



*Easter 1927: mayhem with a 75-pound chocolate rabbit (MHS COLLECTIONS)*

## Easter Bunny

EVEN TODAY, six decades after the fact, my mother, Gail, can tell you all the details of the great injustice perpetrated on her by her older sister Barbara. Every year Gail, Barbara, and middle sister Phyllis each received a chocolate bunny in celebration of Easter. Gail and Phyllis always gobbled theirs down as quickly as their stomachs allowed. Barbara, on the other hand, stowed hers in a drawer and removed it only after her sisters had devoured theirs. Then she tortured them by slowly nibbling her rabbit-shaped confection as they watched in horror. The fiend!

I wonder how Barbara would have fared against Paul Ritschel and Lee Sundberg.

The caption accompanying this 1927 photograph informs us that Paul (on the left), Lee, and a 75-pound chocolate rabbit are posed in front of Florian's Pharmacy at the corner of Snelling and Minnehaha Avenues in St. Paul. The story behind the photo remains a mystery, but that shouldn't stop us from speculating.

City directories and census records help fill in a few details. Florian's Pharmacy, near Hamline University (the building now houses Lloyd's Pharmacy), was owned by

Florian Ritschel, the son of German immigrants. Florian knew the value of promotion—his drug store sold, among many other items, proprietary postcards of local landmarks—and this chocolate-rabbit stunt was almost certainly an effort to drum up Eastertide business. His six-year-old son, Paul, made an ideal chocolate-rabbit hunter. Young Lee Sundberg, with his handsaw and devilish grin, may have been a neighborhood kid or possibly a relative of one of Florian's fellow St. Paul pharmacists, Ronald Sundberg.

Beyond its humorous intent, the photo reminds us that pharmacies have always been more than medicine dispensaries. The sign on the door advertises cough syrup, while the chocolate bunny and the Pulver chewing-gum dispenser ("Delivers a 'Tasty Chew'") appeal to our sweet teeth. I'm just glad my mother was born too late to witness Paul and Lee dismantle their long-eared chocolate companion. She might never have recovered.

—DAVE KENNEY

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