



Valentine's Day Origins, Customs

by Deborah McGee

to those of the earth's feathered inhabitants.

Historically the festival probably is a direct descendant of the early Romans' Feb. 15 Feast of Lupercalia. As part of the festivities, priests sacrificed goats in the Palatine Hill's Lupercal Cave, said to be the site where a wolf nursed to life the orphaned Romulus and Remus (purported founders of the Eternal City).

Once sacrifices and ablutions were performed, priests fashioned whips from the goats' hides. Smearing their foreheads with the goats' blood, the men struck people with the whips. The purpose was to stimulate the fertility of those so touched, as well as to ease labor pains for women already pregnant.

Another early account of the feast day recalls that priests dropped papers bearing the names of eligible Roman women into clay urns. Eligible men then drew names of partners and the chase was on. . . .

Roman deities Juno and Pan were Lupercalia's patron celestials, Juno being goddess of marriage and wife of Jupiter, king of gods; Pan, or Lupercus, was the frequent sidekick of Venus, goddess of love. All these connections point to a pre-Christian origin of the holiday, which perhaps explains why we often omit the word "saint" when referring to the festivities.

Christians and Critics

In the era of the early Christians, the holiday seems to have made the shift in dates, from celebration of Lupercalia on Feb. 15 to a Feb. 14 feast day in memoriam to one Saint Valentine. Martyrology has documented that a man of this name was beheaded on Feb. 14, 269 A.D., upon Roman Imperial orders, for refusing to denounce his belief in Christ. Popular myth has it that during his imprisonment, he fell in love with his jailer's daughter and miraculously cured her of blindness.

The story goes that when he was about to lose his head, he penned a farewell note to his beloved signed, "From your Valentine."

Apparently this February holiday occasioned the wrath of certain establishments. One reference mentioned that St. Francis de Salis became so enraged at the lusty lottery's prevalence into Christian times that he ordered a change in the rules of the game.

Under the guidance of De Salis, boys drew names of saints—rather than men drawing names of women. The boys then strove to emulate the qualities of the saint so chosen. Record has it that people resisted the change and soon the original rules again prevailed.

Another critic was Britain's Oliver Cromwell. In the time of King Henry VIII, Cromwell termed the holiday "immoral and irreligious" and banned it, but by the reign of Charles II (1630-85), people had revived the celebration. At the latter time it was popular to exchange performed gloves and jeweled garters.

Cards Become Popular

While the death-row musings of St. Valentine may have been the first Valentine's Day message, it was the advent of the printing press which stimulated the widespread exchange of greeting cards this time of year. Paper valentines first appeared in 16th Century England. Commercial versions began circulating after 1800, an industry boosted in America by the organization of the postal system.

In 1830, an enterprising American woman founded a business on the valentine trade. Daughter of a merchant who imported valentines, Esther Howland started her own offshoot: that of importing laces and fine papers, with which she created valentines. Today these "Worcester" valentines are collector's items.

Our less consumer-oriented forebears tended to make valentines by hand. People penned original verses in decorative scroll, and glued paper lace, shiny trinkets and other memorabilia into what are almost mini-collages, all custom-made for objects of their love.

The Lane County Historical Museum has an antique valentine collection and displays it some years (not 1986). Hand-made valentines, and early commercial cards with pop-up and moveable parts, grace their holdings. Two of the most unusual cards are formed of several nearly-identical cut-outs, each printed with succeeding parts of a verse; silk ribbons link the parts together to form one card.

Most fascinating in the local collection, however, is a group of postcards from the earlier part of this century. They are solici-

tations as bold as today's "Personal" classified ads! One shows a black and white photo of a man doing laundry. "Wanted! A Girl Here," reads its message. Another such postcard holds only these words:

I am single. My hair is all my own. I never stay out late. Am of marriageable age and disposition, and my parents have tired of supporting me. What are you going to do about it?

The latter card was printed by the Guard Printing Co., Eugene. The more things change. . . .

Oregon, a Romeo and the Mafia

We Oregonians have further cause to commemorate St. Valentine's Day. On this date in 1859, we became the 33rd state in the Union.

As a further aside, the name of this holiday may conjure up in certain minds the image of matinee idol Rudolph Valentino. Nicknamed "the perfect lover," the star's real name actually did have *Valentina* in it. He died of a ruptured ulcer while in New York City for a 1926 opening of *The Son of Sheik*. Fans loved him so much they lined up for 11 blocks to view his body.

