

St. Urho

One of the lesser known, but most extraordinary legends of ages past, is the legend of Saint Urho, patron saint of Finnish vineyard workers.

Saint Urho Day is celebrated on March 16th, one day after the Ides of March (March 15th) and one day before the commemoration of Well, let us say some other saint who supposedly drove the snakes out of an emerald green island nation west of England.



St. Urho Statue in Menasha, MN

The story goes that, many years ago, the wild grapes of Finland were threatened by a plague of grasshoppers, until Saint Urho banished the lot of them with some select Finnish words:

“Heinasirkka, Heinasirkka, Menetaalta Hiiteen”

St. Urho

which translates in English as:

“Grasshopper, Grasshopper, Go Away”

(That is an approximate translation - this is, after all, a family-friendly website).

Ever since that day the people of Finland have rejoiced with much feasting and merriment. On March 16th the homes of many happy Finns are decorated in the colours of Saint Urho: Royal purple and Nile green.

Menasha, Minnesota, and Finland, Minnesota, both have huge statues of Saint Urho erected near their town centers. And if you go to Menasha, Minnesota on Saint Urho day (on March 16) you too can join in the barstool races. This is a fun-loving event where barstools are mounted atop downhill skis and the barstool, with barstool-race-participant, fly downhill to thunderous applause of the spectators.

Now, there is a rumour that Saint Urho never existed. And truth-be-told it is not possible, today, to buy a bottle of Helsinki Red to wash down your reindeer cabbage rolls, because grapes don't grow in Finland. And some Irish scholars have claimed that grapes have never grown in Finland.

We don't give much credence to these conspiracy theories, but in fairness, we will say that some people have claimed that the story of Saint Urho, is... a *fabrication*, a fabrication which originated in Virginia, Minnesota in 1956.

Supposedly, the Finns of the Minnesota Iron range thought that they should have a reason to drink whiskey one day before their Irish co-workers. They sought the help of a professor at Bemidji State University (who was also a Finn), they took the name of Urho Kekkonen (the wildly popular Finn who was elected President of Finland in March of 1956), and they invented Saint Urho day to supplant Saint Patrick's Day.

Saint Urho day is now celebrated by Finns around the world, and to them Saint Patrick's Day is nothing - nothing but a day of rest from feasting, drinking and dancing.

Finnish music is very popular in Minnesota. Check this website for sheet music for tunes like Metsakukkia.

St. Urho



St Urho Statue in Finland, MN