

"To Greet You My Valentine." This valentine is signed, "Dear Mearl, Wishing you happiness and prosperity. Lovingly Miss Nelle." Marked, "Stecher Lith. Co. Roch. N.Y."



HISTORY AND LEGENDS

Valentine's Day is not a legal holiday, which means that schools, post offices, and other offices are open. Still, it is a special day for people to celebrate, and celebrate they do! In countries near and far, an array of gifts is given on February 14, including flowers, candy, and, last but not least, Valentine's Day cards, better known simply as "valentines." Valentines are cards that can be purchased or made with loving hands. Most bear a message such as "To my loving husband" or "To a great friend." But before we go more in depth into what a valentine is, let us see where it all began.

The history and folklore of Valentine's Day, the day for lovers, is varied. How did it all begin? Who is this mysterious saint, and why do we celebrate this holiday? The answers to

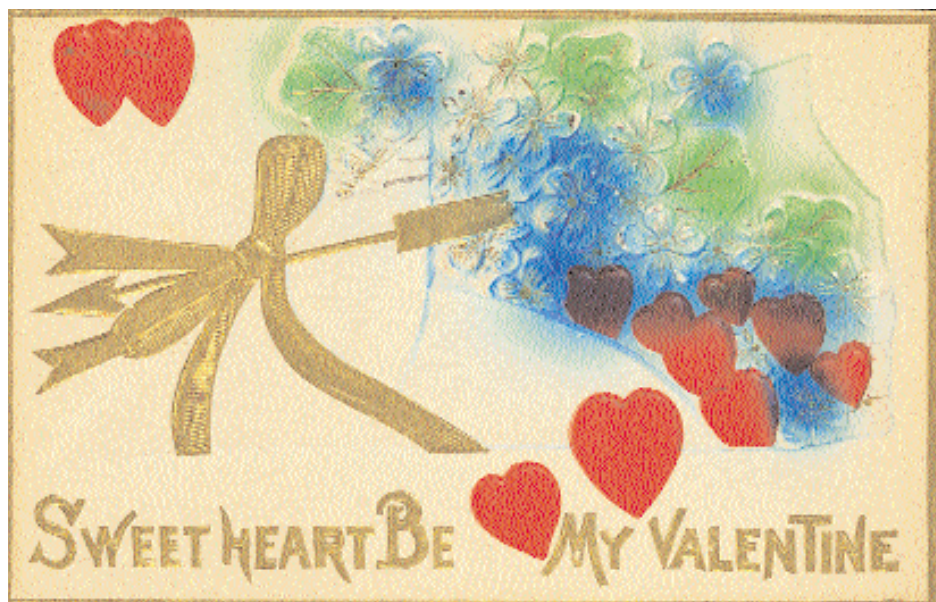
these questions can be found on the following pages.

February has been a month of romance for years. Valentine's Day is a mixture of both Christian and Roman traditions. The Catholic Church recognizes not one but at least three different saints named Valentine or Valentinus.

Some say that St. Valentine was a priest during the third century in Rome when Emperor Claudius II thought that single men made better fighters and soldiers than married men. So the emperor outlawed marriage for young men in order to increase his pick of soldiers. St. Valentine, refusing to obey the emperor, performed marriages anyway until Claudius finally put him to death.

St. Valentine as a priest and physician is one

"Sweetheart Be My Valentine." This embossed card is inscribed, "Happy Valentine From Grace Rohrer—Miss Zanerian Funk 102 Fairground Ave. City." It is postmarked Hagerstown, Maryland, February 13, 1912. Maker unknown.





"I send you this card and call you mine and love you always my valentine." Marked, "P.C. 245" and inscribed, "From Walter Harold Howley."



of the most popular legends. He was a kind-hearted doctor who practiced medicine in a small room in his home. St. or Dr. Valentine also loved to cook and would carefully prepare medicines that pleased his patients' taste buds. Many of his medicines contained honey, wines, or milk. He would lead followers in prayer. Many times he would pray for the good health of his patients. One day a jailer for the emperor of Rome knocked at Valentine's door holding his blind daughter in his arms. The tales of Valentine's medical and spiritual healing abilities had reached this man and he wanted desperately to find a cure for his daughter. After several visits and a number of weeks had passed, the girl's sight still had not been restored. Finally, soldiers arrived at the home of St. Valentine and arrested him. Before Valentine's execution date of February 14, he jotted his farewell message to the blind girl and signed it, "From your Valentine." When the blind girl opened the letter she was able to read St. Valentine's words—her eyesight was restored.

