

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

Carroll's Yesteryears
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St. Valentine's Day Cards Photo Essay
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* NOTE – Article missing, copied from Jay's draft *

The customs of sending cards on St. Valentine's Day can be documented in Carroll County for nearly a century and a half. The Historical Society's collection contains a number of early Victorian Valentines, the oldest of which is dated 1852. These early valentines involved a large degree of creativity and originality on the part of the sender. Stationary stores sold fancy embossed blank cards and appropriate printed motifs which were glued to the card. The sender then penned a verse on an inside page.

Enterprising printers quickly capitalized on an eager market for ready to send cards. Many cards featured paper mechanisms which when activated revealed a hidden verse or motif.

The introduction of the postal card in the 1880s provided card sellers with a new medium. Brightly colored cards were printed for different holidays. Those designed for St. Valentine's Day often featured embossed red hearts, Cupids, and doves. German and British firms exported huge quantities of cards to the American market.

Many young women kept scrapbooks containing their cards. These books became important mementos later in life and today are valued as an index to popular designs, printing techniques and prose.

St. Valentine's Day dances became popular shortly after cards appeared. An unused dance card from 1882 and a corresponding newspaper article provide some details about the event. A correspondent for the Westminster *Democratic Advocate* wrote:

"On Tuesday evening last the young gentlemen and ladies of this city held a Valentine hop at the City Hotel, W.A. Brownley, superintendent, which was largely attended and passed off pleasantly, all enjoying themselves to the utmost. The music was good and the supper likewise, and was served by Westminster's colored caterers, Hopes & Bruce."

Photo credit: Courtesy of the Historical Society of Carroll County

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Photo caption: Made in 1852 this valentine is the earliest example in the Historical Society’s collection. Its construction is typical of the mid-nineteenth century. The purchaser bought a fancy stock envelope and an embossed card. He then glued an angel dove, wreath and two panels of verse. The sender penned a few “Lines to Miss Mary Jane Patterson” on the inside page.

Photo caption: Layered valentine cards appeared in the late nineteenth century. When the intricate cover was opened on this example, a bouquet of flowers was revealed. Bending back the bouquet exposed a printed verse.

Photo caption: Mechanical valentine cards were extremely popular in the late nineteenth century. When the recipient of this card folded a cardboard tab on the reverse, the central angel motif moved to reveal a valentine verse.

Photo caption: Postcard valentines became popular by the turn of the century. Many examples featured embossed heart, Cupid, and dove motifs. This card was sent from an Etta May to her Aunt Laura with a simple message “We are alive and kicking lively.”

Photo caption: This turn-of-the-century card featured lover birds on the cover. Opening the two front panels revealed a Valentine verse and song “A DREAM” by J. C. Bartlett: “Last night I was dreaming, of thee love was dreaming, I dream’d then did’st promise we never shall part.”

Photo caption: This unused dance card was from a Valentine Party and Valentine Hop at the City Hotel Westminster, Md., held on February 14, 1882. The practice of providing women with dance cards was popular in the Victorian period. The inside of this card has a page entitled “Order of Dancing,” being a list of the twenty dances for the evening. The opposite page entitled “Engagements” provided twenty lines to record one’s dancing partners.