

Ireland

Capital City: Dublin

Main Languages: English and Gaelic

Currency: Irish Pound

Area: 27,135 sq. mi. (70,280 sq. km.)

Population: 3,535,000

Main Religion: Christian

Government: Republic

People: Irish

Flag: The Irish flag is green, white and orange-red. The green stands for the land, white for peace and orange-red for King William III.



Many people call Ireland the "Emerald Isle" because of the spectacular green of its valleys and rolling hills. This luscious green comes from the abundant rainfall and mineral-rich limestone soil.

To visitors, Ireland seems like a land of enchantment with stories of leprechauns and elves and much song, dance and merrymaking. Thatched roof cottages, winding country roads and "haunted" ruins, lend to the charm of the country.

But, Ireland is actually a very poor country. There is little industry and not enough jobs for its people. During the Great Potato Famine of 1840, thousands fled Ireland to seek opportunities in other lands. Many of these people settled in Canada and the United States.

Saint Patrick's Day is celebrated each March 17th in honor of Ireland's patron saint, Saint Patrick. Patrick was a great teacher and taught many Irish to read and write, along with the study of Christianity. It is believed that he was responsible for bringing the small shamrock plant to Ireland. He often used the shamrock in his sermons to illustrate the message of the holy trinity. On his day, many people celebrate by wearing a shamrock, Ireland's national flower.

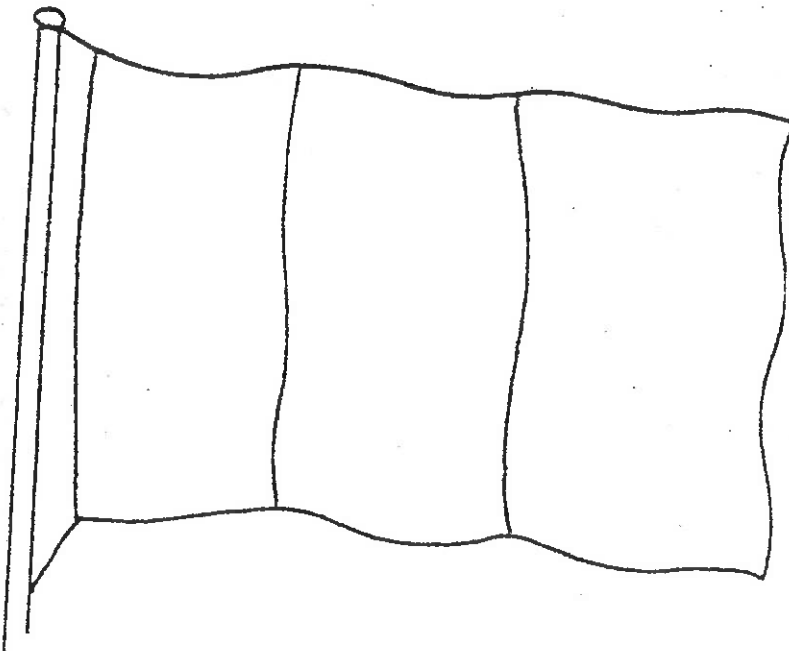
Ireland is a country divided. In 1920, the Protestant counties of Northern Ireland split off from the rest of the country to stay under British rule. The rest of Ireland, known as the Irish Republic, was granted independence from England in 1949. Today, much fighting takes place in Northern Ireland. Many wish to be independent of the British monarchy.

Interesting Facts:

- Peat bogs cover almost one-sixth of Irish land. The Irish cut the peat into chunks and burn it as fuel for stoves and fireplaces.
- There are two national sports in Ireland, Hurling and Gaelic Football. The first is similar to field hockey and the second resembles soccer.
- Before 1949, the Irish Republic was known by the name of "Eire."
- The first sweetened carbonated drink was ginger ale. It was invented by the Irishman, Dr. Cantrall, in 1850.
- The Blarney Stone is said to give great powers of persuasion to anyone who kisses it. It's located near Blarney Castle at County Cork.