Not everything about this date, however, connotes love. In Chicago, on Feb. 14, 1929, members of "Scarface" Al Capone's armed guard murdered seven members of a rival gang. The St. Valentine's Day Massacre has become an established date in American history.

VALENTINE'S DAY TRIVIA QUESTION: What is the most spectacular valentine on record? One sent by comedian Garry Moore, who hired four planes to do skywriting for his wife. They etched a heart three miles wide pierced by an arrow six miles wide, and wrote "Garry & Nell" in its center.

The moon goes into earthy Taurus in the wee hours of the 14th. Will you wear your heart on your sleeve that day, or play hard-to-get? Are you going to the WOW Hall or Mac Court? Planning a candlelit evening for two or turning early to bed? Whatever you do, you won't be able to ignore the persistence into modern times of this pagan-rooted holiday.

A man wondering if a current mate is "The One" need only wear a bachelor's button on Valentine's Day. If the flower dies, he should continue his search.

Five bay leaves pinned to her pillow St. Valentine's night will bring a woman dreams of her true love.

Thus sayeth two of the customs tied to the Feb. 14 folk festival. For some it is the Feast Day of St. Valentine, patron saint of lovers. One source mentioned the usefulness of chanting this name when suffering from "epilepsy, the Plague, or fainting spells."

Another interesting custom remains in this festival's chronicles. In bygone days, people also would divine their true mates on St. Valentine's Day by placing candidates' names on pieces of paper. Then one rolled the papers in clay and dropped these tokens into water. The first to rise to the surface was said to be that of your most auspicious partner.

In Denmark the holiday is "Fjortende Februar," a time when school children exchange trinkets. For Bulgarians it is "Trifon Zarezan," or Viticulturists Day, in honor of that twinkle-eyed god of wine and merriment, Bacchus. No wonder Valentine's Day colors are mostly red, white and rose!

Mysterious Roots

Some may think the celebrations began with the greeting card companies, but the origins of Valentine's Day are as mysterious as love itself.

In Chaucer's *Parliament of Foules* we find the earliest literary reference to the holiday:

*For this was Seynt Valentine's Day,
When every foul cometh ther to choose his mate.*

So at least since the Middle Ages popular belief has held that birds begin mating on this date. Perhaps earlier humans, feeling similar urges, linked their own celebrations

Introductory offer for the NEW CENTER FOR MASSAGE THERAPY



Save \$25!! on a MASSAGE PACKAGE: 5 1-hour massages for \$110 (reg. 27.00 per hour)

We accept insurance and doctor's referrals.

Nina Cherry, Director
388 West 10th • 485-8090

Valentines Day—February 14
"Most romantic restaurant in Oregon" — Oregon Magazine



ENGELSIOR CAFE

754 E. 13th • 342-6963
CAFE • RESTAURANT • BAR

The city's best restaurant.

Join the Valentine's Weekend Fun—

Backstage Dancewear
41 W. Broadway
the Cloak Room
931 Oak
Ellen's
Inside Steven J. 941 Oak
Favors
845 Willamette
Feminine Fancies
99 W. Broadway

Thursday, Friday & Saturday in Downtown Eugene

- ♥ More quality specialty shops & services
- ♥ More individual attention
- ♥ More unique styles, selection

DOWNTOWN SHOPS WITH UPTOWN STYLE!

Leah's Wine & Co.
Corner of 7th & Willamette, Parade

London Hair Studio
770 Willamette

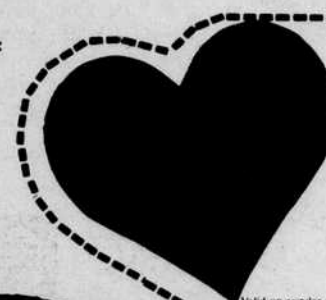
Marley's
187 E. Broadway

Melange
39 W. Broadway

Town & Travel
Just east of the Fountain

And to celebrate Valentine's Day:

- ♥ Free flowers at each of these participating shops—visit all 10 and collect a bouquet!
- ♥ Refreshments and special drawings at each location
- ♥ 25% discount on your choice of any single regular priced item. Just clip the red heart in this ad and show it at each shop when you make your purchase.



This heart worth 25% off any single item at the 10 Valentine shops

Valid on regular price merchandise only.



This is a great chance to see all that's new for spring and enjoy our unique spirit!