

Create Your Own 'Antique' Valentine

BY SALLY BAIR
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"The rose is red the grape is green

The days are past that I have seen

The roses red, the violet blue
Carnations are sweet and so are you

If you love me as I love you
No knife shall cut our love in two..."

If it's February, Valentine's Day is just around the corner, and sentiments like the one above can be found in every card shop. Well, perhaps the sentiments today are not quite like the one above which was found in a card from 1830.

Valentines and the sentiments they carry have been around for a long time, and have enjoyed popularity in this country since the

Revolutionary War period.

Legend has it that the first Valentine was a message sent in ancient Rome from St. Valentine himself on the night before he was put to death to a girl he had befriended and whose sight he had restored. Over the years the idea of sending Valentines has become quite widespread, and not reserved just for the one you love. After all, where would the elementary school Valentine box be, if that were the case.

Janet Birch, Hershey, is conducting a class in making reproductions of antique Pennsylvania German Valentines at the Hershey Museum of American Life, and there was so much interest she had to add a second class.

In a book called "A History of

Valentines," by Ruth Webb Lee, the author said, "More often than not they (Valentines) were proposals of marriage and a form of love making that relieved the shy suitor of saying what was in his heart by proxy."

The Pennsylvania German Valentines were elaborate creations, often scherenschnitte colored with water colors. These Valentines date from the 1740's to the 1840's according to Janet. She adds, "People had more leisure time then to think of love and anticipate Valentine's Day."

She says that Valentines in those days carried no postage, but were folded and sealed with wax, mostly in red. "The were then hand delivered to the lady's door." If the lady in question lived out of town, the important Valentine was wrapped and put on the stage coach to be delivered. Now that is romantic!

Janet notes that it was not until 1845 that there was a uniform postal service and envelopes began to be used. For collectors, she points out that the envelopes are probably more valuable today than the Valentines they carried, especially if they have the mark which was used as a stamp.

In addition to the intricate art work of scissors cutting, pin pricking and water coloring, many Valentines carried interesting prose. One which is from a Lancaster man reads as follows, "God and the Trinity thought up the institution of marriage He also told me the oath which I give you today my birdie. If you will become my wife, I will be faithful and exercise pious duties, that good fortune and peace will grow and besides this, our house and wealth will profit by the work which we do. This do I write to you, beloved treasure, your faithful Philipp in the year, 1753."

This indeed seems to be a proposal of marriage. According to Janet the first Valentines were usually sent by men, and the ladies replied to their valentine.

The following verse leaves no doubt as to the giver's wishes:

February the fourteenth day
It's Valentine they say
I choose you from among the rest

