

Mid-March Trio

By Charlie McBriarty

It is March and still winter, with spring not scheduled to arrive until the vernal equinox when the sun is directly over the equator and the length of daytime and nighttime is roughly equal. This astrological event marks the official end of winter and the beginning of spring for those of us living in the northern hemisphere. This year, the event will occur on March 20. That means as we rip the February sheet from the calendar nearly three weeks of winter remain. However ole man winter's treatment of us this year doesn't portend an early spring. Surely there is something the new month has to offer other than nearly three weeks of winter.

The middle of March presents three intriguing days to off-set the wintertime blues. First there is March 15, which has been an interesting day in history. The ancient Romans used the term "Ides" when referring to the fifteenth day of four months, March, May, July and October. On the other months the Ides fall on the thirteenth day. Today one seldom hears of the Ides of May, July or October, but you may have heard of the Ides of March when watching Jeopardy, or you might have run across it when playing a game of Trivia. If you are a history buff, you might even recall that the Roman Emperor Julius Caesar was assassinated in 44 B.C. on the Ides of March. However, it is much more likely that you heard the term in your high school English class studying Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* where a soothsayer advised Caesar to "beware the Ides of March."

Then there is March 16 when a few of North Carolina's coastal fishermen

still commemorate Old Quawk's Day by staying in port. The story behind this custom is that in the late 1700s or early 1800s Old Quawk was cast ashore on one of the barrier islands of North Carolina. Some reports indicate that Bogue Banks was the island of refuge while others identify the site as Ocracoke Island. In either case, the tale is that Old Quawk was a sailor aboard either a West Indian or South American vessel that was shipwrecked off the treacherous North Carolina coast. He was what today we would label as a loner. In addition he was viewed as stubborn and contrary by his neighbors. There is no record of his given name, but he was called Old Quawk because people believed that when he became angry or excited, he squawked like the night heron. Like other men on the island, he was a fisherman. The story is told that on this particular day, March 16, a storm was brewing off the island. The other fishermen decided they would not take a chance on challenging the weather and did not leave port. Ever the contrarian, Old Quawk set sail, cursing the weather, his spineless neighbors and God at the top of his voice. That was the last sight or sound of Old Quawk. Since then for hundreds of years, seafarers along the islands did not venture out on March 16. Whether they remained in port because of the weather or a belief that Old Quawk had put a curse on that day may never be known. But the legend has it that fishermen remaining in port on March 16 were doing so in memory of Old Quawk.

Finally there is March 17, St. Patrick's Day. This is a day for the wearing of the green, a day when everyone is either Irish or professes to be. A lot is widely known about how the day is celebrated and about Patrick himself. Here are

some lesser known facts surrounding the Saint and his day. Although clearly associated with Ireland, Patrick was not himself Irish. He was born at the end of the fourth century or the beginning of the fifth on Britain's west coast, and as a youth, he was not particularly religious. In fact, as a teenager he was kidnapped and shipped off to Ireland where he spent six years as a slave. It was during these years that his faith emerged. When he eventually escaped from his captors, he returned to his family and began a 15-year course of religious study leading to his becoming a priest.

Upon his ordination, he was sent to Ireland to minister to the few Christians on the island and to begin the process of converting the pagan Irish people. His understanding of the language and customs of the Irish, acquired during his time as a slave, provided him with many of the tools he needed to convert the people. His knowledge that the pagan Irish used fire to honor their gods led him to use bonfires to teach them about Easter. The ever-present fields of clover offered a symbol to explain the concept of the Trinity—three persons in one God. Also, Patrick is often credited with driving snakes from Ireland; however, this story has been refuted by scientists who maintain that no snakes have been on the island since the Ice Age.

It is believed that Patrick died in Ireland on March 17. Though there is some debate about the exact year of his death, most believe it was in 461. For centuries, March 17 has been celebrated as a religious feast day to honor St. Patrick as one of the patron saints of Ireland. It was a day for families to pay their respects by attending Mass in the morning, followed by celebration with friends. Although the day occurs during Lent; a time of fasting and abstinence,

dispensation has been granted, allowing people to celebrate with dancing, food and drink honoring St. Patrick.

Surprisingly, the first St. Patrick's Day parade did not take place in Ireland; rather it happened in New York City on March 17, 1762, when Irish soldiers of the British army marched along the city's streets to celebrate their ethnicity. This parade has become a tradition attracting hundreds of thousands of participants and watchers. Today, there are hundreds of communities across the United States where St. Patrick's Day parades are held. Those in New York City, Boston, Chicago and Savannah are among the largest.

Ironically St. Patrick's Day parades were not embraced in Ireland until recently. Perhaps the fact that there are 30 million Americans of Irish ancestry as compared to 4 million living in Ireland may explain this phenomenon. It was in the 1970's that Ireland began doing more to celebrate this day with parades and other secular events. In 1995, the Irish government initiated a campaign to transform St. Patrick's Day into a truly Irish celebration. Today, the St. Patrick's Festival is a week-long celebration, which has attracted millions to the Emerald Isle.

So if the March doldrums have gotten you down and you can't wait for the vernal equinox to return the joy of spring, remember March 15, 16 and 17, any one of which can justify a celebration. An Ides of March Toga Party might be an interesting change on March 15. An Old Quawk Squawking Contest could be planned for March 16. Even if you are not Irish, on March 17 you might enjoy a meal of corned beef and boiled cabbage with or without a pint or two of Guinness.

SOLVE YOUR WATER PROBLEMS WITH YOUR PHONE. CALL CULLIGAN.

Culligan.

better water. pure and simple.™

Culligan.com
252-726-6118

TIME TO UPGRADE?

Find out by having your softener inspected by your local Culligan Man™! (Any Brand)

- ✓ Set Timer
- ✓ Clean Screens
- ✓ Test Water
- ✓ Adjust Salt Settings
- ✓ Check Regeneration Cycle

\$29.95 (Reg. \$95)
PLUS Get 2 Bags of Salt FREE!

Dealer participation may vary. Limited time offer. Not valid with other offers. Subject to credit approval. Offer may vary. See dealer for details. ©2011 Culligan International Company.

Seaside
Lawn Care

Professional Care & Free Estimates

Locally owned and operated
out of Emerald Isle, NC.

Schedule you winter yard clean up today!

(910) 554-9066

- Pruning
 - Trimming
 - Hedging
 - Mowing
 - Weed Eating
 - Small Tree Removal
 - General Home Maintenance.
- ~FULLY INSURED~**
Caleb Parker