



Valentine



The Feast of Lupercus

The first interpretation has this celebration originating as a pagan tradition in the third century. During this time hordes of hungry wolves roamed outside of Rome where shepherds kept their flocks. The God Lupercus, was said to watch over the shepherds and their flocks and keep them from the wolves. Every February the Romans celebrated a feast called Lupercalia to honor Lupercus so that no harm

would come to the shepherds and their flocks. Also during Lupercalia, but in honor of the goddess Juno Februata, the names of young women were put into a box and names were drawn by lot. The boys and girls who were matched would be considered partners for the year, which began in March. This celebration continued long after wolves were a problem to Rome.

St. Valentine's Day

As Christianity became prevalent, priests attempted to replace old heathen practices. To Christianize the ancient pagan celebration of the Feast of Lupercus, the church officials changed the name to St. Valentine's Day. To give the celebration further meaning and eliminate pagan traditions, priests substituted the drawing of Saints names for the names of the girls. On St. Valentine's Day the priest placed saint's names into an urn or box. The young people then drew a name from the container. In the following year, the youth was supposed to emulate the life of the saint whose name he had drawn.

By the fourteenth century they reverted back to the use of girl's names. In the sixteenth century they once again tried to have saintly valentines but it was as unsuccessful as the first attempt.

While it can't be proved historically, there were seven men named Valentine who were honored with feasts on February 14th. Of these men, two stories link incidents that could have given our present day meaning to St. Valentine's Day.

One of these men named Valentine was a priest during the reign of Emperor Claudius. Valentine was revered by the young and old, rich and poor, with people of all walks of life attending his services. At this time Emperor Claudius was heavily recruiting men to serve as soldiers for his wars without much success. The

men preferred not to leave their wives, families and sweethearts to fight in foreign lands. Claudius became angry and declared that no more marriages could be performed and all engagements were cancelled.

Valentine thought this to be unfair and secretly married several couples. When Claudius found out, he threw Valentine in prison where he died. Friends of the priest retrieved his body and buried it in a churchyard in Rome.

Another version had St. Valentine jailed for helping Christians. While Valentine was in prison he cured a jailer's daughter of blindness. Claudius became enraged and had Valentine clubbed and beheaded on February 14, 269 A.D.

Yet another story claims that Valentine fell in love with the jailer's daughter and wrote her letters that were signed "From your Valentine."

All of the seven Valentines eventually evolved into one. In 496 Pope Gelasius declared the day in honor of St. Valentine. Through the centuries the Christian holiday became a time to exchange love messages and St. Valentine became the patron saint of lovers. Lovers' quarrels come under his jurisdiction and, naturally, he is the patron saint of engaged couples and of anyone wishing to marry.

February 14th - The Day the Birds Began to Mate

The Europeans also believed that on February 14th the birds began to choose their mates. In fact Chaucer, in his "Parlement of

Foules," wrote: "For this was Seynt Valentine's Day when every foul cometh ther to choose his mate."

John Donne wrote:

Hail Bishop Valentine! whose day this is;
All the air is thy diocese,
And all the chirping choristers
And other birds are thy parishioners:
Thou marryest ever year
The lyric lark and the grave whispering dove;
The sparrow that neglects his life for love,
The household bird with the red stomacher;
Celebrations
Thous mak'st the blackbird speed as soon,
As doth the goldfinch or the halcyon . . .
This day more cheerfully than ever shine,
This day which might inflame thyself, old Valentine!

The Christian tradition of drawing names on St. Valentine's Eve continued in England and other places. The tradition of birds choosing their mates on St. Valentine's Day led to the idea that boys and girls would do the same. Now when a youth drew a girl's name, he wore it on his sleeve, and attended and protected her during the following year. This made the girl his valentine and they exchanged love

tokens throughout the year. Later this was changed to only men giving love tokens to females, usually without names but signed "with St. Valentine's Love."

Later, in France, both sexes drew from the valentine box. A book called *Travels in England*, written in 1698, gives an account of the way it was done:

On St. Valentine's Eve an equal number of Maids and Bachelors get together, each writes their true or some feigned name upon separate billets, which they roll up and draw by way of lots, the Maids taking the Men's billets, and the Men the Maids'; so that each of the young Men lights upon a Girl that he calls his Valentine, and each of the Girls upon a young Man which she calls hers. By this means each has two Valentines--but the Man sticks faster to the Valentine that is fallen to him than to the Valentine to whom he is fallen. Fortune having thus divided the company into so many couples, the valentines give balls and treats to their mistresses, wear their billets several days upon their bosoms or sleeves, and this little sport often ends in Love. This ceremony is practised differently in different Countries, and according to the freedom or severity of Madame Valentine. This is another kind of Valentine, which is the first young Man or Woman chance throws in your way in the street, or elsewhere . . .

St. Valentine's Day was mentioned by Shakespeare. The poet, Drayton, wrote verses entitled "To His Valentine," in which he

expressed the idea of the birds' mating on St. Valentine's Day.

Each little bird this tide
Doth choose her beloved peer,
Which constantly abide
In wedlock all the year.