Magdalen Islands and later moved to Cape Breton.

But it was not until the 1820s that the first Irish came to this part of Canada. It was after the Irish rebellion of 1798 and the great famine of 1822 that the Irish of both the south and the north - Catholic and Protestant - immigrated to Canada. By the mid-nineteenth century Irish in Canada outnumbered both the English and Scottish. In the later nineteenth century and twentieth century, a higher proportion of Irish emigration went to the United States and the percentage declined in Canada.

There may have been Irish



in Acton and area earlier but the first recorded history of large scale settlement was in Little Dublin, the area south of Acton bounded by what was Highway 25, 25 Sideroad, the Town Line and 15 Sideroad. Scottish settlers had settled on land further south, below Speyside, in what became known as the Scotch Block. The more rocky, less attractive land on the Escarpment was deeded to the Irish.

Families with names like Gibbons, Kennedy, Dunn, O'Callaghan, O'Hara, Curren, Dalton, Mulloney, McPhee, Foley, Lamb, Flynn, Cummins, Fitzpatrick, Donnelly, Kelly, Mulley, McCann, Mulholland, Carty, Kinsella, Monahan, McGuire and Kaley carved farms out of a stubborn Esquering wilderness. By 1857 they had built a frame church on two acres of land given to the Catholic Corporation of the Diocese of

Hamilton by Matthew McCann and John Mulholland. Work started on the church on March 18, 1857, one hundred and forty-three years ago, a day after St. Patrick's Day and a day before the feast of St. Joseph. The church was called St. Joseph's perhaps at the behest of the parish priest, a Jesuit of French origin.

The adjoining burial ground, rough, stone strewn on the side of the hill on the Dublin Line (First Line) tell a story of privation, diphtheria and cholera epidemics which raged through the middle of the 19th century. Sometimes whole families were wiped out. Meanwhile, quite a few Irish families had come to Acton with the railway in 1856.

It wasn't until 1887, 30 years later, that the parish moved into Acton into the present church on Church St. It had been erected by Congregationalists who couldn't handle the expense. The Irish families weren't easily persuaded the move was in their interest. Some of the pioneer families with deep roots in the soil refused to move. It wasn't until the pews were removed from the little frame church and it was torn down that the move to Acton was completed. A monument on the Dublin Line cemetery marks the site of that frame church.

Northern Protestant Irish had settled in Acton, took, and became pillars of the com-

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Who was St. Patrick?

Who was this St. Patrick whose feast day is celebrated every March 17 and who has been called the "Apostle of Ireland?"

There's some controversy about where he was born. Some claim his birthplace was a village called Bannavem Taberniae, near Dunbarton-on-the-Clyde, that's Scotland isn't it? Or at the mouth of the Severn River in England. Others maintain he was born in Brittany which is the Celtic part of France.

We know of a certainty that Patrick was of Romano-British origin and was born in 389 A.D. His full name was probably Patricius Magonus Sucatus, obviously a Roman name. As a young man, according to his brief "Confession," he committed some fault and although he was born into a Christian family - his father Calpornius was a deacon - he apparently lived a dissolute life.

At age 16 Patrick and some others were seized and carried off by sea raiders to become slaves in Ireland. Research now indicates he was a swineherd in County Mayo for six years before escaping back home. During his stay in Ireland he reformed his life, and prayed constantly and returning home studied and was ordained a priest.

Around the year 442 Patrick went to Rome and met Pope Leo who took a special interest in the Irish church. The Pope sent him to Ireland to evangelize and unify the church. He is credited with converting thousand of Irish to Christianity.

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