Please, Be Our Valentine

Celebrate Worcester!
in 2020
with
Worcester Historical Museum
Be Our Valentine  2020

A program of
Worcester Historical Museum

in partnership with
Worcester Loves To Read

and
Worcester Public Library
A brief look at Worcester’s unique role in the history of American valentines

Produced and distributed by
Worcester Historical Museum

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Valentine’s Day represents the merging of an ancient pagan festival and the death of a Roman priest named Valentine.

His fond farewell message to his jailer’s daughter was signed “from your Valentine.”

Valentine’s Day has become a time for sweethearts (or hopeful sweethearts) to display their affection through messages.
Early valentines were heartfelt labors of love. This example, from the collections of Worcester Historical Museum, was hand-made in America in the late 18th century. It features a love knot design.

If you look closely, you can see that the verses are written on the interweaving lines of the knot.
According to local folklore, Worcester’s Esther Howland received an English valentine shortly after graduating from Mount Holyoke College in 1847.

She was so impressed that she made similar valentines for her friends. Recipients liked her cards so much that Esther began to make some to sell in her father’s stationery and bookstore on Main Street.
Working out of the third floor of her family's home on Summer Street, Esther Howland hired young Worcester women to work in assembly line fashion, making cards like this one. Esther’s business proved to be a big success.

Each woman added something different to the card. Background paper, brightly colored paper wafers, gilded lace, and decals imported from Europe were standard features.
Esther Howland’s valentines came in many sizes, colors, and designs. It is said that no two were ever exactly alike.
While it is generally agreed that Esther Howland was the first to make valentines in Worcester, the first commercial maker in America is subject to debate.

According to family folklore, this claim belongs to Jotham Taft of North Grafton. Some even credit him with teaching his friend Esther Howland the art of creating these beautiful valentines.
Esther Howland’s valentine business moved to Main Street in 1874.

In 1879, she joined forces with Jotham Taft’s son Edward to form the New England Valentine Company (NEVCO). They made cards like this.
A feature of these early cards, the use of “springs,” was developed by Esther. Small folded strips of paper--“springs”--hold the top layer above the base for a three-dimensional effect.
Like Esther Howland, Jotham Taft used paper lace, decals, and folded paper “springs.”

This later instruction sheet for making lace valentines shows you how to make your own springs.
By the late 1880s, George Whitney was running the valentine business he and his brothers had opened in Worcester more than a decade earlier.

Whitney eventually bought out ten other American valentine makers, including Jotham Taft's business and the New England Valentine Company.

Esther Howland retired to care for her sick father.
Similar to Howland and Taft valentines, early Whitney cards used colored backgrounds to which a layer of lace and decals was applied.

George C. Whitney Valentine Company, c. 1870
Although this Whitney valentine looks very modern, it still uses all the traditional elements of earlier cards.

Instead of separate layers of background, decals, wafers, and lace, all the layers are machine printed directly onto the paper which is then simply folded to form a card.
In the 20th century, the Whitney Company also made valentine postcards in many different styles.
This card is typical of the type of valentine the Whitney Company was producing by the tens of thousands when the factory closed in 1942.
The United States was not the only nation to manufacture valentines. Some countries and communities produced sentimental valentines similar to the ones made by Worcester’s valentine makers.

Others created elaborately cut and printed cards like this English example from about 1880.
Not only is this small heart beautifully hand-colored, it opens to share multiple verses on both blue and yellow layers.
The fan design was very popular. Notice how the paper is printed and cut to suggest a real feather edge.

Some cards had parts that moved—like the eyes on the cat and bear.
Some valentines did have real feathers!
Like the early handmade love knot, some later printed valentines were puzzles, requiring the recipient to figure out the sender’s message.
This graceful Japanese woman stands up with the support of a cardboard hinge on the back of the card, much like an easel.

Even without hearts, the color pink or any lace, this valentine still has a very romantic look.
This three-dimensional German valentine was made about 1900.

