

News from the Inn-Spector



The Stag's Head in the Spanish Patio

Many of us have been asked about the stag's head surrounded by what appears to be a wreath that hangs in the southeastern portion of the Spanish Patio. This is known as St. Hubert's Elk or Stag, and has deeply religious connotations to it, stretching back over 1,000 years.

According to the legend, Hubert was out hunting. He had the stag in his sights when he saw something emanate from the animal's head. There are differences of opinion among the many sources about (a) what Hubert saw - a cross or a crucifix, (b) when he saw it - Easter Sunday, or just a Sunday when he ought to have been worshipping, (c) what he heard - nothing, or a call to repentance to avoid certain Hell, and (d) details of his later life - either as a priest, a bishop, the patron saint of Bavaria, or of hunters.

The artist Albrecht Durer (1471-1528) portrayed the story in a 1500-1502 etching entitled "St. Eustace." Durer's hunting saint, dressed in the garb of Durer's times kneels to the epiphany while his mount and hounds wait calmly on the lightly wooded hillside. Thus Durer gathers up several centuries of tradition, inviting his viewers to respond to the values presented in the miracle.

FAM liked the story enough to have a print of the Durer etching (1500-1502) of the story hung behind his office desk in the Mission Inn, an affirmation of his life-long religious inclinations. See Zona Gale, Frank Miller of Mission Inn (New York: Appleton, 1938) page 146.

What We Should Say

The INN-SPECTOR says - The iron stag's head and its wreath of oak leaves represents the legend of St. Hubert's conversion while hunting, perhaps in the 8th century. A cross sprang from a stag's head giving a visual, some say verbal, impetus to Hubert's conversion. He later became bishop and the patron saint of Bavaria. The artifact is probably German, from Nuremburg.