The legends continue. For instance, others

believe that Emperor Claudius II arrested St. Valentine for helping Christian martyrs. After refusing to give up the Christian faith, he was beaten to death on February 14.

United States and British history differs from Roman and Catholic legends. It is said that while the Romans were conquering most of Europe, they brought valentines with them. They gave these messages of love to women they met.

Although the truth behind the Valentine legends is shadowy, many stories certainly emphasize Valentine's appeal as a sympathetic, heroic, and, most importantly, romantic figure. It is no surprise to many that by the Middle Ages, Valentine was one of the most popular saints in England and France.

It is really quite funny how many different legends there are about St. Valentine. Many are very similar yet have distinct features all their own. Any of the above explanations may be true. I think that Valentine's Day developed out of a combination of all or parts of the legends explained.

FEbruary 14

While some believe that Valentine's Day is celebrated in the middle of February to commemorate the anniversary of Valentine's death or burial—which probably occurred around A.D. 270—others believe that the Christian church may have decided to celebrate Valentine's feast day in the middle of February in an effort to "Christianize" celebrations of the pagan Lupercalia festival.

It is said that in A.D. 496, Pope Gelasius set aside February 14 as a day to honor St. Valentine. Valentine would become known as the patron saint of epilepsy, having suffered from it in life. He also became the patron saint

of lovers when the church assimilated the fertility festival into its calendar.

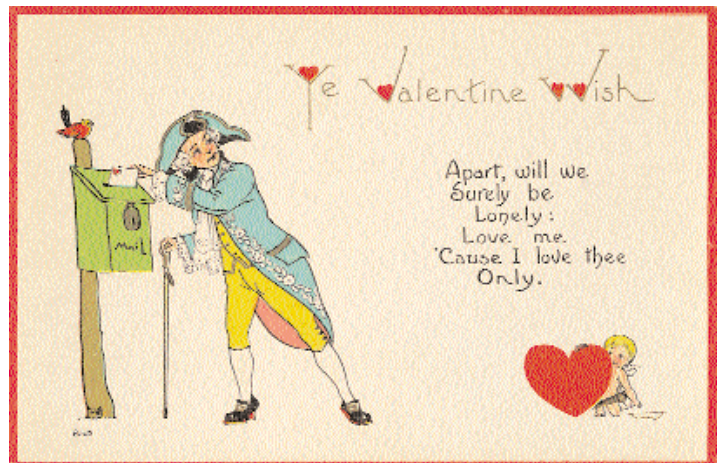
In ancient Rome, February was the official beginning of spring and was considered a time for purification. Houses would be cleansed by sweeping them out and then sprinkling salt and a type of wheat called spelt throughout its interior. Lupercalia, which began February 15, was a fertility festival dedicated to Faunus, the Roman god of agriculture, as well as to the Roman founders Romulus and Remus. To begin the festival, members of the Luperci, an order of Roman priests, would gather at the sacred cave where the infants Romulus and



"Your Valentine sends her best wishes." Marked, "Series No. 9017. The Pink of Perfection Regd. The Fairman Co, Cin. & N.Y."

Remus were believed to have been taken care of by a she-wolf or *lupa*. The priests would then sacrifice a dog, for purification, and a goat, for fertility. The priests then sliced the goat's hide into strips, dipped them in the sacrificial blood, and took to the streets. They gave them to young men, who would gently slap both women and fields of crops with the goat-hide strips. You would think it would send terror through the women of the area. Instead, it was welcomed, since Roman women believed that being touched with the hides would make them more fertile in the year to come.

Later in the day, according to the legend, all the young women in the city would place their names in a big urn or bin. This ritual was known as "drawing lots." The city's bachelors would then each have a chance to choose a name out of the urn and become paired for the year with that chosen woman. These matches often ended in marriage. This custom was Christianized and spread throughout Europe and England. Later, the names drawn were of saints instead of girls, and the girls who drew the names were supposed to model those saints' behavior for the year, acting as well as



"Ye Valentine Wish. Apart, will we Surely be Lonely: Love me 'Cause I love thee Only." Marked, "S. Bergman N.Y. 1913."



