EXHIBITION OF VALENTINES
FROM THE COLLECTION OF
MRS. EMMA BLANXIUS HODGE
ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO
FEBRUARY 12 TO FEBRUARY 28
1917
VALENTINES

St. Valentine, called by Charles Lamb the Arch-flamenc
of Hymen, could have no better literary monument
than the observance of Valentine’s day in so late a time
as 1917. The Roman name of this handsome youth
of the Eternal City was Valentinus. The fact that
he belonged to one of the early Christian families in-
vited upon this ambitious and austere young gospelizer,
the rage of Calpurnius, who first imprisoned him, and
then beheaded him. This dire event occurred on the
Flaminian Way in an early year in the third century.
Just how St. Valentine, whose name thus came to be on
the roll-call of the Saints, became also associated with
what has been held to be the revival of the Roman Lup-
percia, we must find in the account given in the words
of Mistress Diana Mason in the introduction to Kem-
mish’s Annual for 1797.

“I have by me a very old Book, which has the fol-
lowing Account of Valentine being confined at Rome on
account of his Religion, and committed to the care of a
Man whose daughter was blind, whom Valentine restored
to Sight, and from that Time the Girl became enamored
of him, nor did he treat her Affection with Contempt.
But after a long imprisonment he was ordered for Pub-
llick Execution on the 14th of February. While in Prison
being deprived of Books, he used to amuse himself with
cutting curious Devices in Paper, on one of which he
wrote some pious Exhortations and Assurances of
Love, and sent to the Keeper’s Daughter the Morning
of Execution; and being concluded in the Words, “Your
Valentine,” there is great reason for supposing that to be
the origin of the present Custom.”

One of the interesting books offered to the student
in connection with the present collection of American
Valentines is “The Circle of Venus” and another “Cu-
pid’s Annual Charter” and “New Gentlemen’s Valentine
Writer.” These are of the same fountain-like service-
bleness to the rtaker of valentines, as the book from which this quotation is made. These books were veri-
table cisterns of verse such as this method of lovenmak-
ing required, without being fountains of poetry.

Perhaps Mr. Frank House Fair of Cleveland has the
largest collection of these alluring missives of love which
has been gathered in America, and in order that these
endearing manifestos shall have something to match
their dainty service in the history of the human heart,
be turns us to the Ceremonial of "Valentine Choosing;
of whose ritual Mission, the 17th century traveler gives
this account:

"An equal number of maids and bachelors indite their
names upon separate billets, which they roll up, and draw
by way of lots, the maids taking the men's billets and the
men the maids'; so that each of the young men lights
upon a girl that he calls his valentine, and each of the
girls upon a young man whom she calls hers. By this
means each has two valentines; but the man sticks faster
to the valentine that has fallen to him than to the valen-
tine to whom he has fallen. Fortune having thus divided
the company into so many couples, the valentines give
balls and treats to their mistresses, wear their billets
several days upon their bosoms or sleeves, and this little
sport often ends in love."

But the valentine itself has had no more distinguished
associations than the love which has sent it from the
lowliest hut to the loftiest palace of the world.

Mr. Drakey says in his article on "A Queen's Valen-
tines": "Among the many mementoes of the marriage
of the Queen Victoria to his Royal Highness, Prince
Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, February 10, 1840, per-
haps the least remembered is the series of valentines
issued in England at that time. This was before fancy
valentines were placed in the list of American products.
The few specimens seen in this country were imported
from England, for valentines are distinctively of English
origin, and the manufacturers in that country enjoyed a monopoly for years.

"Their sale, both in Great Britain and the United States, was comparatively small because of their high price and the high cost of postage. Those were the days before postage stamps, and the postal tariff as considered in the light of the present rates, was quite exorbitant, it being regulated on a basis of the distance. The cost of sending one sheet of paper not exceeding 30 miles was 6 cents; over 30, and not exceeding 80 miles, 10 cents; over 80, and not exceeding 150 miles, 12½ cents; over 150, and not exceeding 400 miles, 18½ cents (the value in Boston of a Spanish real); over 400 miles, 25 cents. Two sheets cost twice as much, three sheets three times as much, and so on.

The present collection has to show a set of charming love tokens with other supreme examples of the history of the valentine. The great names of the artists who gave a certain dignity as well as beauty to what have been called these "naive, over-decorated, human documents" were: George Kershaw, of London; Charles Lloyd; A. Park; 47 Leonard St., London; Dodds, Gilka, Marks, Peck and W. Evans, of London.

But as Mr. Bruley tells us: "It was left to Miss Esther Howland of Worcester, Mass., to introduce the printed verses. This bright young lady was the first to manufacture valentines in this country. A year or two after she began business the English firm from whom she bought lace papers sent her a set of six valentines they had issued in commemoration of the marriage of the young Queen of England to her cousin. They depict various royal residences, some of them the favorite abodes of the Queen and her consort. The pictures are made from sheets of cork stamped in bas-relief, the foliage being represented by pulverized cork. The whole is then painted with oil colors, giving them a quaint, if not pretty effect. The cards bearing the cork picture
are glued to perforated sheets of various designs with gilt decorations.

"The writer is unable to identify all the scenes represented by the valentines, but Windsor Castle, Balmoral, and the Tower of London are easily recognized. Perhaps one or two represent the ancestral home of the Prince Consort, and the cottage may have figured in the royal romance."

