

Love dies hard

St. Valentine's Day survives rocky road

Is romance dead? Far from it. If Valentine's Day is any indication, it's alive and well and living in the hearts of everyone who loves and needs to be loved. In fact, the occasion ranks second only to Christmas as a card-sending holiday.

During this national love-in on Feb. 14, most people would be hard-pressed to explain the origins of the heart-to-heart exchange of cards, candy and flowers.

According to Dr. Lee W. Gibbs, acting chairman of the department of religious studies at Cleveland State University, St. Valentine is commemorated primarily in North America and Britain.

"There were at least eight men with the name Valentine, seven of whose religious feast days fall on Feb. 14," said Gibbs. "One of the most credible legends dates back to around 269 A.D., when Valentine, a priest in Rome, defied Emperor Claudius II's beliefs that single men made better soldiers. The priest, thinking this attitude was unfair, joined several couples in matrimony. Valentine was swiftly sent to

prison, where he eventually died. Friends buried his body in a churchyard.

Despite the number of Valentine legends, common themes linking them all involve compassion, martyrdom or the passing of love notes between the bars or prison windows. In 469 A.D., Pope Gelasius named Feb. 14 as St. Valentine's Day. This new Christian holiday gradually became a time for exchanging love messages, with St. Valentine emerging as the patron saint of courtship and lovers, explained Gibbs.

People in England were probably sending Valentine greetings as early as the 1400s.

By around 1800 the first commercial Valentine cards appeared, featuring fine paper, ribbon and lace, and love symbols, such as doves, cupids, flowers and bleeding hearts.

Traditional artwork and sentiments on Valentine cards still remain ever popular, although contemporary adaptations are increasing in acceptance. Studio and humorous cards, also

known as "slams" are ideal for exchanging Valentine messages without undue sentimentality, according to James Semon, assistant vice president of marketing at Cleveland-based American Greetings Corp.

If Valentine's Day is any barometer of shifting social values, the decade of the '80s looks like return to old-fashioned romance and tradition. The more conservative mood of the country is reflected, for example, in the resurgence of the

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"Slam cards are slightly derogatory in a humorous, chiding fashion," said Semon. "Artwork is also more far-out."

During World War II, slams became even more intense, with a "get even" tone reflecting the strong patriotism and clear-cut good vs. bad nature of the times. This cynical trend continued throughout the McCarthy era of the early 1950s.

Ironically, during the Viet Nam years, cynical cards had their lowest ebb, according to Goeller. Instead, cards with romantic photographic art and introspective, conversational messages were enthusiastically received. "The increasingly educated Viet Nam generation placed an emphasis on love,

not war. Once peace was restored, so was humor."

What accounts for this shift to the traditional? "Perhaps the country is settling down and changing from a 'me' to an 'us' generation," Goeller observed. "Kids today are more realistic and are focusing their attention on recreational pursuits and day-to-day existence rather than causes. There's also an increase in the number of people in the 20-35-year-old bracket."

Goeller noted that today's conservative mood is in some ways a return to the Andy Hardy era, when movies were filled with happy days and happy endings.

From the Heart...



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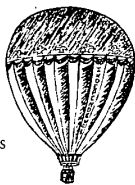
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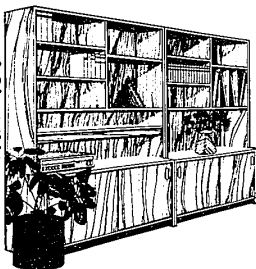
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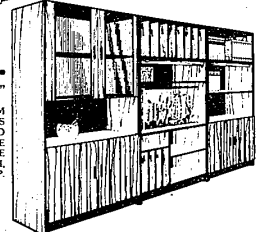
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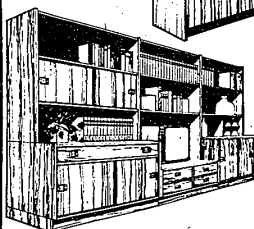
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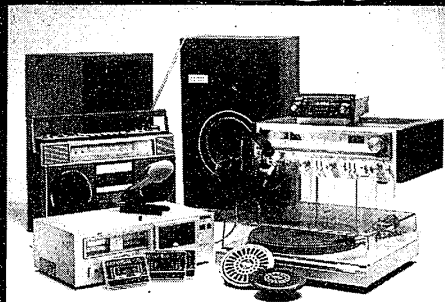
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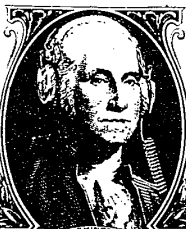
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