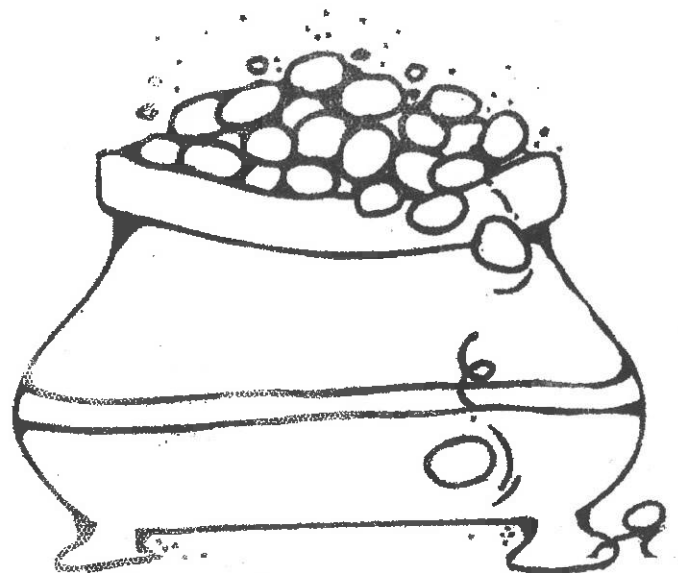
Important Holidays:

