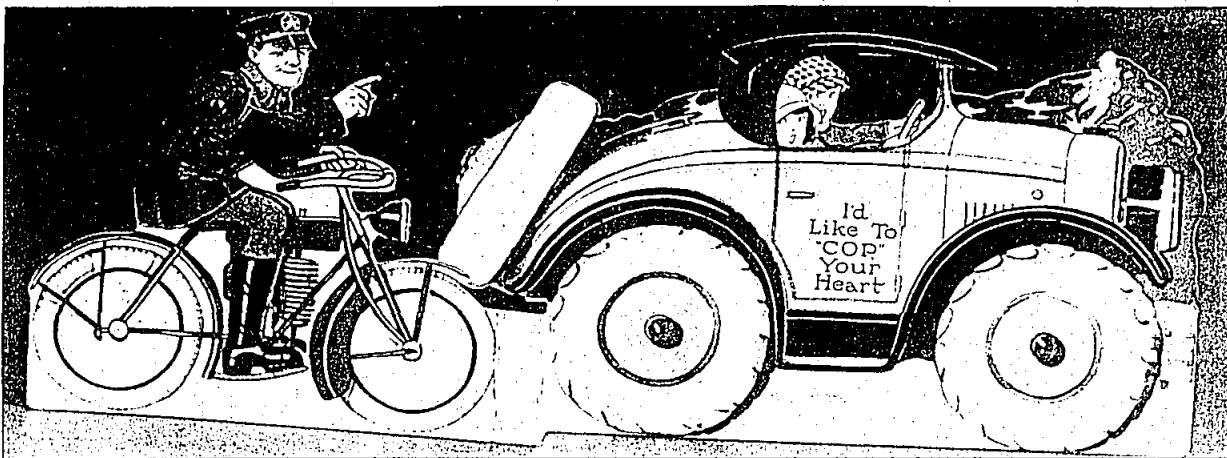


Suburban Life



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Valentines take a heartfelt look at life

By Louise Okrulsky
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LACY, cute or crazy, Valentine's Day cards come in enough shapes, sizes and sentiments to suit almost everyone. And they have for generations.

Long before Garfield and Snoopy took over a chunk of the greeting card industry, juvenile Valentine's featured winsome, apple-cheeked children and chubby cherubs. Cats

and dogs played second fiddle to girls with Betty Boop eyes and boys still in short pants.

Last fall, the Farmington Historical Museum acquired a collection of Valentine's from the 1920's and 1930's. Put away as childhood keepsakes for Farmington resident Dick Carvell by his mother, they were discovered after her death and donated by Carvell to the museum. A small part of the collection is seen on this page. These cards do more than set

hearts into motion.

Many of the cards feature moving parts or sections that stood out for a three dimensional effect. Sweethearts run around town in cars with running boards and rumble seats. Little boys balance on stilts that can be made to wiggle. Fans open. An elephant rocks.

Many of the pre-World War I and German Valentines have this honeycomb paper piece which folds down. The card becomes a monument or a statue for the table," said Judith Endelman, curator for Greenfield Village/Henry Ford Museum, Dearborn. Endelman edited the museum's book of late 19th century post card Valentines.

Farmington's Valentines talk about a first kiss, first crush kind of love. "I'd like to cop your heart," pleads one. "Sweet thought," croons another. "I'll get you yet my Valentine and gladly make you forever mine," boasts a third.

They tell us about some of the attitudes society took for granted 60 years ago. Girls watch little boys run and jump. Features on the faces of black children are exaggerated.

And everyone — cherubs, kids, cats and dogs — are pudgy.

"Many of the cards feature children. They look winsome. You don't see that as much," Endelman said. "The cultural standards for kids were different. They were chubbier."

We might still grin at the card that says "Warm up you little Eskimo. Don't say my cause is lost. Can't you see I'm trying to get you — to defrost." But Valentine humor wasn't always gentle.

From its start in the 1880's the amount of humor in Valentines sometimes depended on which side of town you called home.

"Some were pretty malicious," Endelman said.

Printed on cheap paper, the 19th century cards took pot shots at different professions and ethnic groups.

"We see some cruel, racist cards," Endelman said.

Looking back in time, cards also hint at the decline of Germany in the world market of the time. The 1920s and 1930s were a time in which the German printing industry failed to recapture its pre-World War I spot as a producer as some of the world's best color cards.

During the 19th century, German chromolithographs were valued for their rich colors. In the early 1930's cards made in Germany still featured muted but rich colors, shadings and more sophisticated details. Their earlier cache was lost to memories of the world war.

IT'S SAID that every generation thinks it invented love. But the ancient Romans helped invent the Valentine.

Go back far enough into the history of the holiday and you'll find the Romans sending love letters to each other in mid-February. The month seems to have been the accepted time to go courting, according to Endelman.

By the middle of the 18th century society in America and Valentine's Day were established enough to produce elaborate hand made missives. Using cutouts and pin pricks makers devised a card for one special person.

Victorians, who seemed to believe that nothing could be too elaborate, went all out for their cards. Valentine's Day cards had grown into a cottage industry of sorts with women assembling them at home and selling them.

By the second half of the 19th century commercially produced Valentines became available. It fed into the Victorian mania for as-

sembling postcards and prints into scrapbooks.

Valentine's Day still promotes a frenzy each February at card

shops, proving that two things are constants in this life. All you need is love and the price of a postage stamp.



CARDS COURTESY OF THE FARMINGTON HISTORICAL MUSEUM

Humorous cards range from the gentle kidding (above) of a 1930s era card to the ethnic bashing cracks popular in the 1880s. Novelty items (below) include the boy, a girl and cupid card that starts out as a tulip and ends up as a fan.



SHARON LEWIS/staff photographer

Old fashioned Valentines set more than hearts to moving. The policeman chasing the couple at the top of the page, pops out for a 3-D effect. Stilts in the early 1930s card (above) made in Germany wiggle. Standing on a rocker, the elephant and the apple-cheeked boy rock in another German-made card from the same period.