

Around Our Town...Legally Speaking

How Did the Bunny Become Part of Easter?



by R. Michael Shickich

Spring is the season of rebirth and renewal. Plants return to life after winter dormancy and many animals procreate. Ancient cultures held spring festivals to celebrate this renewal of life. One of these festivals was in honor of Eostre or Eastre, the Saxon goddess of dawn, spring and fertility. Eostre was closely linked to the hare and the egg, both symbols of fertility.

As Christianity spread, missionaries turned pagan festivals into Christian holidays. The Eostre festival occurred around the same time as the Christian celebration of Christ's resurrection. The

images of the hare and the egg remained as the cultures and traditions blended.

The Oschter Haws (Easter Hare) was first mentioned in German writings in the 1600s, and came to America with Pennsylvania Dutch settlers in the 1700s. Dutch children would fashion their caps and bonnets into nests for Oschter Haws to lay its colored eggs for good children. (In the 600s, Pope Gregory the Great forbade the eating of eggs during Lent, the 40 days before Easter, thus making eggs a special treat at Easter time.

But, why colored eggs? The precise origin is not known, but the blooming of flowers in the spring seems to coincide with brightly dyed eggs. Many Christians of the Eastern Orthodox Church dye their Easter eggs red, the color of blood, in recognition of the blood of the sacrificed and resurrected Christ. Some also use the color green, in honor of the new foliage emerging after the long dead of winter.

Getting back to the hare, it later became the more common rabbit, caps and bonnets gave way to baskets, and over time the Easter Bunny started bringing chocolate, other sweets like jelly beans, and small toys as well. The Easter Bunny even got a proper name in the popular media –



Peter Cottontail – as the character became entrenched in American culture.

My thanks to the authors of various Internet articles from which this article was compiled: www.celebratingeaster.com/traditions/easter-bunny.aspx, www.mentalfloss.com/blogs/archives/24486, <http://ask.yahoo.com/20021108.html>, and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Easter_Bunny.

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