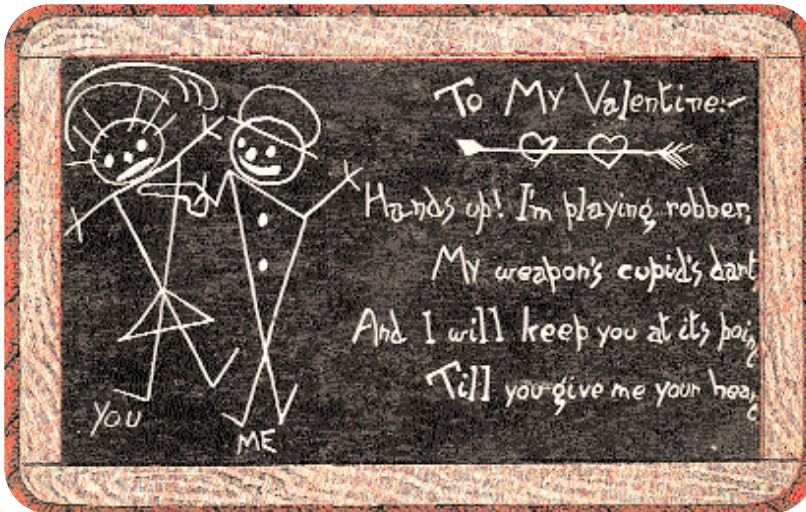
they could. This change was not very popular, however.

In France the tradition differed. The first young man seen by a girl on Valentine's Day was to become her boyfriend, or valentine, for the year to come. It was expected for an engagement to follow at the end of the year, and in many cases, it did.

After Pope Gelasius declared February 14 St. Valentine's Day, the Roman "lottery" system for romantic pairing was found to be un-Christian and outlawed. Later, during the Middle Ages, it was believed in France and England that

February 14 was the beginning of birds' mating season, which added to the idea that the middle of February—Valentine's Day—should be a time for love and romance (see "On the Wings of a Dove" chapter).

It is also thought that when Oliver Cromwell, Lord Protector of the Commonwealth, came to power he declared Valentine's Day immoral and had valentines banned. By 1660, Valentine's Day was restored. The 1969 book *The Valentine and Its Origins* states that the earliest valentine recorded in Britain contained verses of Chaucer. Chaucer served as an esquire in the royal court.



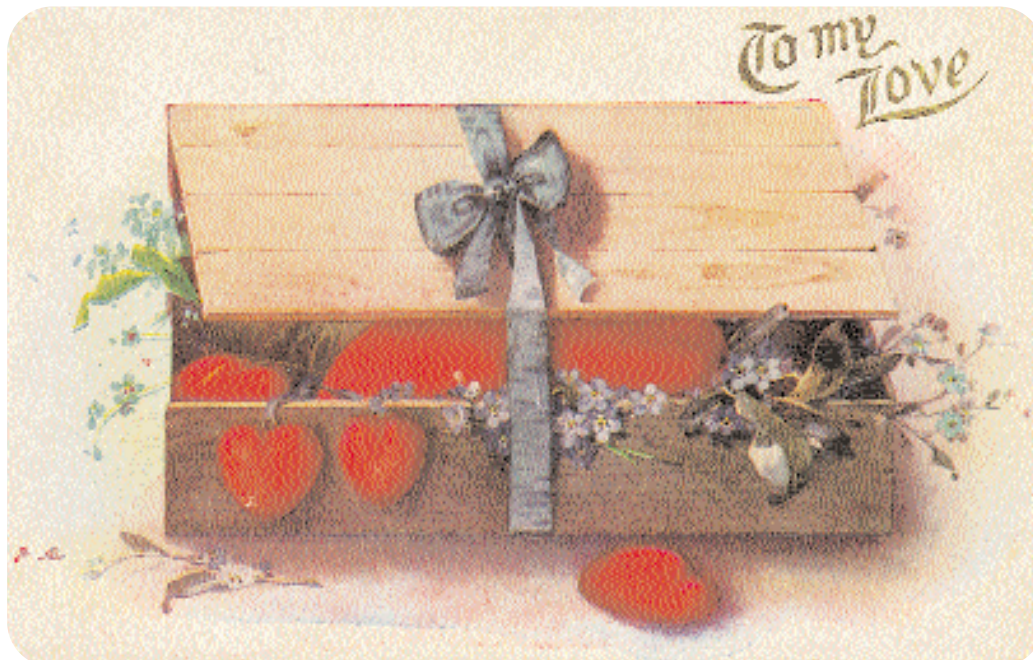
"To My Valentine:—Hands up! I'm playing robber, My weapon's cupid's dart, And I will keep you at its point Till you give me your heart." Maker unknown.



