



Rearview Mirror

A LIVING HISTORY PROJECT FROM THE STORY AND PHOTO ARCHIVES OF THE DETROIT NEWS

The Detroit News

INDEX ►



Detroit News photographer William Kuenzel, leaning against the fire hydrant, photographs strollers in their Easter finery early in this century.

How the egg came to symbolize Easter

Eastertime

By Anne Campbell / The Detroit News
March 26, 1948

*The world is ready for the Spring,
The winter has been long and cold.
The birds will soon fly home to sing
Of April glories they behold.*

*The world has need of Eastertide.
It has been plunged in Lenten gloom.
But now upon the countryside,
The bashful crocuses will bloom.*

By Patricia Zacharias

The joy and hope of Easter Resurrection has been



symbolized for centuries by lambs, rabbits, lilies and crosses. The simple egg, however is perhaps the oldest and most universal symbol of rebirth and new life. The custom of offering Easter eggs, either chocolate or hard boiled and colored, dates back well beyond the early years of Christianity to the most ancient pagan traditions.



Another Easter stroller.

Egyptians and Persians used to dye eggs in spring colors and give them to friends as a symbol of renewed life long before Christ was born. The myths of several Eastern and middle Eastern cultures maintain that the earth itself was hatched from a giant egg.

Scholars believe the name Easter is derived from Oestar, a goddess of Spring and renewal. The rabbit or hare was the symbol of fertility, new life and of the moon in ancient Egypt. It may have become an Easter symbol because the date for Easter is determined by the moon. Also the ancient Egyptians called the hare Wenu, an insignia of the rising of the sun, Ra, and of the resurrective powers of Osiris.



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Detroit's celebration of Easter is steeped in traditions of its diverse ethnic groups. Polish legend has it that on the first Good Friday a man was taking a basket of eggs to market to sell. On the way he put the basket down and ran to help Christ carry the cross. When he returned, the eggs were supposedly decorated in beautiful colors and designs. Local Polish immigrants continued the tradition of 'Pisnaki' decorated eggs.

Other Eastern Europeans, Czechs, Romanians and Ukrainians followed the tradition. Some of the designs have significant meanings and are handed down in a family from generation to generation. Others are characteristic of different regions. The eggs are always included in the food basket when it is taken to the church for the traditional Easter Saturday blessing.

Paska, the traditional Ukrainian Easter bread, was as intricately decorated as wedding cakes. The decorations of tiny lambs, doves, flowers and other symbolic figures were made of dough rather than frosting. The bread itself is symbolic of the bread used at the Last Supper.

Switching Day, another Polish tradition practiced locally, grew up in Poland over 800 years ago. Peasant boys celebrating the end of Lent and a lull in their farm work, would swat their sweethearts with red willow switches. On Easter Tuesday the girls would get even by switching the boys.



Easter's place on the calendar was not actually fixed to the Sunday after the first full moon of Spring until 325 AD by the Roman Emperor Constantine. The emperor may also be responsible for starting the traditional Easter Parade when he ordered every citizen to wear his or her best clothing to observe the Holy Day.



In a centuries-old Polish tradition, peasant boys celebrating the end of Lent and a lull in their farm work, would swat their sweethearts with red willow switches. On Easter Tuesday the girls would get even by switching the boys. The tradition was carried on by Polish immigrants who settled in Detroit

Early Christians believed the week before Easter was a good time to be baptized, calling it 'White Week.' They wore new white clothes as a sign of their new life. Europeans came to believe that a new piece of clothing worn on Easter Sunday would bring good luck. Old or used garments would usher in a year of misfortune.

The grandfather of Easter parades in the United States is the Atlantic City parade, started in 1860, when the strollers in their new Spring finery took walks on the Boardwalk. The promenade on New York's Fifth Avenue was immortalized in Irving Berlin's song, 'Easter Parade.'



Easter strollers head for the traditional march up Piety Hill to church.

Eastland Center's annual fashion parade attracted thousands of spectators. Starting in 1959, grand prizes were awarded for 'best of show' in six divisions. Hundreds of participants displayed their Easter finery before a fashion jury. Not only did mother get a new hat but the children surprised her with a corsage.

