

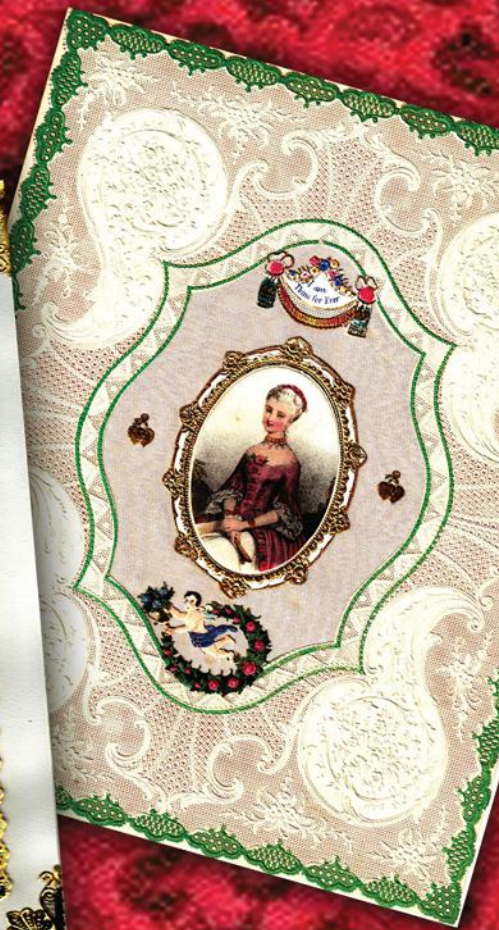
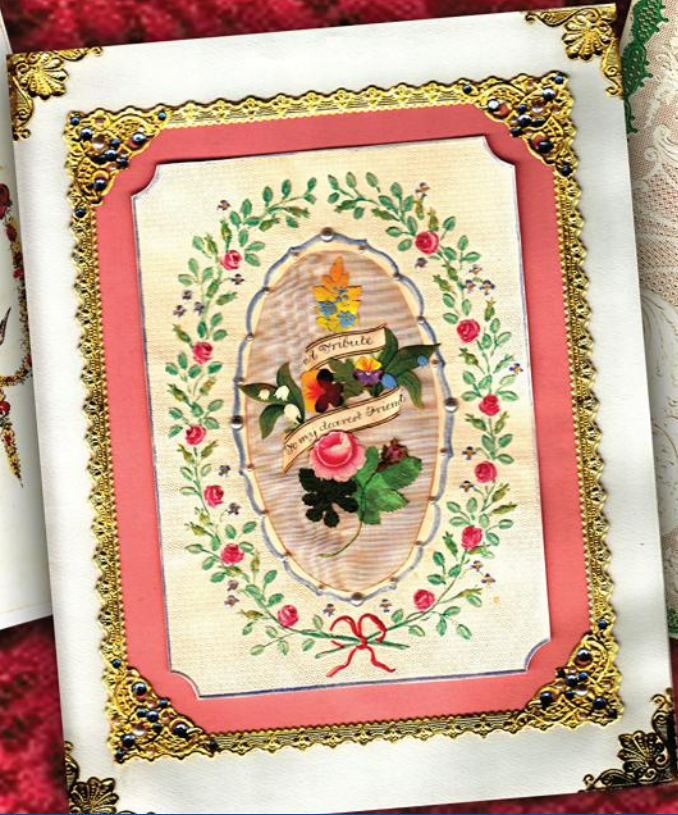
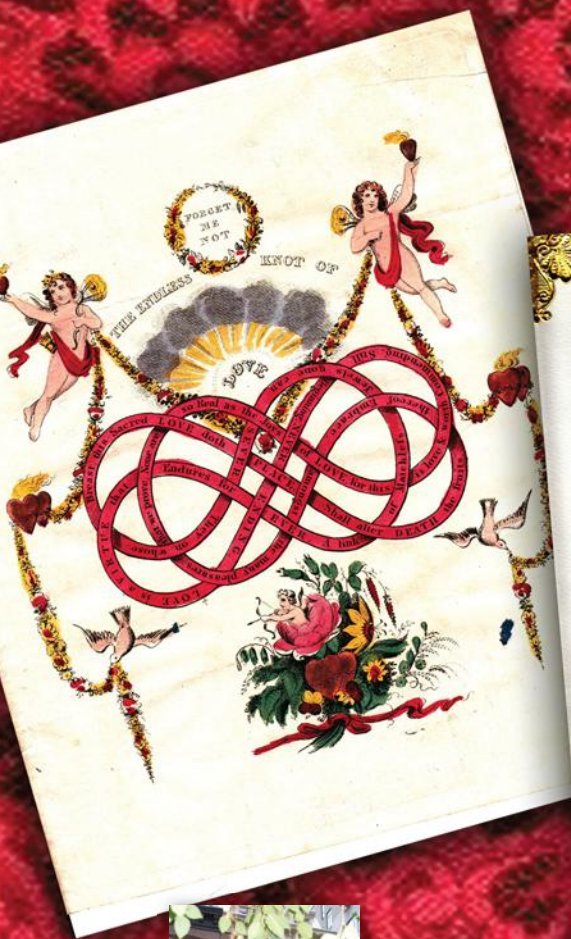
# The American Stamp Dealer & Collector