Some cards seem quite silly, such as this one, which states, "This valentine card has NO purpose . . . except to make money for the printer." Marked, "Valentine No. 15 Printed in U.S.A. © CVC."



"To My Valentine—I would be Friends with you and have your Love. Shakespear." Marked, "6718" and inscribed, "With love From Veora Patterson. Ruth Collins, City."

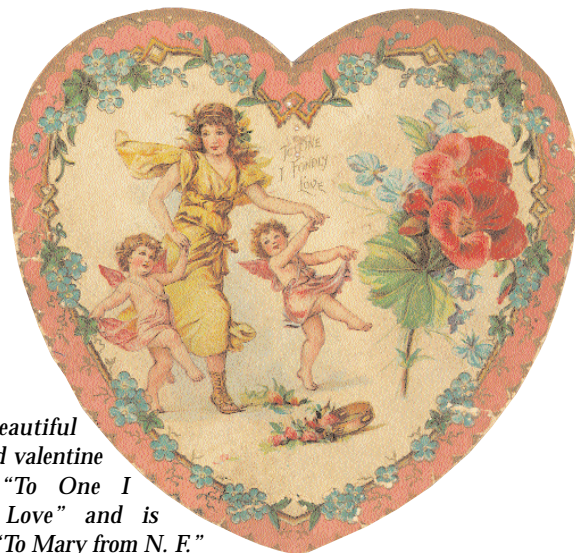


"To my Love." Inscribed, "Dear Aunt & Mama," with message, signed, "Your Little Niece Shirley." Dated 1949.

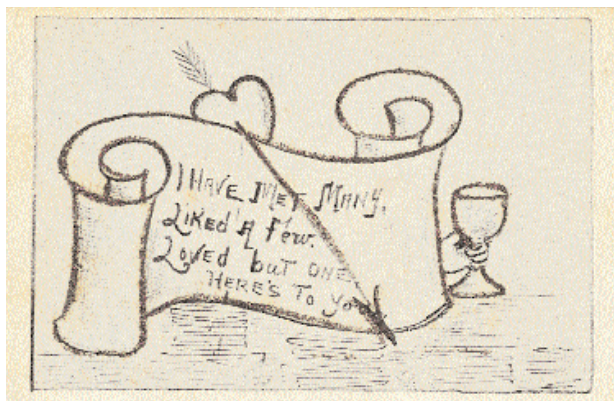
VALENTINE'S DAY CARD

The oldest known valentine still in existence was a poem written by a Frenchman, Charles, Duke of Orleans. It was sent to his wife while he was imprisoned in the Tower of London following his capture at the Battle of Agincourt. The greeting, which was written in 1415, is on view today at the British Museum in London, England. It is believed that several years later, King Henry V hired a writer named John Lydgate to compose a valentine note to Catherine of Valois.

Valentine's Day began to be widely celebrated there around the seventeenth century. Some say the Germans began the valentine tradition by sending *Freundschaftskarten* or "Friendship Cards" on the New Year, birthdays, and anniversaries. This custom was then imported to England and America in the 1700s, where such cards were given on Valentine's Day. Valentines were placed on friends' doorsteps and given to men and women in England while children sang valentine carols. By the middle of the eighteenth century, it was very common for friends and lovers from all social classes to exchange small gifts or handwritten notes.



This beautiful embossed valentine states, "To One I Fondly Love" and is signed, "To Mary from N. F."



"I have met many, Liked a few. Loved but one, Here's to you." Marked, "Authorized by act of Congress—May 19, 1898."



"Roses are red, violets are blue, I'll always be warmhearted toward you." This card has a bow and heart in red raised fuzz.



The popularity of Valentine's Day grew during this time. Gifts were costly, so many valentines were homemade. In America, valentines accompanied gifts such as flowers, candy, and perfume.

By 1800, printed cards began to replace written letters due to improvements in printing technology. Ready-made cards were an easy way for people to express their thoughts and emotions in a time when direct expression of one's feelings was looked down upon. The lower postage rates also contributed to an increase in the popularity of sending a Valentine's Day greeting.

Poets or other writers would work with printers to produce the valentines. Many of these valentines were produced in booklet form, with space reserved for the sender to write a message. The cost for these works of art was around a penny.

