

The First Valentines

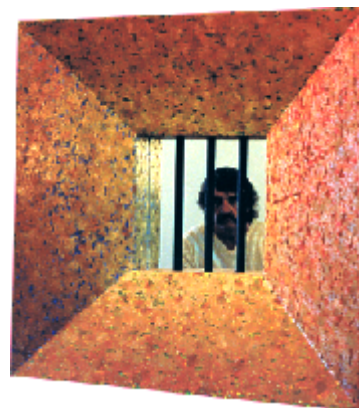
Till Death Did Them Part

Despite being important to lovers worldwide, as far as is known no country has made it a public holiday; not officially, anyway. Given the full title of Saint Valentine's Day it could be assumed that it had religious connotations, and it certainly did; but maybe not in the way that everyone imagines.

The date of its origin seems to have been earlier than 270 AD on February 15th when Romans celebrated the festival of Lupercalia. The Luperci were priests presumably taking their name from Lupa, the she-wolf who cared for the children, Romulus and Remus, the founders of Rome. The ceremony was conducted in a secret cave where a goat and a dog were sacrificed, apparently for purification, but of what or whom is unclear. Perhaps it had something to do with the suggestion that Lupercalia was also dedicated to Faunus, the Roman god of agriculture; on the other hand, the Roman holy-men may just have derived some perverse gratification from killing defenceless creatures for their hides and blood.

Bizarre though this might sound, there was good reason, at least in the minds of the Romans. Strips of goat hide were soaked in blood and the priests would wander the community slapping women with them (gently though) and also the crop fields to increase the fertility of both. The corn having no idea what was going on simply shucked and took it on the ear, whereas the ladies knew the worth of a bit of slap because the tickle would come later. That would be after they had put their names in an urn which the local bachelors got to dip in to select a lady who would be their companion for the coming year, perhaps even a future wife.

The "Valentine" tag came later, thanks to a well-forgotten Christian kleptomaniac, Pope Gelasius I. Round about 496 AD, he borrowed the basic ideals of the pagan festival, changed the date to the 14th and called it St. Valentine's Day. The saint in question is definitely questionable, a few contenders vying for the title. The most likely seems to be one Valentine, a priest making a governmental nuisance of himself in third century Rome. At the time, common soldiers were forbidden to marry, a situation Valentine set about remedying, conducting ceremonies for the GI's and their intendeds in secret. He was subsequently jailed for that, and also for assisting Christians to escape the cruel attentions of the Romans. While in prison, the sentimental and rather naive priest fell in love with his jailer's daughter. Just prior to his inevitable execution, he wrote a letter to the girl and signed it: "From your Valentine".



The tradition of writing Valentines seems to have started spreading in the 1400's, maybe prompted by the Duke of Orleans' poem to his wife while he was banged up in the Tower of London. The note still exists today in the British Library in London, a testimony to his undying love and lending inspiration for romantics in the future. Not that he or Valentine had much of one, but all good things must come to an end.

A Season of Happiness - helping you towards a better lifestyle

For a look at some informative articles on a variety of subjects just return to the web page



Although every effort has been made to be accurate and fair-minded, comments and opinions expressed on this website are based on personal experience and do not necessarily reflect the views of the wider community or those groups and institutions mentioned. A Season of Happiness and its staff accept no responsibility for any outcome based on suggestions offered. What works for us may not work for you. Please bear this in mind.