



*Valentine Box Socials were often a tradition in the early one room schools in the area.*



*This card from the Lamb Collection in the Athens Museum is an example of the detailed design and intricacy that went into the crafting of early Valentine cards.*

# RURAL MEMORIES OF VALENTINE'S DAY PAST

By Sally Smid

In this age of cell phone texts and Instagrams it may be a bit refreshing to think back to the days when personal Valentine messages were sent. This winter holiday was celebrated in a variety of home spun ways. Many may even recall their days in a one room school setting when classroom chores included loading wood into the pot belly stove or bringing in water from the outside pump. Detailed Valentine cards were often made creatively by hand with simple materials. Some also reminisce about the times of the "lunch box socials". Each girl in the class would elaborately decorate a special Valentine box that would contain a lunch for two. Each boy would then bid on a box and if purchased would eat lunch with the creator of the box. Of course, there was a lot of mystery and quandary about which girl had made which box. Each boy would often be quite interested in eating lunch with a particular girl or try to avoid purchasing the box made by a girl that they really would not like to join for lunch! It might probably be the girl who had had her pigtail pulled or dipped in the inkwell who was indeed that boy's

choice for a lunch partner. The girl in turn might drop hints to a particular boy whom she might like to have purchase her box after decorating it in an "alluring" fashion. Sometimes the moneys raised went towards funding for particular needs of the rural school.

In those days valentine cards were often made from whatever materials were on hand and some recall that the teacher required each child to be included in the card exchange. It was a great way to have some school fun in the middle of the winter months.

In the early days valentines were often made with intricate lace, ribbon and pearls. In the mid 1800s postcards were customarily sent for every occasion including Easter, St. Patrick's Day, Valentine's Day and more. It was a way to keep in touch at the time and the card always had a special personal update written on the back. Of course, in those days postage was only a few cents.

However, it would seem that the real history of Valentine's Day does not include roses, chocolates or pretty cards. The

holiday seems to date back to the story of a man whose martyrdom may have been the inspiration for the special day. There were reportedly three early Christian saints named Valentine, but the one that sparked the holiday was most likely a Roman priest from the 3rd century A.D. under Emperor Claudius II who made the unpopular law that banned marriage among young people, believing that unmarried soldiers would be better warriors. This priest Valentine, believed marriage was a God-given sacrament, and continued officiating marriages in secret but was eventually found out and imprisoned. The advent of the Valentine card may have come from stories that the jailer's daughter passed him loving notes of encouragement. Others say that she had been healed by him and his final note to her before his execution was signed "From your Valentine".

At the end of the 5th century, Pope Gelasius I declared February 14 to be St. Valentine's Day. Centuries later it is celebrated around the world in an increasingly more commercialized way each year. School children still exchange cards but they are usually more media oriented and the marketers even push more elaborate and costly gifts. Much has changed from the quaint traditions of days gone by, however it seems that Valentine's Day is still an affectionate and bright diversion in the midst of the dark days of winter. **LH**