\$5.00



No. 47  
February 2011

## Will You Be My Valentine?



Philately's great historic landmark building. See page 20.

## See Nancy Rosin's Valentine postal history on page 24.



ASDA's Chicago Postage Stamp Show  
March 11-13 • See page 38

STAMP COLLECTING'S PREMIER MAGAZINE DEDICATED TO THE ENJOYMENT OF OUR HOBBY!



# Adding Flight to the Wings of Cupid: Postal Delivery of the Valentine

By Nancy Rosin

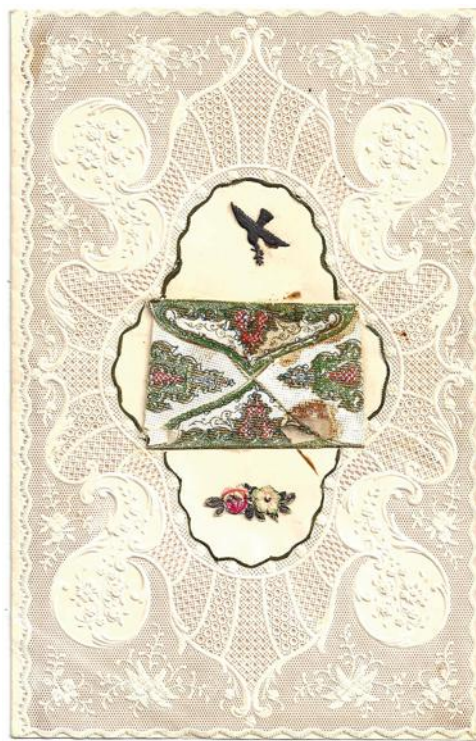
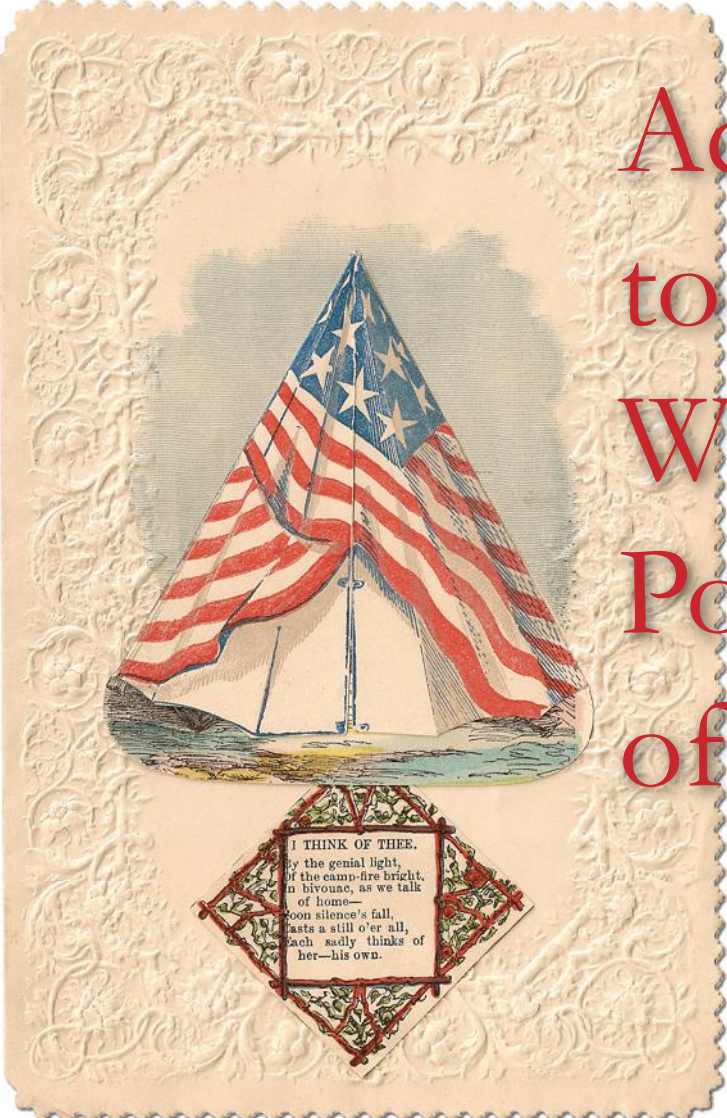


