

Valentine PAST

The most famous Valentine, for whom the day is most likely named, was a priest in third century Rome.

Americans will spend almost \$500 million this year on Valentine's Day presents and cards honoring a tradition shrouded in mystery.

No one is sure how St. Valentine's Day got started, or even who St. Valentine was. Some historians say there may have been as many as 20 early Christian martyrs and saints with the name Valentine. Others put the number variously at eight, three or one.

Little is known about any of the Valentines, or even if they really existed. The few known facts about their lives are so interwoven with folklore and legend that it is impossible to tell fact from fiction.

The most famous Valentine, for whom the day is most likely named, was a priest in third century Rome. Legend has it that Emperor Claudius II could not recruit enough soldiers for battle. Men did not want to leave their wives and sweethearts and refused to go. To stop this, Claudius decreed that no more



marriages could be performed and canceled all engagements.

St. Valentine defied this ban, secretly marrying several couples. When the emperor found out, he jailed the priest.

Behind bars, St. Valentine further angered Claudius by miraculously restoring sight to his jailor's blind daughter. At Claudius' command, St. Valentine was beaten and beheaded. A variation on the

story has Valentine falling in love with the daughter and signing his letters to her, "Your Valentine."

The body of St. Valentine is supposedly interred at St. Praxedis Cathedral in Rome, with his head not far away at the cathedral of St. Sebastian. Whether the remains are authentic is doubtful. Other remains allegedly belonging to one or more St. Valentines are in churches in France, Belgium and

Spain. Theories about how St. Valentine's Day came to be celebrated as a day for lovers are varied. The holiday was first popularly celebrated in England during the early middle ages, where folk wisdom of the time held that birds chose their mates Feb. 14. Chaucer made reference to this belief in his "Parliament of Fowls" when he wrote: "For this was sent Valentine's Day when every foul cometh there to choose his mate."

This belief, quaint as it may seem, was transferred to this country where it survived until the early part of this century among the inhabitants of the Ozark Mountains. Feb. 14, they believed, was not only the day birds mated, but the "real" Groundhog Day, when a groundhog glimpsing his shadow meant six more weeks of winter and also the best day of the year to plant lettuce.

Another theory says the association between St. Valentine and love has a linguistic base. At one time, the letters "V" and "G" were interchangeable in common speech. The Norman word "galantin," meaning a lover of women, was written and spoken variously as "valantin" and "valentin."

Others say Valentine's Day is the Christianized form of the ancient Roman feast of Lupercalia, celebrated Feb. 14. One of the rituals of the feast was the drawing of young women's

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