Valentine's Day: Little Known Facts

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Some historical facts about traditions associated with Valentine's Day

Most of the modern world knows of Valentinius, aka St. Valentine, the martyred saint for whom the holiday of lovers is named. How many of us, however, know about the origins of the custom of sending valentine cards? Where did that come from, why do we still do it and what other things about this holiday don't we know about?

Below are some interesting questions and answers about some not so well known Valentine's Day facts.

1- **Who sent the very first valentine?**

One of the most interesting Valentine's Day facts concerns the sending of the very first valentine. It is associated with St. Valentine himself, who left a note for the jailer's blind daughter before being executed by King Claudius II, also known affectionately as Claudius The Cruel. The king was mad at St. Valentine because he secretly married soldiers in the Roman legions against his express royal wishes. "From your Valentine," the note read, as Valentinius was led away to a death by stoning, and passed into the annals of love, sop, sentimentality and posterity.

2- Why is St. Valentine associated with romance?

Romance and St. Valentine became inextricably linked when a Roman celebration was combined with the martyrdom of St. Valentine. The date, February 15th, was set aside to honor the Roman God, Lupercus. On that day, young women would write love notes and deposit them in a large urn. The young men of Rome would remove the notes and then court the women whose message they had drawn. When Christianity became the official religion of Rome, the church began to celebrate a new holiday, merging both celebrations on February 14th.

3- How did the custom of sending valentines spread?

Sending valentines spread across Europe along with the Christian faith, particularly to England and France. During the Middle Ages, when few people could read or write, friends said or sang their valentines to each other. The earliest written valentines come from 1415 and were written from prison in the Tower of London by French royal, Charles, Duke of Orleans. Considering that most people bathed about once a month in those days, it's a wonder lovers managed to stand next to each other, much less make love and sing praises. In 1537, a Royal Charter by Henry VIII, who had six wives, officially declared February 14th as St. Valentine's Day. By the next century, Valentine's Day was widely celebrated in Britain and by the 1700s cards were exchanged on a regular basis.

4- Who created the first American Valentine?

The English colonists brought the Valentine tradition to America but one of the most little known Valentine's Day facts concerns a Mount Holyoke College student named Esther Howland, who in 1830, crafted the first commercial American Valentine card. Her father was a stationer in Worcester, Massachusetts, who imported Valentine cards every year from England. Esther, who became known as "the Mother of the Valentine," began her own collection, and imported lace, fine papers and other supplies on her own. Her creations were the first paper valentines, made with real lace, ribbons and colorful pictures known as "scrap."

5- Why does the letter "X" signify a kiss?

The custom dates back to the early Christian era when a cross mark or an 'X' conveyed the force of a sworn oath. The cross referred to both the cross of Calvary and the first letter of the Greek word for Christ, 'Xristos.' In days when few people could write, their signature cross, or 'X' was a legally valid mark. To emphasize their complete sincerity, they often kissed the 'X' when an oath was sworn upon it. It was this practice which led to its becoming the symbol of a kiss.