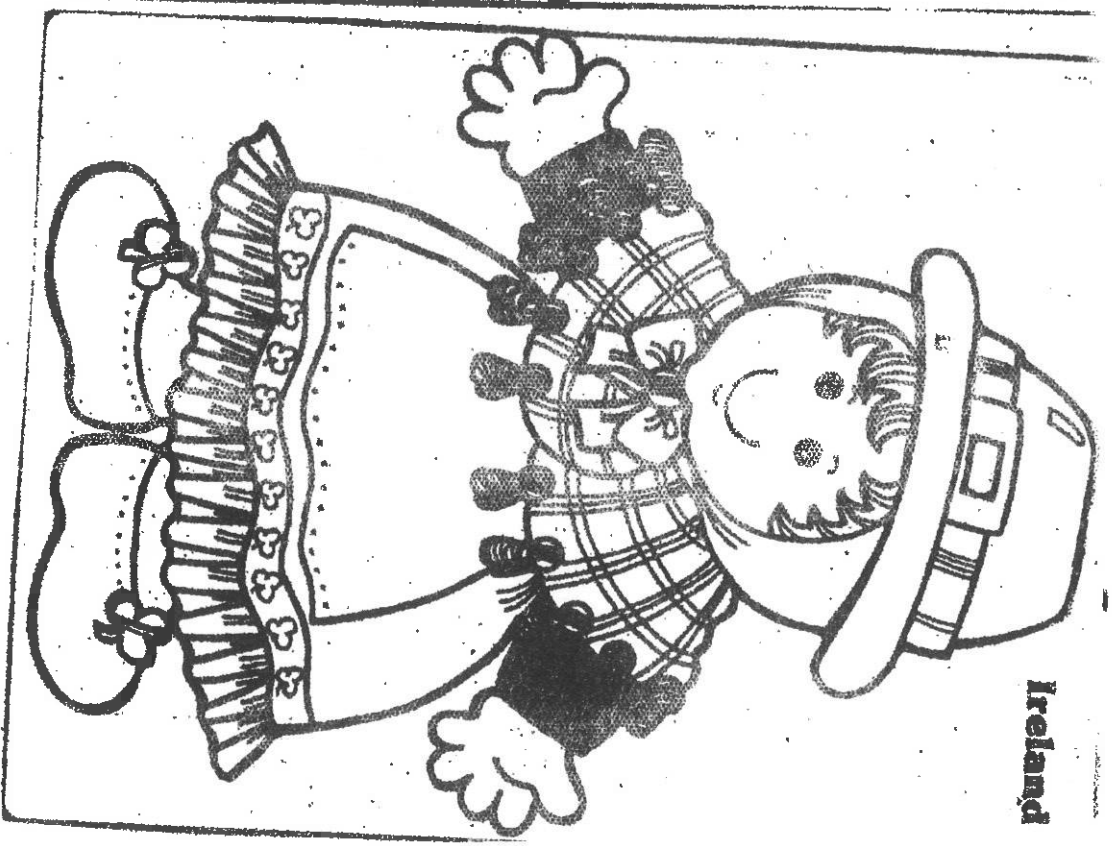
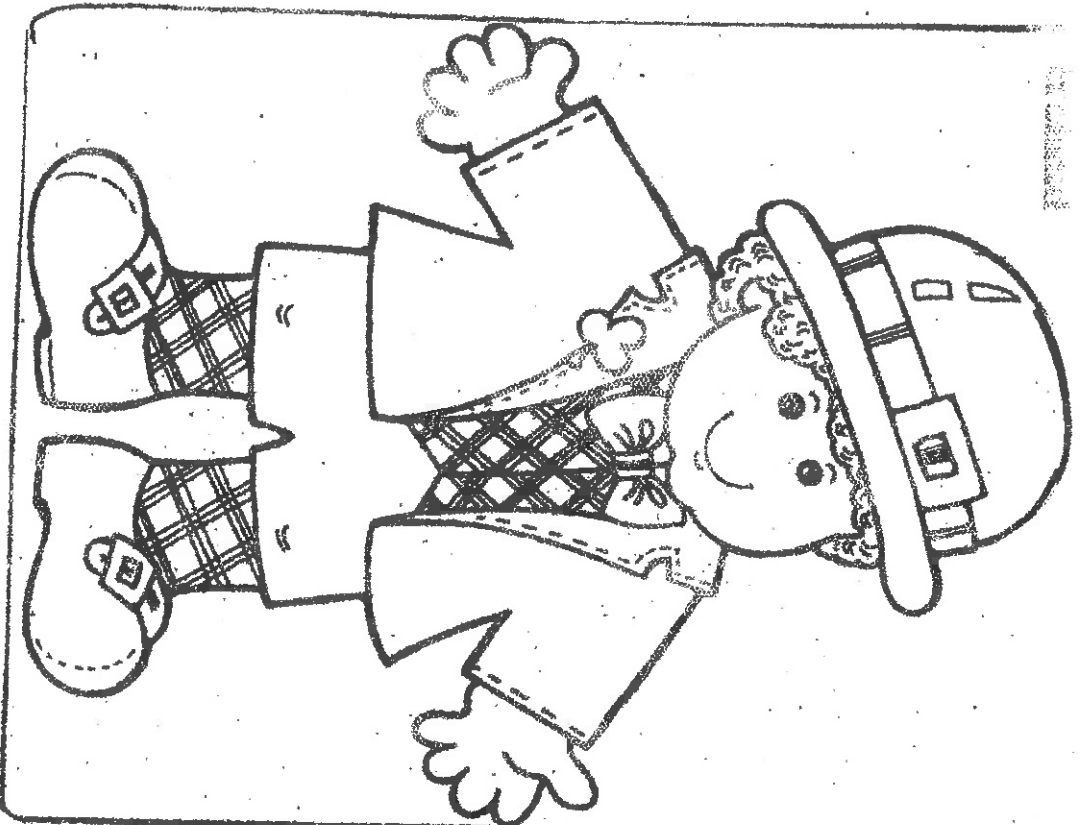
- Ireland is the only country in which Halloween or All Hallow's Eve is a national holiday. It is celebrated on the 31st of October. In the 1840's, the Irish immigrants brought their Halloween customs to North America including the carving of jack-o'-lanterns.
- October 6th, the anniversary of the death of Irish nationalist leader, Charles Stewart Parnell, is observed throughout Ireland. The day is called "Ivy Day" because everyone wears a sprig of ivy on their lapel in remembrance.
- On December 26th, the Day of the Wren, takes place in Ireland. Masked party-goers and musicians go door to door and ask for money. Much singing and dancing follow at large parties.



IRELAND is an island where it rains a lot. The fields are fresh and green so it has been named the "Emerald Isle". Dublin is the capital where about 2 million people live. Most of them speak English and some speak Gaelic. Belfast is the capital of Northern Ireland.

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