

Johns Hopkins University Sheridan Libraries

Special Collections Valentines



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FOREWORD

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Giving tokens of love to one's family, friends, and sweethearts (both real and imaginary) have been a hallmark of Valentine's Day since at least the mid-17th century. Messages of love ranging from the sentimental to downright crude proved particularly popular and by the 19th century a burgeoning greeting card industry existed in both England and America producing millions of Valentine's Day cards for those loving souls wishing to partake in Cupid's festivities.

Much like today, the cards people gave to each other in the 19th century would be either store-bought or homemade. For those of you longing to prove that your love is of a fine vintage, we are pleased to share with you historic Valentine's Day cards from our collection.

The first two images are from a lovely valentine created around 1880. The valentine itself is double-sided and is housed in a very delicate lace paper envelope. The valentine contains elements of collage, such as the incorporation of decorative elements like flowers and cherubs. Valentine's Day card kits were launched in America in the late 19th century and they would include all elements needed to create a proper love card, such as suggested verses, a variety of paper lace, and decorations. It is likely that this particular valentine, with its build-up of lace paper and its inclusion of two different love-themed illustrated prints, was made from such a kit.

Next, we have an enchanting novelty known as an origami paper heart. The heart folds out to reveal three different flowers whose petals are all shaped like hearts. Most likely produced in the mid-19th century, the flower petals contain sentimental verses on the ideal characteristics of love from a moral perspective, focusing on faithfulness, charity, and courage. The paper heart includes a ribbon so that the receiver could either affix it to their outfit or hang it somewhere in their home.

Finally, we leave you with images of love and equal franchise! Cupid's mailbag was full of suffrage-themed valentines in the early 20th century. One of the most popular of the suffrage valentines shows a little suffragette proclaiming a boy to be her hero for supporting her right to vote. Cupid, fully understanding the importance of equality and respect in relationships, looks on approvingly!

While our "My Hero" postcard is quite sweet, humor also has its place in valentines, especially when it comes to what, for lack of proper expression, we shall call "derriere humor!" A little boy sits on a bench, but to his embarrassment, he discovers that his derriere is now a billboard for women's suffrage. Who says that comedy, love, and voting rights can combine to create a smashing valentine greeting?

We hope you enjoy these expressions of love that we have put together here, ready to be printed, cut out, and sent to your valentine of choice. To see more examples of the vintage valentines we house in Special Collections, please browse our album: bit.ly/jhuvintagevalentines



To
my own
Valentine.

492108890

Double-Sided Handmade Paper Valentine, ca. 1880.



Double-Sided Handmade Paper Valentine, ca. 1880.

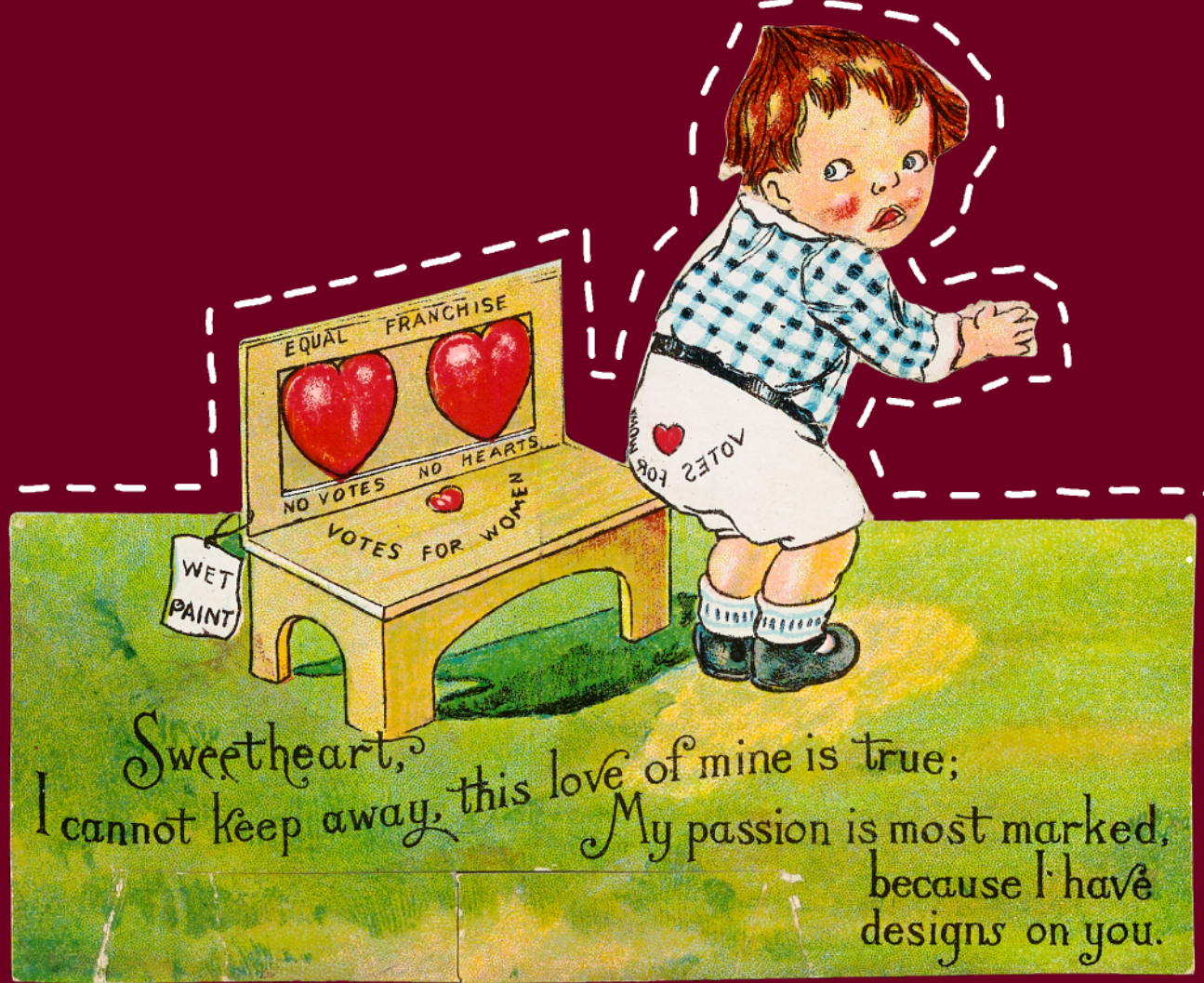


A GOLDEN WISH.

No rubies on the Indian shore
Outshine thy noble mind;
Its radiance far excels them all,
And blesses humankind.

A heart of heavenly purity
Is laid within thy breast;
And ever, for the weary soul,
It breathes some tone of rest.

Heart-Shaped Valentine with Origami Folds and Verse, ca. 1840.



Sweetheart,
I cannot keep away, this love of mine is true;
My passion is most marked,
because I have designs on you.