Many countries celebrate Valentine's Day, including the United States, Canada, Mexico, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, and Australia. However, England has had by far the biggest impact on the holiday. By the 1600s, the English had a similar legend as the French,

where a girl was supposed to marry the first boy she saw on the fourteenth of February. Another English tradition was to draw slips of paper with names on them to choose your valentine for the rest of the year. Men and boys drew names of women and girls and sometimes vice versa. The couple could go to dances together, exchange gifts, or just spend the day together. If you were lucky, the person whose name you drew would be compatible, but in some cases, an older woman might be paired with a much younger man or vice versa. This really was not the most effective way of bringing lovers together, though sometimes sparks did fly!

One can only guess the true origin of Valentine's Day or the valentine card. One thing is for certain; valentines *did* catch on. According to the Greeting Card Association, an estimated 1 billion valentine cards are sent each year, making Valentine's Day the second largest card-sending holiday of the year. (An estimated 2.6 billion cards are sent for Christmas.) Women purchase approximately 85 percent of all valentines.



"Valentine Wishes—My whole affection is set upon you Please say you like me a little bit too." Marked, "Series 1080 A." Inscribed, "Dear Dick, Was awfully glad to hear from you again. You haven't moved yet—I take it. I wrote a letter and sent cards to your home. Did you get them? How are you now—we're all fine here. Love Dot."

THE BUSINESS OF CARDS

There are many different types of valentine cards, from the traditional to the far out. Many depict scenes related to the history of the valentine.

Valentines went through many changes as the years went by. Around 1840 to 1850 the new “comic” valentine was becoming more common and popular. These were not the funny style of today’s valentines but rather mean-spirited remarks that were often hurtful. These “sour” types of valentines are known as “vinegar” valentines or “penny dreadfuls” and are very collectible today. Who received the vinegar cards? Several people, including those the sender was mad at or just disliked. Often they were sent anonymously to a foe, and many times they were sent postage due!

After 1840, the United States and Great Britain’s mail service was greatly improved. Before this time it could take weeks to get a letter from one place to the next. When mail