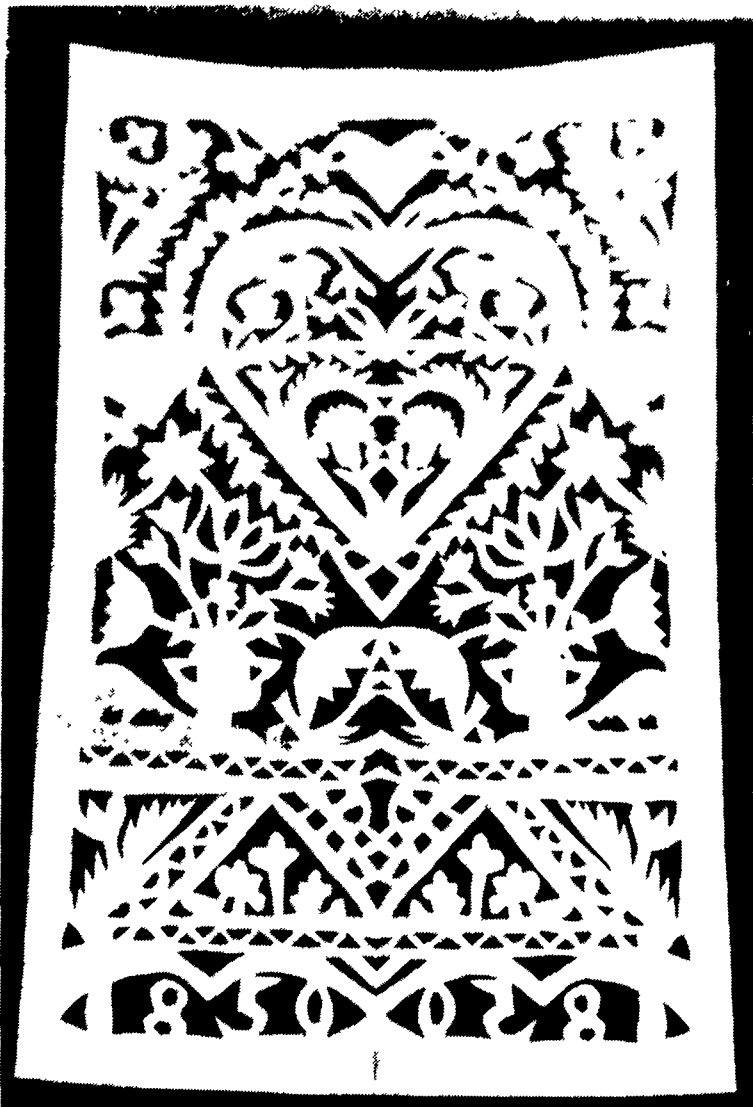
The reason was I loved you best

Sure as the grape grows on the vine

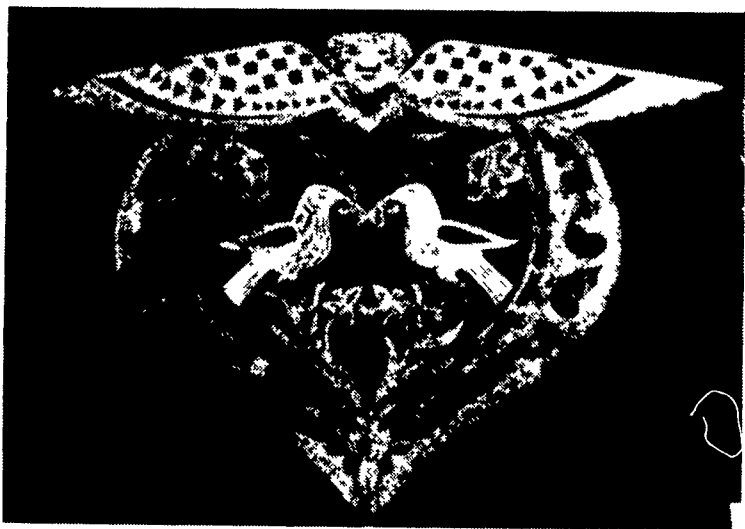
So sure you are my Valentine
The rose is red the violet blue
Lilies are fair and so are you.



After the cutting is done, pin pricking can be done to create some interesting details on the paper. Here Janet Birch, instructor, shows Bette Wells how to use the hat pin for best effect on her Valentine.



The Swiss influence was dominant along with the German, and this is a design from 1850, believed to be Swiss. A description says that the Swiss influence is felt because of "using all areas for cutting." The motifs of the central heart and the floral turns are so well defined that they could be presented as individual enlarged single cuttings.



Valentines have been exchanged in this country since colonial times, in a custom which probably had its origins in ancient Rome. Pennsylvania Germans utilized their own skills in making finely detailed scherenschnitte colored with water colors. It took hours to create one of these individual Valentines, but there was more leisure time for creating since there was no television or other electronic equipment to fill the evening hours. These are reproductions of Valentines dating from the 1740's to the 1840's.



Student John Lucas works at antiquing his Valentine after cutting the design from calligraphy parchment paper. The antiquing solution is 1 teaspoon instant coffee to 1 tablespoon boiling water. After it is gently brushed on, the scherenschnitte is turned upside down on a brown paper, which will absorb the excess moisture, and covered with a pane of glass to help flatten it.

Round is the ring that has no end,

So is my love for you my friend
Again take this in good part
Along with it you have my heart

But if you do the same refuse
Pray burn this paper and me excuse.

Another from 1949 reads,
"I've often thought that I would send

A valentine to some dear friend

Now, though I've many friends 'tis true,

My preference is all for you
For if the truth must be confessed

Believe me, I like you the best."

One of the oldest known Valentines in American reads, "I ever will in you remain, let your heart return again." It is believed that this was created by nuns in Strasburgh, who wrote verses and created Valentines using the money for charity.

to make the decorative art on which these messages might have been carried, Janet says a pair of manicure scissors is a must. When