Figure 1.

**T**he modern Valentine embodies centuries of tradition, popular culture, and industry. Having evolved from the religious Devotionals and Biedermeier Era greeting cards of eighteenth century Europe, the paper Valentine has become a cherished icon in America and England. Following a historic timeline, which includes the technology of papermaking and printing, significant artistic achievement, and creative passion, we arrive at the establishment of a Universal postal system – which put greater flight into our beloved Cupid's wings.

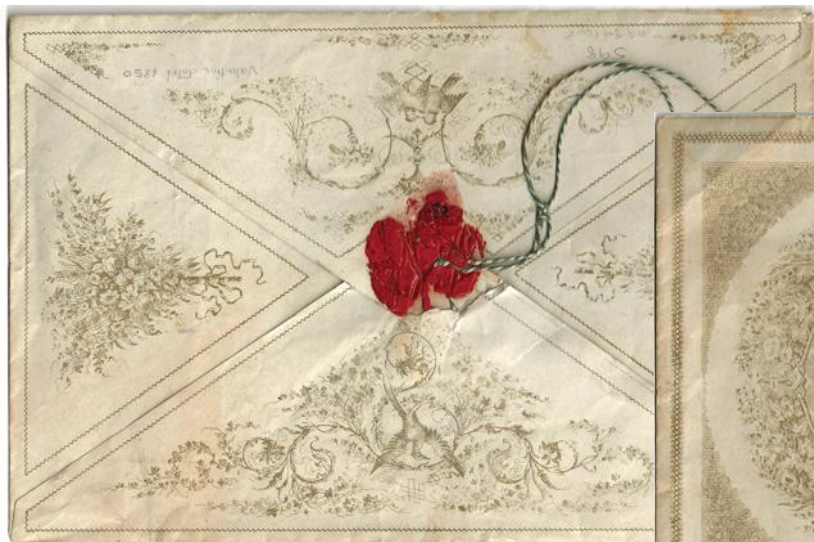
The term, Valentine, originally referred to a person, and gradually transformed to signify the gift, itself. Jewelry, silk stockings, embellished paper confections, a posey carrying a message inspired by the language of flowers, or perhaps, simple poetic lines or hand-made treasures, all became sought-after expressions of love. As manufacturing techniques developed, the products became more sophisticated and even more popular, and February 14th became a critical date for the delivery of these life-changing missives.

Valentine collecting acquires a completely new dimension when one embraces not only the Valentine, but also the cover, linking sending with sentiment. Stampless or stamped, cosseted within a private envelope, or a single page gently hand-delivered, each connotes a special experience, invaluable in recreating this history of love.