Sent closed (flat), the card opened to be freestanding, to show off its impressive “honeycomb” design.
Early valentines usually had short verses on the inside. Some were printed right on the card; others were pasted in.
Whitney valentines from the 20th century had longer verses and often included illustrations.
Sometimes the verse and design combine to create the message.
Not all valentines were machine made.

The person who made this valentine used ribbons and yarn, a button for the face, wallpaper, magazine cutouts, pencil and paint.

Sailor suits were very popular in 1912.
Not all valentines are red or have hearts. Some are funny and others are very sincere.

How creative can you be?
CAN'T YOU SEE
I'M LOOKING
FOR A
VALENTINE
Enter WORCESTER HISTORICAL MUSEUM’S 42nd “Be Our Valentine” Contest

Create an original valentine in 2020 and celebrate Worcester’s historic valentine-making tradition.

In partnership with WORCESTER PUBLIC LIBRARY and

Open to students in grades 3, 4, 5 and 6 or the equivalent who (a) attend Worcester schools, (b) are the children of members of Worcester Historical Museum, or (c) are holders of an active Worcester Public Library card.
Worcester Historical Museum ♥ Be Ours in 2020

Categories:

V for VERSE. If the valentine is to be judged for the verse, be certain it is very clear and easy to read. Choose V and mark it on the back of the entry.

H for HISTORIC. If the valentine resembles the work of Esther Howland, the Tafts, or the Whitneys, mark it with an H.

C for CONTEMPORARY.
Feature the theme or character(s) from one of your favorite books or stories. Be sure to write the name of the book and the character on the back of your valentine.
and...

M for MASTER. If an entrant has already won in the past, his/her entry must be marked with an M. Entries in this category will be judged separately from the other entries. One winner will be chosen in each of the three categories (Historic, Verse and Contemporary).
ALL ENTRIES MUST BE MADE OF NON-PERISHABLE MATERIALS!

MATERIALS FOR CREATING VALENTINES

• Heavy papers (assorted colors)
• Paper wafers
• Paste/glue sticks
• Lace (paper doilies)
• Paints, markers, crayons
• Scissors
• Decals: stickers, magazine pictures, photographs
• Miscellaneous decorations: beads, rickrack, buttons, feathers, yarn, etc.
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Is your verse original?

If not, be sure to credit the author or the source.
Be creative with your design and verse, but be sure your valentine does not exceed 11” in any direction.
Have you used featured the theme or character(s) from your favorite book or story for your CONTEMPORARY submission?
Most valentine makers “signed” their creations. Early Whitney cards were stamped with a “W.” In the 20th century, printed Whitney cards proudly said they were made in Worcester.

To enter the Museum’s contest, you must “sign” your card with your...

Name
Grade
School, or Worcester Public Library Card number
School Telephone
Home Address
Category: H, V, C, or M
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**R E M E M B E R . . .**

**V** for VERSE. If the valentine is to be judged for the VERSE, put a **V** on the back of the entry.

**H** for HISTORIC. If the valentine resembles the work of Esther Howland, the Tafts, or the Whitneys, mark it with an **H**.

**C** for CONTEMPORARY. If your valentine features your favorite character or story or is non-traditional, put a **C** on the back.

**M** for MASTER. If you have already won this contest in the past, your entry must be marked with an **M**.
The valentine contest is open to children in grades 3, 4, 5, and 6 or the equivalent who either
♥ attend Worcester schools
♥ are children of Museum members, or
♥ hold an active Worcester Public
Library Card
One entry per student
All work must be original
Materials must be non-perishable
Size must not exceed 11”

DEADLINE
All entries must be delivered to
Worcester Historical Museum,
30 Elm Street, by
Friday, January 31, 2020, 4 pm
2020
AWARD CELEBRATION

Monday, February 10
4 pm
(Snow date: Tuesday, February 11)

Fletcher Auditorium
Worcester Historical Museum
30 Elm Street

A party for winners and their families, principals and teachers.

Winners will be contacted at their school not later than Thursday, February 6
Worcester Historical Museum

Be Ours in 2020

Worcester Historical Museum

508-753-8278

www.worcesterhistory.org