

Valentine's Day has varied history

Many myths surround St. Valentine legend

For Oregon history buffs, Feb. 14 means Admission Day — the day in 1859 that Oregon became the 33rd state of the Union. But for most of the rest of the world, the 14th is a day for love, Valentine's style.

Like many occasions of the calendar, St. Valentine's Day has become merely another reason to support the greeting card, candy and flower industries. That's just as well, for its roots as a religious occasion are suspect at best.

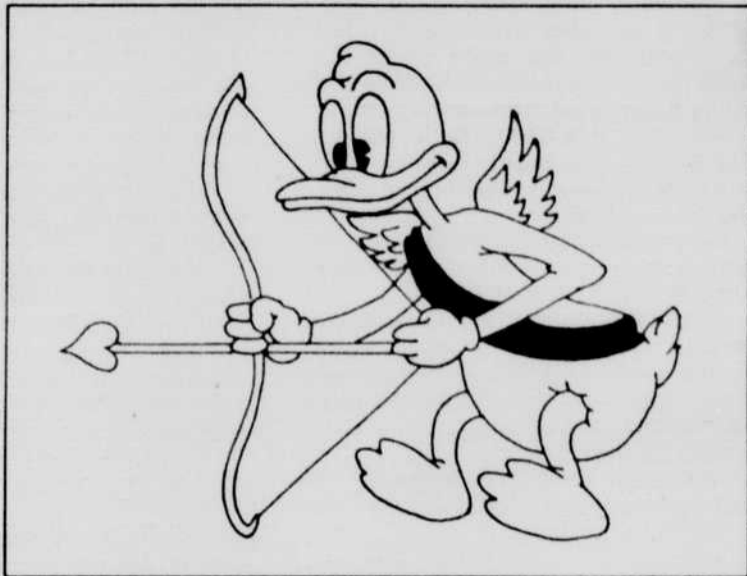
The history of Valentine's Day has long been muddled by the many legends of the saints (there were two or three by the name of Valentine) and their thin connections to the theme of love and lovers. It's origin, it seems, depends on which source you read.

Antedating the lives of the saints, a pagan festival called *Lupercalia* was held on Feb. 15th to ensure protection from wolves. During this celebration, young men struck women with strips of animal hides in the belief that whipping made them more fertile. Britain borrowed *Lupercalia* from the Romans when it was conquered in 43 A.D., and the festival is linked to Valentine's Day because of the similar date and the connection with fertility.

There were two saints named Valentine in the early Christian church. The modern tradition of sending Valentine's Day cards may or may not have any relation to the saints. In legend, their lives are connected with the Valentine's Day theme.

In the third century A.D., Valentine was a pagan priest who was converted to Christianity and became a bishop. At the time, the Roman Emperor Claudius abolished marriage because he believed that single men were better soldiers. Valentine secretly married young lovers, but was arrested, imprisoned and eventually clubbed and beheaded on Feb. 14, 269.

Another account says Valentine frequently aided persecuted Christians and was thrown into jail. But he contin-



ued his saintly work and was executed on Feb. 14, only after it was realized that he had cured his jailer's daughter of blindness. Whether this miracle was performed by the first Valentine or a second one again depends on the source.

One Valentine story tells of a bishop who healed the son of Craton the rhetorician, who almost choked to death by a fish bone.

Another story is that in Italy and Germany, Valentine was appealed to help against epilepsy, plague and fainting diseases.

Yet another myth says that Valentine was an early Christian who made friends with many children but was imprisoned by the Romans because he refused to worship their gods. The children who missed Valentine tossed notes of love between the bars of his cell window. This tale might explain why people exchange messages on Valentine's Day.

Another theory traces the exchange of valentines to the English poet Geoffrey Chaucer. He mentioned in his writings that birds began to pair off on that day. Indeed, springtime had always been believed to be a time for lovers, and the old English belief was that birds chose their mates on the 14th.

In any case, Valentine's Day cards are believed to be the first greeting cards to be exchanged. While wood engravers produced prints with

religious themes in the Middle Ages, the first Christmas cards as we know them didn't

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