The Easter bunny's roots?

Ted Brown

Since today is Good Friday, I became curious how Easter customs found their origins.

I researched the Internet for background on Easter traditions and the history behind them.

Most of us know Easter is the celebration of the crucifixion of Christ, and churches the world over are filled to overflowing as Christians celebrate Holy Week.

Holy Week, the last week of Lent, begins with Palm Sunday, which takes its name from Jesus' entry into Jerusalem when crowds laid palm branches at his feet. Maundy Thursday commemorates the Last Supper, the night before the crucifixion.

Good Friday in Holy Week is the anniversary of the crucifixion, and Holy Week ends with Easter Sunday, the day of resurrection of Jesus Christ.

One thing that I always found curious was that Easter was never celebrated on a set date.

More research— I learned Easter is observed the first Sunday following the full moon that occurs on or following the spring equinox.

As a result, Easter can be held as early as March 22 or as late as April 25 in any year, depending upon the phase of the moon.

Originally, the holiday was a pagan festival called Eastre, and had nothing to do with the crucifixion of Christ. In an effort to convert more Christians, the name of the festival was changed to Easter, so Christians taking part could join in the celebrations.

Having pretty much researched all I could about the religious background of the holiday, my next quesion was obvious.

Where did the Easter bunny and Easter eggs come from?

It seems the bunny had its origin in pre-Christian fertility lore, being the most fertile animal (the randy little devils) serving as symbols of the new life in the spring.

The first Easter bunny seems to have originated in Germany in the late 1500s, and the first edible 'bunnies' were also of German origin in the early 1800s, made of flour and sugar, and decorated with icing.

The bunny concept was brought to North America in the mid-1700s, with the arrival of the Pennsylvania Dutch.

The Easter bunny is only second in popularity to Santa Claus. As we all know, if they're good, little children receive decorated eggs on Easter Sunday morning.

Eggs, a symbol of fertility, also originated in Germany, and decorated eggs were painted to simulate the brightness of spring flowers.

Eggs have crossed over to the Christian celebration as well, since in Greece, Easter eggs are painted red to represent the blood of Christ.

Purple and gold colors on eggs represents the purple robe that was placed on Christ when he was mocked as the "King of the Jews" prior to his Crucifixion.

It's ironic— I've spent a lifetime celebrating the annual rituals of Easter, from both a religious and whimsical point of view, but never questioned the origin of the traditions.

I've found most people who have any religious affiliation are well-versed on Holy Week and Christ's crucifixion, but few are aware of where the other Easter celebrations originated.

As we celebrate Easter in whatever way we choose— be it religiously, or whimsically— always remember one thing.

Above all else, it's a time to spend with family and friends— and in doing so, celebrating this season of renewal.

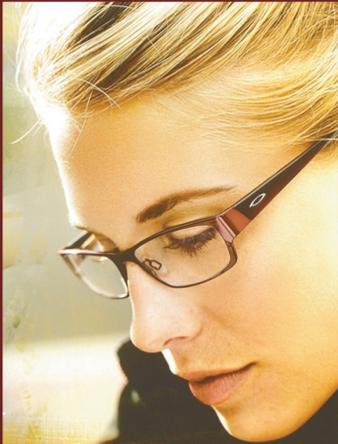*—Ted Brown can be reached at tbrown@independentfreepress.com*