

Holiday's history rooted in several traditional myths

The commercialization of Valentine's Day in the U.S. dates to the 1840s

By **Brittney Lively**
Freelance Reporter

As Valentine's Day approaches, images of Cupids, love arrows and boxes of chocolates have quickly begun to appear. Some of these Valentine's Day icons are more than a way to seduce a special someone — they also stem from old traditions.

The holiday known today as Valentine's Day is surrounded by many myths, and nobody is certain of the actual events that led to the creation of the holiday. One legend says that Valentine's Day evolved from Lupercalia, a festival beginning during the third century in Rome that celebrated the fertility of soil and women.

"It was a custom that young men and women would draw lots to see who they might marry," history Professor Matthew Dennis said.

These men and women would then spend the next year as partners, and in some places, the men would wear their valentines' names on their sleeves, which is believed to be where the saying "wearing his heart on his sleeve" originated.

Some also think that a priest by the name of Valentine secretly continued marrying young lovers despite a command from Emperor Claudius banning marriage because single men performed better as soldiers. When he was caught and put in jail, he fell in love with the jailer's daughter, and before his death, he allegedly wrote her a note signed "From Your Valentine."

A Turkish bishop named Valentine was also martyred at this time, so it is unknown who the day is really named after.

In Norman French, a language spoken in Normandy during the Middle Ages, the word "galantine" sounds like

Valentine and means gallant or lover. "This resemblance may have caused people to think of St. Valentine as the special saint of lovers," according to the 1998 World Book encyclopedia.

In A.D. 498, Pope Gelasius declared Feb. 14 as St. Valentine's Day because early spring is the time of love, and this day is near the beginning of many birds' mating season.

"When American settlers came to the New World to establish the United

cards in the mail, which later gave way to the Christmas card.

"An estimated 1 billion valentine cards are sent each year, making Valentine's Day the second largest card-sending holiday of the year," according to the History Channel Web site.

Cupid has become associated with the holiday because he was the son of Venus, the goddess of love and beauty. During his time, Cupid was not a small flying child who would shoot lovers with arrows to make them fall deeply in love.

"Cupid transformed from an adult male figure who could be vicious sometimes and is seen as a cherub," Dennis said.

This transformation of Cupid shows how the American rendition of the holiday has become more gradually centered on women and children. At school, children often have Valentine's Day parties where they eat cupcakes or other sweets and deliver valentines to one another in the celebration of friendship.

"I miss the days of little cut-out valentines in grade school," said Judy McGuire, a romance columnist for the Seattle Weekly. "At my school, we had to give one to everyone so nobody felt left out."

Women tend to buy the majority of valentines each year.

"As far as I can tell, it's always been a money-making scheme for businesses," said McGuire. "But hey, any day that celebrates being nice is OK by me."

With quick, effortless Valentine's Day cards and trinkets to send, it may seem that the holiday has morphed from a love-centered tradition into a one that is a little more consumer-oriented.

"In many ways (Valentine's Day) hasn't changed as much as we think," Dennis said. "Without commercialism we probably wouldn't have the holiday at all."

Brittney Lively is a freelance reporter for the Emerald.

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States, they took some customs with them, but by the 19th century, virtually no one practiced them," Dennis said.

People began changing their customs. "By the middle of the 18th century it was common for friends and lovers in all social classes to exchange small tokens of affection or handwritten notes," according to <http://www.historychannel.com>. "By the end of the century, printed cards began to replace written letters because of improvements in printing technology."

The holiday really began to gain momentum in America around the 1840s, when new publishing houses were constructed, and Esther A. Howland began to sell the first mass-produced valentines in America.

"It was a trend, and people embraced it," Dennis said. "A valentine used to be a person with whom you had a romantic link, but it increasingly became the card or thing you sent to that person."

These mass-produced valentines began the tradition of sending holiday

Cultural differences abound in Valentine's celebrations

Lovers in Australia enjoy warm weather while 'street Romeos' court in India

By **Emma Juhlin**
Freelance Reporter

Je t'aime, suki desu, ich liebe dich.

Love may be the international language, but when it comes to Valentine's Day everybody says "I love you" in his or her own way.

Around the world, many people celebrate Valentine's Day in the traditional Western fashion by dining out with their sweethearts or sending them a box of chocolates. However, many cultures put a spin on the holiday with variations on traditional dating habits and gifts.

Charlie Quirk, a student from Australia, said the only difference between America's version of the holiday and Australia's is the weather.

"At home the hottest month is February," Quirk said. "I don't know what the temperature is, but it feels like it cracks 92 degrees every day. Every Valentine's Day function I've been involved with has involved something outside."

The warm weather allows couples to take advantage of dating venues that might elude February daters in the Pacific Northwest. Quirk said some popular Valentine's dates

include going to the beach, having a picnic or dining at an open-air restaurant on the river.

"Probably the biggest one that comes to mind is the tradition of going to an outdoor cinema," Quirk said. "They are great fun. There are heaps of couples there all year round, but on Valentine's Day every

"Valentines are only given from the girl to the boy (in Japan). In the past, girls didn't come up to guys, but Valentine's Day was one day of the year they did."

Yuka Kobayashi
University alumna

person there is in a couple."

In Japan, University alumna Yuka Kobayashi said the Valentine's Day tradition is to be untraditional.

"Valentines are only given from the girl to the boy," Kobayashi said. "In the past, girls didn't come up to guys, but Valentine's Day was one day of the year they did."

However, Kobayashi said girls are not left empty-handed. On White Day, or March 14, boys who received

Valentines a month earlier give a similar gift back to their admirer.

"The candy companies started it," Kobayashi said of White Day. "It was a good chance to sell more chocolate."

Japan started celebrating the holiday in 1958, and Kobayashi says it is primarily commercial.

"It's just like Christmas — how it started doesn't matter," Kobayashi said. "It's an excuse to sell."

Like Japan, India only recently added Valentine's Day to its holiday calendar. According to BBC News correspondent Vijay Rana, India began celebrating the holiday a decade ago.

"Before that, hardly anyone celebrated Valentine's Day in India. Purists dubbed it as another decadent influence of the West," Rana wrote in an article.

Valentine's Day specials air on Indian television, and love letter-writing competitions are held, Rana said. Another modern trend is the street Romeo.

"Weeks before Valentine's Day, street Romeos appear everywhere," Rana said. "Many of them pretend to enact the Bollywood (Indian movie industry) style boy-meets-girl stories that often degenerate into verbal abuse."

Emma Juhlin is a freelance reporter for the Emerald.

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