

## LOVE IN NEWPORT AND AROUND THE WORLD

## More about Valentine's Day than you really need to know

We can credit—or blame—either the goddess Juno or some medieval birds for giving us Valentine's Day.

First, there was the Roman Feast of Lupercalia, a pagan fertility celebration, starring Juno, among other things the goddess of women and marriage. That was held, more or less, on Feb. 14. Then, we are told, the women of Rome would leave love letters in a large urn. The men would come by, pluck a note by chance, and set out after the woman who had written it. (Talk about marriage as a lottery! Those women had to urn their love.)

In the Middle Ages, Europeans had the idea that birds began to mate on Feb. 14. Don't ask how they knew. But if the birds did it, it must be a good idea, so they started sending love letters on that date.

Now, about the saint who gave his name to the day, the Roman Catholic Church has at least three saints named Valentine, all of whom, if we can believe it, were martyred on Feb. 14. Perhaps the most romantic

of the bunch was a Third Century Roman priest. The emperor at the time ordered priests not to perform marriages because he apparently thought married men made reluctant soldiers. This Valentine performed the marriages in secret and was executed but not before sending a letter to the jailer's daughter, signed, you guessed it, "Your Valentine."

The first commercial American Valentine's Day cards were produced in the 1840s and, the Greeting Card Association tells us, more than a billion cards are sent out each year in the U.S., Mexico, Canada, the United Kingdom, France and Australia.



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**J. C. LEYENDECKER (1874-1951)** "St. Valentine-This is My Busy Day" Circa 1918. Saturday Evening Post cover, Feb. 16, 1918. Daniel Haar, American Illustrators Gallery. Small pictures this page and page 13 are of Valentine's cards throughout the centuries