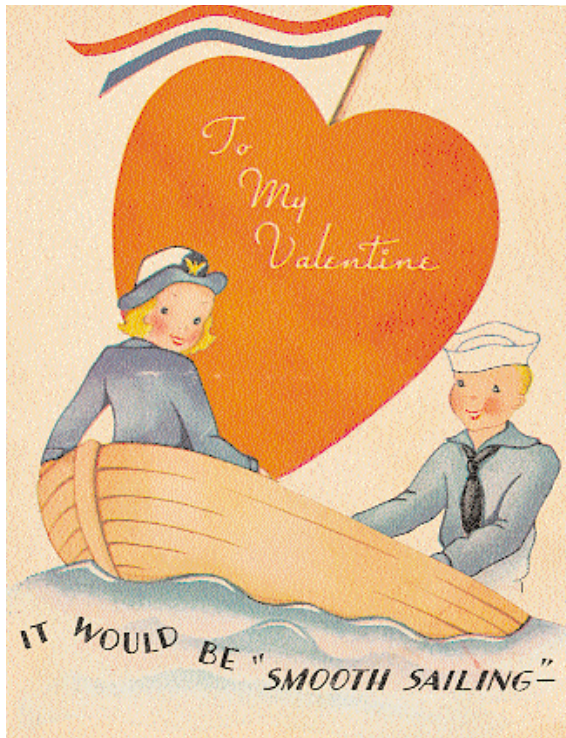
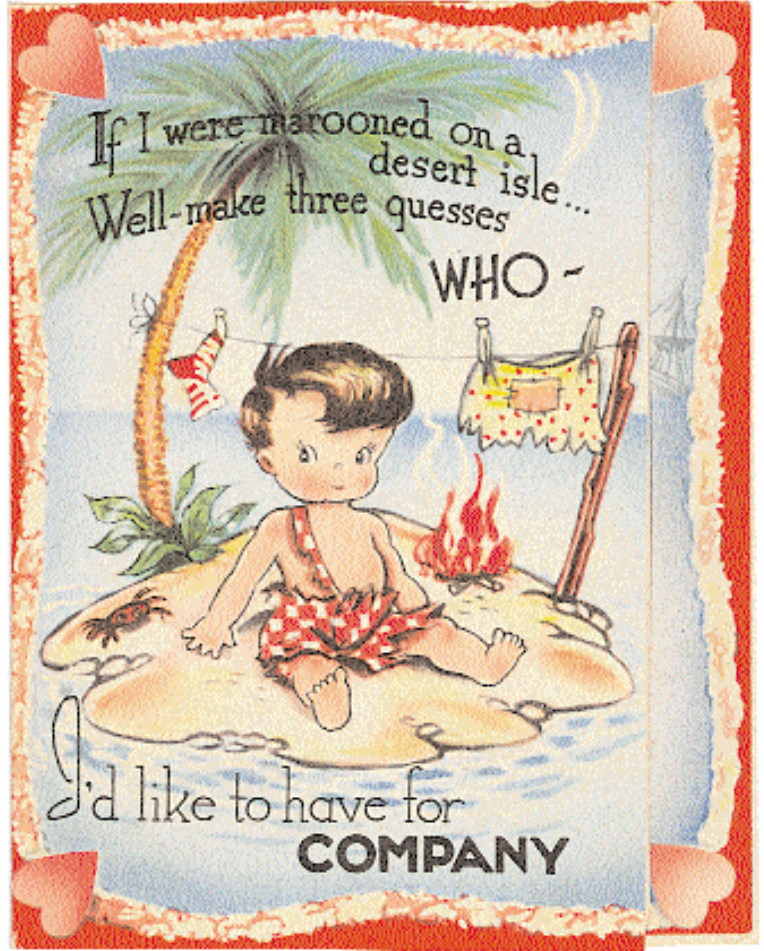
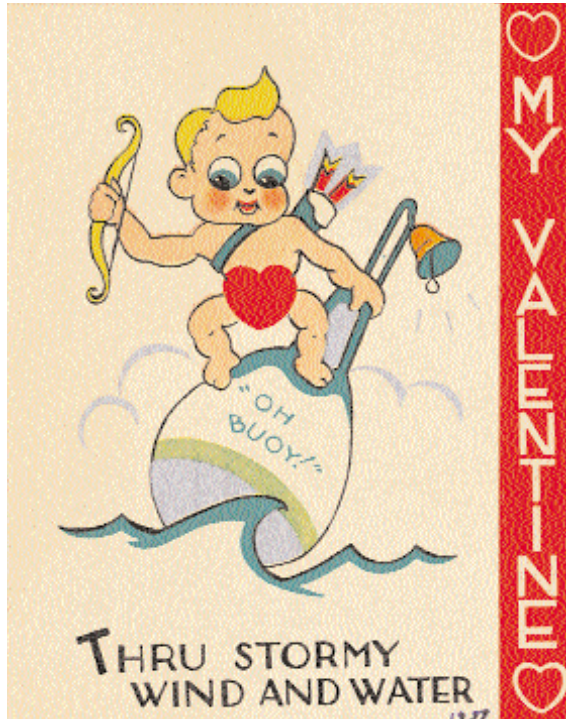
service improved, more people used it to send valentines.

The years from the 1840s through the 1890s were known as the “Golden Age” of valentines. A couple from England, Jonathan and Clarissa King, produced an array of beautiful valentines. It is believed that Clarissa King was the first person to put feathers on valentines. She also would take small pieces of glass and grind them into little sparkles to add to the cards. The couple’s valentines became so popular that they opened a small factory employing a couple dozen workers to help them in production.

Esther A. Howland (1824-1904) from Worcester, Massachusetts, began her career working at her father’s stationery shop. During the valentine season the shop would become filled with beautiful valentines from Europe. Esther thought she could make valentines just as pretty as the imported ones and for much less, so she began producing and



This gorgeous valentines says, “Valentine Greetings” on the outside, and inside the poem reads, “Take it gently off your hook, Take a careful, steady look! You will find, my Valentine That big heart you’ve caught is mine!” It is inscribed, “To Missie Martin From Guess Who??” Marked “Whitney Made Worcester Mass.”



Many valentine cards had themes. These three feature water.



selling them at her father's shop around 1848.

In no time her work sold out and people were asking for more. She began selling her valentines to other shops in various cities. Working out of her home, Esther produced a variety of valentines with the help of hired workers. The majority ranged in price from \$5 to \$20, with some selling for as high as \$35, a great deal of money at that time. In fact, during the 1800s \$35 could buy a means of transportation such as a horse and buggy, so you can see the expenditure some consumers made for one of her works.