Initially, these tokens of affection were hand-delivered single sheets, often gently folded and sealed with wax, slipped beneath the door, or suspended from the door-knob – their anonymity a part of the fascination and enduring mystique. (Figures 1, 1A, 1B)

A vibrant third century Pagan celebration curiously evolved from its' Roman origins to become the symbolic day for lovers, and propelled a major economic phenomenon of entrepreneurship and advertising. More than 60,000 greetings were delivered in London in 1835; today, nearly two hundred million Valentine greetings





Figures 1a and 1b.



Figures 2 and 2a.

are mailed each year. Only the popular later Victorian Christmas cards surpassed Valentine's Day in volume. The stamp specialist, Stanley Piller, referring to the U.S. Post in this very publication, (No. 39, April, 2010, page 33.) stated, "its initial purpose was to deliver Valentines." British postal history authority, Frank Staff, in *The Valentine and Its Origins*, (Praeger, NY, 1969,) regards the development of the postal delivery system as a major factor in the popularity of these greetings.

For most collectors of Valentines, the envelopes are merely a conveyance—non-essential and generally separated from the contents. The markings demonstrate postal evolution, and add a layer of philatelic history to these fantasy confections. The sender's urgency for timely delivery in the nineteenth century, and recognition of the relevance of these communications by modern scholars, enables us to understand their need for a responsible postal network. In this era of Internet-friendly searches, possessing names and addresses opens a Pandora's box. Exciting discoveries can be made, for these missives are now connected to actual people, so much like us, but living in another era. The protective envelope is not merely a messenger of paper dreams, but a key resource.

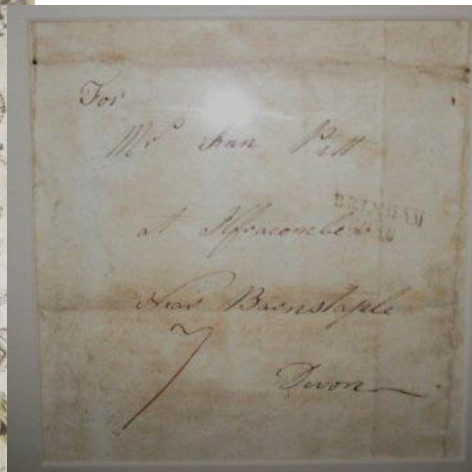
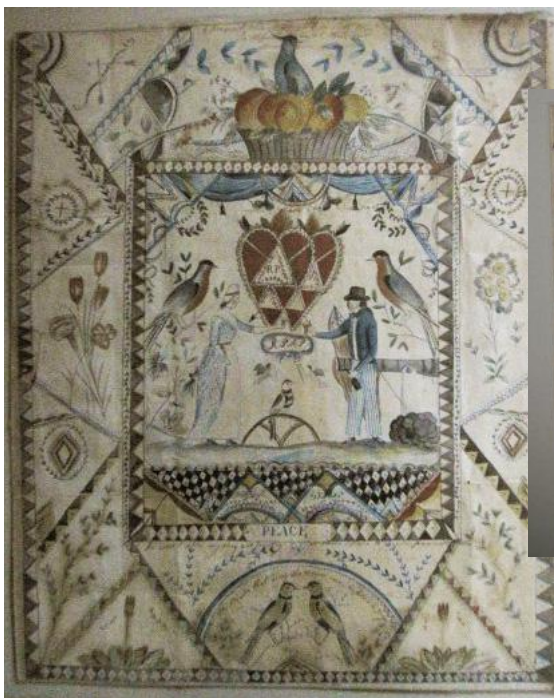
Understanding the people, their place in history, world events and economics, and the expense and complications of sending Valentines, makes one even more curious about their messages. By viewing examples of a few early English and American Valentines, I hope to convey the potential rewards and hidden magic.

The holiday was barely established in America when lovely Miss Solloway, the Milliner to Ms. Norton in Bromley, Kent, received this majestic hand-cut Valentine.

