

IMAGES

...THEN AND NOW

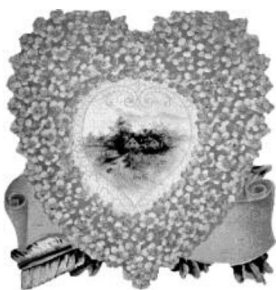
From the Indian Hill Historical Society



**Buckingham Lodge
1861**

The Story of Valentine's Day

There are varying opinions about the origins of Valentine's Day. Some believe it goes back 2000 years to ancient Rome. A pagan fertility festival, *Lupercalia*, celebrated Lupercus, a god who protected citizens from wolves and ensured the safety of their crops and livestock in the upcoming year. Besides feasting, dancing and singing, a dog and goat were sacrificed and their hides were used to slap women and agricultural fields. It was believed this practice would make the females and land more fertile. This rite was carried on for hundreds of years in the middle of February.



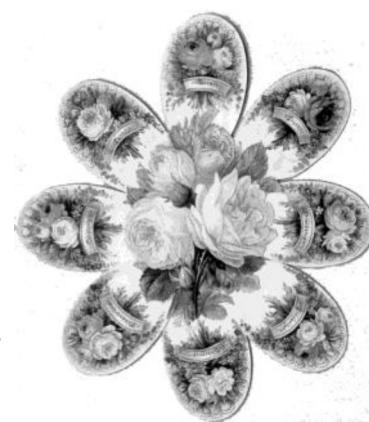
Over time, Christianity came to Rome and the population no longer believed in Lupercus. The Catholic Church decided to continue the holiday - without some of the pagan rituals. At least three different saints were named Valentine or Valentinus. One St. Valentine was killed circa 270 AD for his belief in Catholicism, and the church martyred him. A second St. Valentine (jailed for his religious beliefs) befriended his jailer's blind daughter, and wrote her a note "From your Valentine" shortly before he was beheaded. The young girl's eyesight was miraculously restored. A third St. Valentine was known to marry young soldiers - a crime in the Roman Empire because single men made better soldiers than those with wives and families. When Valentine continued to perform marriages for young lovers secretly, he was executed. All three saints were sympathetic, heroic, brave, and romantic figures and became very popular. Though the observation of St. Valentine's Day stemmed from the early Romans, it became imbued with Anglo Saxon customs over the centuries.

Other European nations adopted this holiday. In England it was believed that birds found their mates mid-February, so it was a perfect time to choose a sweetheart. The British played games, feasted and danced, and children went from door to door singing, and homeowners gave them pennies or sweets. One game involved boys' names written on scraps of paper, thrown in a pot, and fetched out by girls, who supposedly would become their brides. In France, the custom was "une loterie d'amour" (a lottery for love) wherein single men and women connected by shouting at each other from windows to pair up. Flower bouquets were often part of the courtship in France, too. Italians traditionally gathered together in gardens to listen to poetry on February 14, and in Austria, Hungary, and Germany, the day was celebrated with dancing and parties.

People started sending homemade poems or notes, which became known as valentines, to their sweethearts mid-February. These were decorated with hearts, flowers, birds, or cupid-like figures. The oldest known surviving valentine is preserved in London. It is a poem written by Charles, Duke of Orleans, to his wife, while he was imprisoned in the Tower of London in 1415. Written valentines became commonplace in England in the 1400s. Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, penned in the late 1500s, included references to the holiday. It continued to gain popularity.



Germany, 1920s



Valentine, circa 1900

Eventually the custom of observing Valentine's Day crossed the ocean and came to the USA. In the mid-1700s, handmade valentines were exchanged in the states as symbols of affection. By the 1840s, the first mass-produced valentines were sold in America. Particularly memorable were those of Esther Howland, "Mother of the Valentine", who commercially produced elaborate creations layered with ribbons, lace, and pictures. In the Victorian era, valentines were lavishly adorned. In 1906, American Greetings Company began operations, and by 1913 Hallmark supplied cards.

Currently over a billion Valentine's Day cards are sent each year. Many Americans also exchange gifts such as chocolates, candy, plush toys, lingerie, flowers, and jewelry. As well as being a commercial holiday, February 14 has become a popular date for proposals and marriages. During the doldrums of winter, Valentine's Day has become a special time to exchange tokens of love and to kindle romance.