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Recommended Citation

Ness, Henry (1930) "Hearts Are Trumps...", The Iowa Homemaker: Vol. 10 : No. 8 , Article 5.
Available at: http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/homemaker/vol10/iss8/5

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Hearts Are Trumps...

By Mrs. Henry Ness, A. A.

The festival of Valentine's Day is believed to have been named for St. Valentine, a Christian Bishop known as the 'lovers' saint,' who suffered martyrdom under Emperor Claudius on Feb. 14, 271 A. D.

It is told that Emperor Claudius issued a decree from Rome forbidding marriage, since married men were loath to leave their families for war and did not make good soldiers, according to the Emperor's notion. The good priest Valentine heard and was grieved, and invited young lovers to come to him to be secretly married. Valentine was seized when this was done and was thrown into prison, where he died, a martyr to love. The day of his death, Feb. 14, has been kept in his honor.

In the Middle Ages it was customary in England, Scotland and parts of France for the young people to assemble on the evening before Valentine's Day and draw names by chance. During the 17th century we first hear of the bestowal of gifts in connection with Valentine's Day. On Feb. 14, 1661, Sir William Batten set Mrs. Pepys "half a dozen pairs of eyes and a pair of silk stockings and garters" for her Valentine. Such was the original method of "gold digging." Sounds modern, doesn't it?

The paper valentine, usually of decorated design with sentimental verses, seemed to have made its appearance in England during the last twenty years of the 18th century. Early specimens of this type are generally in quite good taste, drawn and colored by hand, produced in monochrome or engraved by lithography. "Dearest Fascinating Being!" was a popular endearment often produced in letter form and written on copper plate. Religious subjects frequently decorated early paper valentines of the continental countries of Europe.

During the 18th century, the superstition was ripe that the first man seen by a maid on St. Valentine's Day was destined to be her husband. Great was the agitation of lovesick damsels who beheld a scullery boy or street urchin first on that day.

The endless knot of love was a familiar motif, and a pair of birds is seen on a large proportion of early valentines, due to the superstition that birds choose their mates on St. Valentine's Day. During the '30s and '40s of the 19th century and for many years thereafter, the comic valentine was much in evidence, while mid-Victorian romanticism expressed itself in valentines engraved with elaborate lace paper borders. During the last years of this century, valentines became so ornate that it has been said that they "died of their own too-much."

We are now urged to "say it with flowers," with bونbons and by wire, but we trust that the decorated valentines, with their tender sentiments, may not entirely perish from the earth.

For entertainment on Valentine's Day, the decorations, favors and food should be in the spirit of the day. The heart may be used profusely for decorations and invitations. For the centerpiece, groupings of red candies, a doll dressed as Cupid, with bow and arrows, a large decorated cake or lace paper doily set on an old-fashioned crystal cake stand, red roses, carnations and tulips, all give charming effects. A heart-shaped valentine box from which streamers run to each place may also be set in the center of the table. In the box, attached to the streamer, will be the guest's Valentine or favor, and on the other end of the streamer may be fastened a heart or cupid, to be used as a place card.

Red paper hearts suspended above the table or scattered over it give a festive air, as do heart-shaped nut cups or lace edged valentines used for place cards.

The preparation of Valentine Day menus affords the hostess abundant opportunity for originality. Fancy molds, tinfoil trays and vegetable and cookie cutters flourish at any hardware store. A heart-shaped cookie cutter or two in varying sizes will answer the purpose.

A very pretty first course is made of half a grapefruit sectioned and garnished with a red heart cut from maraschino and candied cherries. Ground meat shaped in the form of a heart and baked in the oven or broiled under a gas flame is an inexpensive valentine dish.

Attractive platters or planks may be arranged by using vegetables such as beets and carrots cut in heart shapes and piled lightly around mounds of mashed potatoes and heart shaped pieces of toast. Any croquette mixture, thoroughly chilled and spread in a sheet of one inch thickness may be cut with a heart-shaped cookie cutter and fried in deep fat. Creamed oysters or chicken a la king served on heart-shaped pieces of toast garnished with a strip of pimento form a welcome part of a luncheon.

Tomato jelly has the valentine color and may be cut out with a heart-shaped cutter which has been dipped in hot water, while gingerale salad may be put into molds prepared with little pimento hearts already at their bottoms. When the salad is turned out the little hearts are molded in the top.

Fruit and cheese salads may be garnished with arrows and hearts cut from pimentos, and served as separate courses. Heart-shaped sandwiches or pastries fried in deep fat are attractive when served with these salads.

Desserts are always a source of interest in carrying out a dominant idea. Plain brick ice cream, cut in slices, may be stenciled in a design appropriate to the day. Trace your design on stiff paper and cut it out. Dip this stencil in hot paraffin and let cool, then lay it on a slice of ice cream and spread on a thin layer of whipped cream which has been previously colored with some food coloring. For another attractive dessert make a cake mixture in thin sheets, and when cold cut into heart shapes. Cover one side with frosting and decorate the edges with tiny red candies or chopped candied cherries to bring out the heart shape.

But remember—over-decoration in food or table design is worse than no decoration at all. Just as the valentine itself lost favor and all but died from over-decoration, so will our joy in its symbols be dulled unless we use restraint in applying them.