Upon an engraved quarto sheet (Figures 2 and 2A), the hand-colored image of a genteel couple inspires tenderness and promise—home and distant spire evoke their future bliss. The cartouche is surrounded by a naively cut border, suggestive of lace and handwritten inside, a fervent love letter signed, Valentine 1803. Occupying an entire page in Franks Staff's book, it is an important icon in my collection.

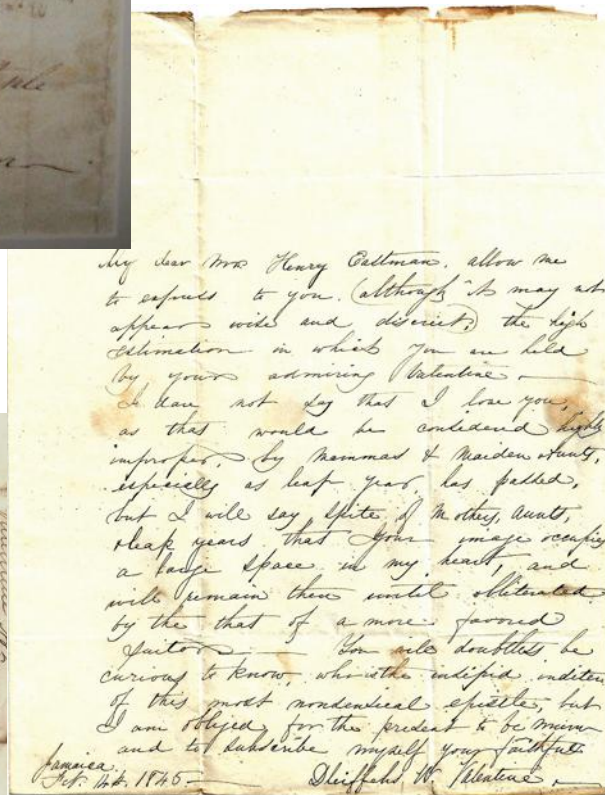
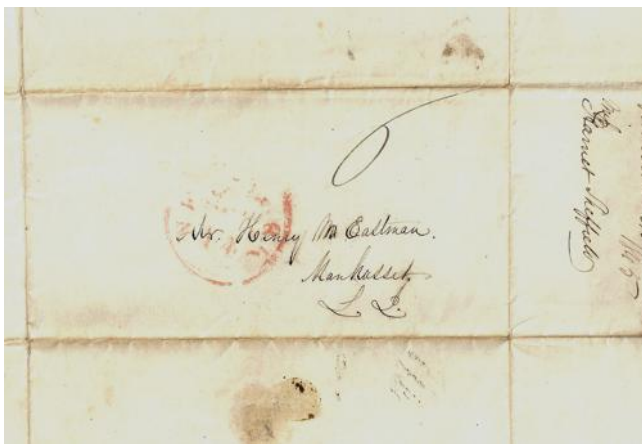
A unique and early postally used Valentine is a handmade one from 1805. (Figures 3 and 3a next page) An exquisite folk-art painting, with a rare postmark, it was a prized possession of Frank Staff. The returning sailor is depicted making a toast to his wife with wine glasses and promises to serve her in peace as he has served his King in war. The symbolic nesting birds, spring flowers, and portraits of the couple make it especially touching. My search of the marriage records of Ilfracombe Parish is underway.





Figures 3 and 3a.

Figures 10 and 10a.



As the postal delivery system changed, and stamps would be affixed, the Penny Red, following the Penny Black, became another landmark. Shown attached to an engraved Valentine sheet, it dates from its pre-perforated era, between 1841 and 1854.

Comic Valentines, the satirical, barbed missives sometimes called anti-valentines, represent a vital social documentary. *The Gambler*, by Elton, one of New York's earliest Valentine publishers, is one of several acidic missives anonymously targeted at Henry Mairs, Treasurer of the State of New Jersey, in the late 1840s. The cancellation on the cover indicates the New York and Philadelphia Railroad.

