



**Left: Victorian Valentine**

**Middle: Box social**

**Right: Old Valentine**



# VALENTINES, One Room Schools & The World's Great Lovers

By Diann Turner

One room schools of the past were filled with fun, frolic and Valentine's revelry. Imagine one large room, wide pine plank flooring, an elevated platform for the teacher's desk and blackboards. The heating source was often a wood stove, in the centre or the corner of the room and was guaranteed inadequate in removing the chill that seeped through the windows on either side. I read one account, where a lady shared, that in 1934 she walked from an unimproved farmhouse with no running water, central heat, or electricity, on a single, sunken dirt lane to a little red schoolhouse.

In February, the trail was sure to be covered with snow with deep, deep drifts. Prior to Valentine's Day, the incentive to get there would be greatly heightened by the forthcoming of the annual Valentine exchange of cards and as older students moved toward maturation, the anticipation of a Box Social. With collywobblers fluttering in their bellies, girls nervously hoped a certain inamorato would purchase the carefully decorated box containing her lunch. Although boxes were anonymous, flirtatious young ladies would drop hints, attempting to manipulate outcomes and avoid undesirable company. Bidding involved teasing, joking, cajoling and a sharp

competitive edge. No doubt there were disappointments and damaged self esteems. Raising money for the school or church was the ulterior motive.

Junetown Public School tales tell of a ten-year-old boy receiving a Valentine from a 12-year-old boy that he never forgot – it was a giant frog that proclaimed, "I Love You!" Glen Elbe school over-flowed with red and white construction paper during art class for a good two weeks. If we did exceptionally well with our creations, we were sometimes given a tiny piece of red tin foil to embellish our art. Paper bags were hung on our desks with our names and hand-made Valentines on the outside sporting little people who had paper springs for legs. Mothers bought paper Valentine books that contained cards we punched out of perforated lines. These Valentine books had little envelopes we fit to the cards. Some of us were lucky enough to get to the Five & Dime Store in Athens to buy five cents worth of red cinnamon hearts. They were scooped out of an enticing-looking glass jar into a little white bag. Toward the end of the 1960's, little candies with words like "Be Mine" printed on them appeared on the market. One year, somebody's mom made cupcakes slathered with pink and white icing, and frosted sugar cookies, loaded with red sprinkles. All of this,

and the big Valentine exchange, created enough fun and laughter to chase away the winter blues and fill our hearts with a happiness that cost our folks nearly nothing. Above all, there was always a special Valentine for the teacher!

Valentine's Day reminds us of romance, love, and hearts full of hopes and dreams. The world has had its share of great lovers in the past – Adam & Eve, Lancelot & Guenevieve, Bonnie & Clyde, Popeye & Olive, Quasimodo & Esmeralda, Alberta & Victoria, Ulysses & Penelope, Romeo & Juliet, Lana & Clark, etc. etc. Marriages that endure and go long distances are sadly decreasing. The demographics of the one room school era seemed to produce a type of stoicism. There are couples around me who married during the 1950's and 1960's; some married 50 years this year, some 65 years. Most of them started out humbly and worked their way up. All of them had children; many had large families. I know for a fact that a few were high school sweethearts, some grade school romances. They all saw their mate as irreplaceable and indispensable. It seems that falling in love is easy; staying in love is elusive. Perhaps the culture will shift back to this one day? The beautiful words of Robert Browning still call out – "Grow old along with me! The best is yet to be..." **LH**