

By Cathy Sherman

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Are you ready for St. Piran's Day on March 5?

St. Piran is the Other Celtic saint celebrated in March. St. Patrick is *numero uno*, of course.

Don Whitman is helping to bring some St. Patrick-style attention to St. Piran, who's the patron saint of Cornwall and its ancient industry – mining.

The holiday is a chance to shine a light on the tiny Celtic country.

"I'm surprised at the number of people who've never heard of Cornwall," Don says. "We don't want Cornish history and culture to sink out of sight."

The Cornish were at the forefront of the industrial revolution, he says

So far, Don and wife Marge Roberts have made a lot of Cornish culture converts (me, included) by that surest of methods – Cornish food and drink. The couple also edits the newsletter of the Greater Kansas City Cornish Society.

Cornwall, a tail of land attached to the southwest of England, is three times the size of Johnson County with about the same number of people. Tin and copper mining fueled its economy for centuries.

In the 1800s, Cornish mines were depleted. Tens of thousands of out-of-work Cornish miners were recruited to work in mines all over North America, including Pittsburg in southeast Kansas. The Cornish miners introduced advanced mining technology.

They also brought the pasty, a hearty meal wrapped in a sturdy pastry that Cornish miners took underground. Similar to the empanada and calzone, it's often filled with chopped beef, potatoes, rutabagas and onions. Cornish miners settling in the Mexican state of Hidalgo created a version of a pasty, called a *paste*.

Miners left some of the pasty crusts for the Tommy Knockers, the mystical little people in the mines who could be helpful – or not. You wouldn't want to get on their bad side, Marge says.

Don's late wife, Polly, founded the GKCCS. Don and Marge aren't Cornish themselves, although they have Irish and Welsh ancestors. Don estimates there are 10,000 Cornish descendants in the Kansas City area, although many don't realize their ancestry, thinking they are English.

I'd thought Cornwall was part of England. Wrong!

Cornwall has never been a part of England, Don insists, though he knows England counts it among its counties.

Howard Curnow (his last name means Cornwall – you can't get any more Cornish than that!) says that "English visitors to Cornwall are frequently astonished to find they are referred to by everyone as 'foreigners'."

Cornwall is one of six Celtic nations along with Scotland, Ireland, Wales, the Isle of Man and Breton in France. The Cornish language, once suppressed, is being revived in schools. Groups, such as the Gathering of the Cornish Cousins, unite the Cornish Diaspora in North America.

Tourism replaced mining in Cornwall's economy. Travel posters show it as Europe's other boot, similar in shape to Italy. Marge describes its narrow lanes winding through thick hedgerows. You're never far from the rocky coastline. It has a mild climate, even a few palm trees. Every town has a male choir and a brewery or two. People gather regularly at the pubs. Daphne Du Maurier featured the wild, romantic countryside in many of her works, including "Jamaica Inn." Gilbert and Sullivan's "Pirates of Penzance" was set there.

To celebrate St. Piran's Day, the GKCCS is sponsoring a pasty luncheon and speaker on March 8 at the Central Methodist Church, 52nd and Oak, Kansas City, Mo. If you want to come, let Don know at donwhitman1@aol.com. You'll be welcomed. As they say in Cornwall, *Dy'goel Pyran Lowen*. Happy St. Piran's Day.