Contemporary newspaper articles describe a high level of anxiety as young ladies frantically awaited the arrival of the postman, now burdened with fulfilling Cupid's enormous challenge. The social relevance of the holiday necessitated a secure messenger, and Cupid now required assistance. The development of various private postal carriers, for example, American Eagle (Figure 6), Blood's in Philadelphia, and Boyd's City Post in New York, (Figure 7), recognized by stamps and cancellations, were followed by US stamps in limited use in 1842, and widespread in 1847. The envelope – widely used after De La Rue demonstrated his envelope machine at London's Great Exhibition of 1851 – became more important now because of standardized, prepaid postage, based

upon weight, rather than distance. No longer could irate fathers complain about paying huge sums for the unsolicited Valentine mail their popular daughters incurred. Great strides were made – and largely for love!

Often separated, the envelopes were frequently discarded, and the lovely contents were placed in albums as nearly sacred treasures. (Figures 7a and 7b) The messenger, that tender envelope upon which a young swain may have wishfully inscribed his beloved's name, and even placed a stamp at raucous angles to convey a secret message, was lost. For one elaborate envelope, extra postage was apparently required to pay for the heavily embellished enclosure, but it is uncanceled.

A treasured letter on decorative notepaper is signed, Your Valentine, and was sent to Lavinia Dickinson, sister of the poet, Emily Dickinson. (Figures 8 and 8a) The wafer on the reverse carries the message, "I bear good tidings." From California, with the cancellation "10"—one assumes a fee of ten cents to travel all the way to Amherst, Massachusetts. While the rates researched did quote ten cents for more than three hundred miles, mail to and from California was actually forty cents—so this postmark is curious.

During the Civil War, Valentines and letters were a crucial link between home and the front. Valentines were made available at low cost from many companies, and volunteers often distributed



(Figure 5 and 5a)



Figure 6.



**THE GAMBLER.**

A Black-Leg of all characters, the girls most despise;  
 From Gambling, ten thousand evils will arise;  
 Leave your Cards, Sappy Sir, pursue higher game,  
 Follow some honest pursuit, and get a good name;  
 Leave the company of night-rangers, drink less wine,  
 Then some girl, out of pity, will be your Valentine.

ELTON, Publisher, 18 Division and 90 Nassau St., N. Y.



Figure 7.





Figures 7a and 7b.



(Figures 8 and 8a.)



*Editor's Note: We are quite pleased to welcome author Nancy Rosin to these pages. She is currently president of the National Valentine Collectors Association ([www.valentinecollectors.com](http://www.valentinecollectors.com)) and vice president of the Ephemera Society of America ([www.ephemerasociety.org](http://www.ephemerasociety.org)).*

decorated stationery free. The images on the famed Romeo and Juliet envelopes feature the transition from troubador to soldier, and they add interest that goes beyond the enclosed memento. The most famous enclosure found within this cover was The Soldier's Tent. (Figure 9)

Henry Eastman, a young Long Island lawyer, is a charming character residing within my collection, (Figures 10 and 10a) for

he curiously catalogued many of his Valentines. This popular beau avoided confusion or duplication among his flirtations by carefully listing every poem—and every lady—to whom he sent a Valentine. An Internet search revealed that one year after the last Valentine, in 1847, he married one from the list, with whom he eventually had ten children. Without the address, his law apprenticeship, this fascinating information would have been lost. In this Valentine



Figure 9.



letter, sent from Jamaica, N.Y. to Manhasset, Long Island, N.Y. in 1845, we find an ardent coquette, Rebecca Sheffield, signing her name backwards as, Dleiffehs W. Valentine, Henry's unknown admirer.

Today's savvy collectors decipher calligraphy, examine details, and scour the Internet for substance relating to their treasures. The personal gratification found in the process adds depth and passion to the collector's mission. Piecing together those facts, adding a

watermark or a stationer's name, and most definitely, the postal markings, gives historic importance to the cherished object. Imagining another era and circumstances, yet sharing similar emotions, there is ageless content to a Valentine. I love the tactile quality of all ephemera, but with these tender mementos, I can savor romance in the palm of my hand, and feel the fingerprints of love. Shown on this page are some other colorful examples in my collection of Valentines. ✉