Esther became known as the first person to sell mass-produced or "assembly-lined" valentines in America. An enterprising woman and graduate of the Mt. Holyoke Women's Seminary, she became very wealthy. Her company expanded after the success of her valentine cards, adding Christmas and other holiday cards to the selection. Her company's sales would reach over \$100,000 a year. Esther was one of the first employers to pay women a decent wage and one of the first women business owners to travel without a chaperon.

Esther developed her own style by using imported lace paper to make beautiful valentines. Some of her loveliest and earliest valentines are not signed, but collectors can recognize them by their large size and fancy, ornate style. Many of Esther Howland's later valentines are marked in the upper left-hand corner with the letter *H*. (An *H* on the right corner is from a different valentine manufacturer who produced cards about twenty years later.) After many years of producing stylish valentine cards, Esther sold her company to the Whitney Company in 1866, a major printer of children's books.

Though Esther Howland was known as one of the innovators of valentine making, other



This mechanical valentine can move back and forth. It states, "To my Valentine—Just read my heart and you will see Whose Valentine I'd love to be!"



This beautiful foldout valentine states, "To my Valentine—Loving Greetings." It is marked, "Printed in Germany" and inscribed, "To Beverly, from Martha Dunlap 1930."

women followed suit with creations of their own. Kate Greenaway (1846-1901) was one of them. Ms. Greenaway, a British artist, is well known today as an illustrator of children's books such as Robert Browning's *Pied Piper of Hamelin*. Many of her earliest works were valentines. Kate Greenaway loved to use children as the focal point of her cards. Often they depicted children giving valentines to other children. Another of her favorite subjects was the garden. The greeting card company Marcus Ward & Company produced many of her designs.

After the Whitney Company took over the Howland ventures, George C. Whitney's paper-novelty publishing company, based in Worcester, Massachusetts, became one of the most important valentine producers of the nineteenth century. Their valentines sold for many years and were cute and pretty. However, they lacked the luster of the Howland cards and, for that matter, of those made by other major valentine publishers, such as Nister and Tuck. The company focused on schoolchildren as its primary customers. Their price and designs showed that focus. From about 1910 until 1940, the majority of the Whitney cards were stand-ups, with two panels at the base that folded backward.

After the Civil War, George Whitney and his brothers Edward and Sumner organized their business and focused mainly on assembly-line production with some of the parts imported from overseas. After 1870, George Whitney took full control of the company and purchased machinery to publish more valentines as well as other greeting and holiday cards. The company closed its doors in 1942.

Whitney's largest competitor was the McLoughlin Company. Some McLoughlin valentines have a blue *H* in the upper right-



hand corner. The *H* can be confusing for collectors of Howland cards, since her cards also had an *H* in one corner. The price for collectible McLoughlin cards today, around \$10 to \$25, is lower than for Howland cards.

Around 1900, a popular valentine was the German foldout card with honeycomb tissue and beautiful die-cuts. Though American valentines were similar, the price of these versions was much less and they were usually not as pretty.

As Kate Greenaway did in the 1880s, many top illustrators (including Norman Rockwell,

Grace Drayton, and Francis Brundage) drew and designed valentines during the 1920s and 1930s.

As the 1900s moved onward the fascination for valentines began to wane. They were still as beautiful as ever but the cost prohibited many from purchasing them. Around this time, several things happened. First, several greeting card companies were founded, including American Greetings and Hallmark. Mass production by these companies lowered prices. Children could now afford to buy Valentine's Day cards and give them to their



This valentine states, "For My Valentine." The red heart folds over with red honeycomb tissue and may be hooked onto the back to stay open. There is also a cardboard stand on the back. Maker unknown.



friends. That tradition has not waned and today children are the main givers of Valentine's Day cards. The cards have changed greatly over the years, but their allure continues to grow. The United States and Britain lead the pack of nations celebrating Valentine's Day today. As in the earliest

days of valentines, certain subjects, such as hearts, cupids, flowers, birds, and children, have remained popular. The following chapters will illustrate many of the much-loved designs and sayings from years of valentine giving.



INTERESTING FACT

Did you know that the expression "wearing your heart on your sleeve" comes from a Valentine's Day party tradition? Women would write their names on slips of paper to be drawn by men. A man would then wear a woman's name on his sleeve to claim her as his one and only—the one who would have his heart for the coming year.