

Adult Forum, Sunday, February 9, 2020

Art and Love, and the Legend of Valentine's Day

What is Valentine's Day? How did it get started? Who was St. Valentine? Where did the heart in art come from? I decided to do some research, and came up with some surprising answers. [Google here](#) I come.

The date, February 14early beginnings from legends ... Historians research reveals that the ancient Roman festival known as "the feast of Lupercalia", was celebrated in Rome about February 13 to the 15th. It was to celebrate spring and was a pagan fertility ritual. The early Christian church was in its early stages, and many still were pagans. Around 270 AD, a Roman priest by the name of Valentine was performing secret marriages among the Roman soldiers. The current Emperor, Claudius II, a pagan, had strict laws that the Christians had to abide by. The Emperor believed that single soldiers are more likely to join his army. He had Valentine arrested. Before his execution on February 14th, the priest sends a note to the jailer's daughter, signing it "From Your Valentine". This expression was later adopted by greeting card companies.

How was Valentine's Day established? Two hundred years later in 496 AD, Pope Gelasius authorized February 14th to honor St. Valentine as the patron saint of lovers. He abolished the pagan festival. Note: according to the Catholic Encyclopedia, there are at least three early Christian saints by that name: the Priest in Rome, a bishop, and a missionary in Africa. All were martyred on February 14th. Today February 14, is celebrated as St. Valentine's Day in various Christian denominations.

Some other facts about St. Valentine: according to legend, in order "to remind these men of their vows and God's love, St. Valentine is said to have cut hearts from parchment, giving them to these soldiers and persecuted Christians, a possible origin of the widespread use of hearts on St. Valentine's Day. St. Valentine supposedly wore a purple amethyst ring, with an image of a cupid engraved on it. This was a symbol associated with love that was legal under the Roman Empire. Roman soldiers would recognize the symbol and ask him to perform marriages for them.

Valentine's Day Symbols/icons, such as hearts, how did that association originate? There are various theories on this. The ancient Greek philosophers agreed that the heart was linked to our strongest emotions, including love. The ancient Romans believed that the association between the heart and love was commonplace. Venus the goddess of love, was credited or blamed for setting hearts on fire with the aid of her son, cupid, whose darts aimed at the human heart were always overpowering. In the ancient city of Cyrene, near what is now Shahhat, Libya a coin was discovered in the shape of a heart. This is the oldest known image of a heart. It is really the outline of the seed of the Silphium plant. It is now an extinct species of giant fennel. Silphium was known for its contraceptive properties, and the ancient Libyans got rich from exporting it throughout the known world. They honored it by putting it on a coin. The ancient Romans held another belief about the heart. They thought that there was a vein extending from the fourth finger of the left hand directly to the heart. They called it the vena amoris. This idea although faulty persisted and in the medieval period in England, during the church ceremony in the

liturgy, the groom was told to place a ring on the bride's fourth finger because of that vein. Wearing a wedding ring on that finger goes back all the way to the Romans.

1344, the first known image of the heart icon with two lobes and a point appeared. It is in a manuscript titled "the Romance of Alexander" written in French. It is a great medieval picture book. Then during the 15th century the heart icon showed up throughout Europe on all sorts of items from manuscripts to luxury items like brooches and pendants. It became adapted to many practical and whimsical uses...most related to love but not all!

The Luther rose was the seal that was designed for Martin Luther at the request of Prince John Frederick in 1530, while Luther was staying at the Coburg Fortress during the Diet of Augsburg. Luther explained his use of the symbol: "a black cross in a heart, which retains its natural color, so that I myself would be reminded that faith in the Crucified saves us. "For one who believed from the heart will be justified" Romans (10:10)

Valentine's Day Cards are not the creation of the modern day greeting card industry.

The earliest surviving valentine is a 15th century short poem called a rondeau. Written by Charles, Duke of Orleans, in France. There are other early English valentines also from 1477 by Margery Brewes to her future husband, John Paston.

Modern Day Valentines can be traced back to 1797; a British publisher issued "the Young Man's Valentine Writer" which contained sentimental verses for the young lover unable to compose his own. Printers had already started printing a limited amount of cards, called "mechanical valentines". Paper Valentines became so popular in England in the early 19th century that they were assembled in factories. Fancy Valentines were made with real lace and ribbons, with paper lace introduced in the mid-19th century. In 1835, 60,000 Valentine cards were sent by mail in the UK, despite postage being expensive. Later the postal system was reformed in 1840, and with the invention of the postage stamp more cards were mailed out. Also, introduced were less personal cards which allowed more people to exchange cards. Since the 19th century, handwritten notes have given way to mass produced cards.

In the United States the first mass produced Valentines of embossed paper lace were produced and sold shortly after 1847 by Esther Howland (1828-1904) of Worcester, MA. She was inspired by an English Valentine she received from a business associate of her Father. She was known as the Mother of the Valentine. She made fancy valentines from real lace, ribbons and colorful pictures called scrap. They sold for .50 each and no one could compete with her style or quality. Her company was later bought out by the Whitney Company.

In 1910 Joyce Hall started selling postcards in Kansas City. Then in 1911 formed Hall Brothers with his two brothers, which later used the trademark "Hallmark" on their cards.

Conclusion: Valentine's Day is a day to remember all our friends and family that we hold dear. Call them or write a note to let them know you are thinking of them. Evy Okerstrom