

OSTERSITTEN UND BRÄUCHE / CUSTOMS and TRADITIONS

Osterhäschen / Easter Bunny



EASTER BUNNY'S ROOTS

The Easter bunny was introduced to America by German settlers in the 18th century. The custom of the Easter bunny hiding the eggs is quite common all over Germany and could perhaps be explained by the fact that rabbits have their litters around this time in spring and are seen more often in gardens nibbling on the fresh greens.

In some areas of Germany, however, Easter eggs are brought by other animals such as the fox (Fuchs), the hen (Henne), the crane (Kranich) or colorful hares (der rote Hase, der grüne Hase).

There is an old folk tale according to which a poor woman painted eggs during a famine and hid them in a nest as an Easter gift for her children. Just as the children discovered the nest, a rabbit leaped out of a grassy thicket.

*Pennsylvania played big role*

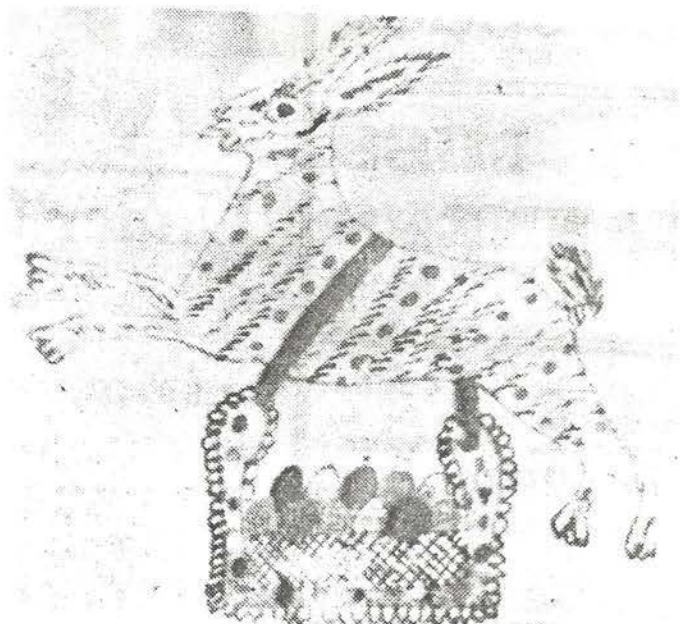
*in legend of the Easter bunny*

The first known American picture of an Easter rabbit bringing Easter eggs is part of a fraktur, a religious record that was drawn in Pennsylvania about 1795-1800.

The watercolor-and-ink picture on paper is attributed to John Conrad Gilbert from what we now call Schuylkill County.

The Pennsylvania Germans told their children that the Easter rabbit laid the eggs. The picture shows colored eggs in a basket held on the rabbit's back, and the eggs were dyed with natural materials.

They used onion skins for brown, madder for red and alder catkins for yellow. Collectors are now searching for all types of Easter items.



Watercolor drawing of Easter bunny was made in Pennsylvania about 1795-1800.