Locally, at the turn of the century, Piety Hill was the place to strut on Easter morning. It never was a hill, but a stretch of Woodward between Grand Circus Park and Warren. That part of Woodward was remembered for its wide lawns, spacious homes and magnificent elms. But mostly the street was noted for the churches, which explains why it was called Piety Hill.

The tradition on Easter was to walk to Church. So beginning at 10 a.m., Piety Hill sparkled with slow moving throngs of well-dressed Detroiters.

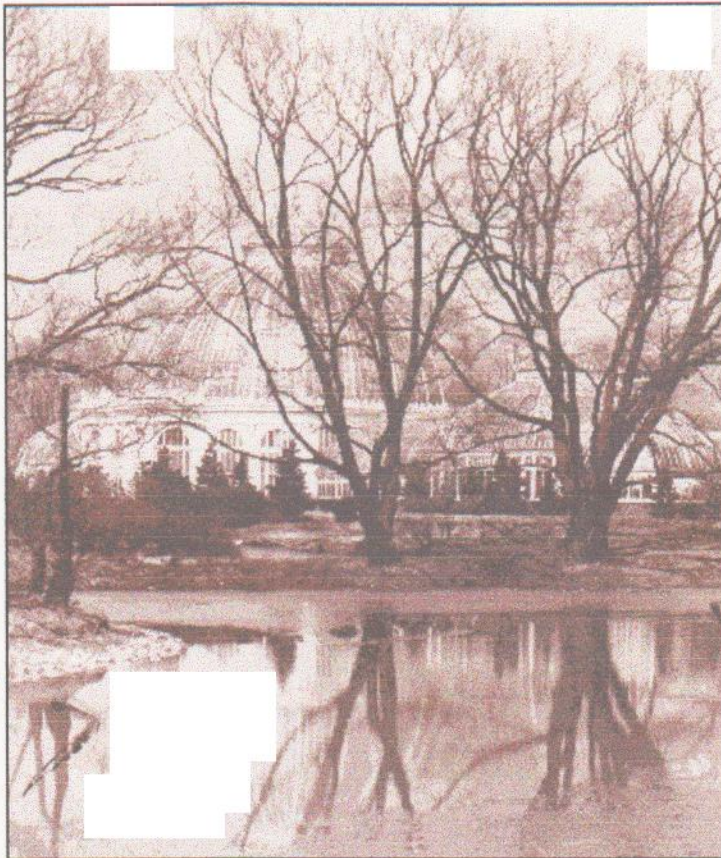
In later years, as Detroiters moved to the suburbs, shopping for that special outfit or mother's new hat moved from the downtown J.L. Hudson's to the branch stores at the malls.

Outdoor Sunrise Services, once popular around Detroit, can be traced back to the ancient spring rituals of building bonfires at dawn to symbolize the triumph of light and

life over death and darkness. Thousands of worshipers attended the annual Belle Isle services at the Remick Band Shell during the 1940s and 1950s. Dawn services also were observed at Memorial Cemetery.

The Belle Isle Conservatory, built by the daughter of The Detroit News' founder James E. Scripps, Anna Scripps Whitcomb, was the spot to view the array of fragrant and pristine Easter lilies. The lily has long been considered the flower of the season, commemorating the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Medieval artists, because of its whiteness, depicted the lily as symbolic of the purity of the Virgin Mary.

Edward Cardinal Mooney celebrated the Pontifical Easter Mass at Blessed Sacrament Cathedral in the '50s, which was televised by The News' WWJ-TV. Hundreds of other denominations celebrated the resurrection, some with six or seven services to accommodate the crowds. On Good Friday, all businesses and retail shops closed from noon til three to commemorate Christ's three hours on the cross before he died. The practice continued until the 1970s.



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The traditional White House Easter Monday egg roll, always the day after Easter, dates back to 1878 with President Rutherford B. Hayes. Children were given the run of the rolling green lawns and brought their own Easter baskets and eggs.

Detroit children collected their booty at local parks like Patton, Rouge and Belle Isle, while the Easter Bunny supplied the eggs. In recent years the Easter Bunny has arrived by helicopter to municipal parks and marshmallows have rained on the children from bunny copters. Brunches with bunny (and the photographer) have replaced the hard boiled egg hunts of yesterday. The decorations and celebrations of the holiday may change with new generations, but the story of the Resurrection, Christianity's assurance of life everlasting endures.

OUR READERS REMEMBER...

INDEX ►