The central and altogether most important portion of the present exhibition is constituted by the specimens of Esther Howland's work. The Queen Victoria and Prince Albert Valentines are of her own collection, and there is exhibited here, the work box, the first valentine which she saw and which inspired her to this interesting career, and the first valentine in which she herself wrought with illuminating care, her tender lines and elegant patch work.

The following account was taken from "The Record" dated February 13, 1908:

"Although college girls are supposed to sniff at Cupid and statistics show that the devotees of higher education make marriage a side issue, it was a college girl who invented the first American valentine.

She was Esther A. Howland, a Mount Holyoke girl, who was graduated in 1847. Yet at that time she possessed the modern college spirit of enterprise and energy, for she not only made a fortune for herself, but established a new industry in this country.

It was two years after her graduation, and when she was back in her home in Worcester, Mass., that Miss Howland conceived the idea of the American valentine. The earlier valentines to come to this country from England fell into her hands in 1849.

It had an elaborate border of fine lace paper and was decorated with colored flowers cut out and pasted on. In the center was a small pocket, containing a tiny red edged note, which bore a tender love message."
Miss Howland's father, who was a stationer, imported a few of these valentines. His daughter, on seeing them, felt she could improve on them, so she manufactured two out of lace paper, colored paper and paper flowers. Even the scoffers had to admit that they outclassed those of English manufacture, and she was encouraged to make a dozen more.

She induced her brother, who traveled for her father, to take the samples with him.

On his return he handed her orders amounting to five thousand dollars. She was aghast. She had hoped for orders representing one hundred dollars, but five thousand meant work enough to keep her busy for several years. She was in a quandary until she thought of asking her friends to help her. They consented willingly.

Embossed paper was ordered from England and colored pictures from New York, from the only lithographer in this country. One friend cut out the pictures and kept them assorted in boxes.

Another, with models before her, made the background of the valentine, passing it to still another, who put on the adornments. Thus it went from hand to hand, each one elaborating it a little more, until it was finally turned out a thing of more or less coquetry and beauty. At last the big order was completed.

The next year Miss Howland looked for novelties and gave her brother a still larger assortment of samples when he started on his trip. Many of these were quite costly, and among them was the first message of Cupid in satin or silk.

The second year the orders were so numerous that it was necessary to double the working force. Miss Howland soon found herself with a valentine factory on her hands. She began to import colored pictures and other ornaments from Germany, but as it was a tedious process to cut these out by hand, she had a set of dies made to shorten the process.
She next conceived the idea of embossing the little lithograph ornaments and wrote to the firm in Germany, outlining her plan and proposing to have the cutting and embossing dies made and sent to it at its expense. It declined Miss Howland's offer, however, and speedily had dies made in its own country.

The American valentine, or the Worcester valentine, as it was known, rapidly gained a reputation all over the country, and the business increased so much that in a few years Miss Howland was sending out one hundred thousand dollars' worth of goods.

But the Mount Holyoke girls do not forget that it was a graduate from their Alma Mater who was responsible for the American valentine, and every year, on February 14, they toast the name of Esther Howland.

The following is a partial list of the contents of the original work box of Esther Howland in this exhibition:

1 VALENTINE
   Sent Miss Esther Howland from England which gave her the idea of making valentines in her own country

2 PRESENTATION OF THE FIRST VALENTINE MADE IN AMERICA
   16th Feb, 1849
   "The most perfect happiness earth can afford is to be found in the union of two fond hearts: it enhances every joy and is a balm for every sorrow. 'Tis the portion of the Angels, and by its aid we may make a Heaven on Earth.
   To share this Heaven with you is the earnest wish of
   Your devoted Valentine"

3 VALENTINE
   Interesting from its folding

4 MISS HOWLAND'S HOME
5 MANUSCRIPT VALENTINE—1852

6 MANUSCRIPT VALENTINE—1853

7 ENVELOPE VALENTINE
   Addressed Miss Esther Howland, Bridgewater

8 VALENTINE
   Dated February 14, 1851, and bearing a poem titled “Generosity”

9 VALENTINE
   Dated February 14, 1853.

10 VALENTINE
   Dated February 14, 1853. Presented by Mrs. William I. Marshall of Chicago. Given to her by her husband in 1855, February, when she was eleven years of age and he was fourteen.

11 ESTHER HOWLAND'S VALENTINE

12 MANUSCRIPT VALENTINE

13 ESTHER HOWLAND'S VALENTINE
   Showing envelope. The interesting part of this valentine is the cancelled stamp on it

14 THIS VALENTINE IS A MATCH FOR No. 8

15 MISS ESTHER HOWLAND'S VALENTINE

16 MISS ESTHER HOWLAND'S VALENTINE
VALENTINE; MANUSCRIPT VERSE

"Each and every care dispelling
    Smoothly onward may you move
Till Life's changing scenes all over
    Heaven opes in beauty to thy view.
Ever there your all to join
    Round the Eternal throne."

VALENTINE; MANUSCRIPT VERSE

"By day or night in weal or woe
That heart no longer free
Must bear the love it cannot shew
And silent ache for thee."

VALENTINE; MANUSCRIPT VERSE

Titled "My heart a music box"

VALENTINE; MANUSCRIPT VERSE

"Forget-me-not, my love, my heart
For thou art all to me
Thinkest charmed me by some magic art,
    To live or die for thee?"

VALENTINE

Interesting part of this is the cancelled stamped envelope

VALENTINE

Manuscript verse, titled, "My aim is your heart"

ONE OF MISS HOWLAND'S ENVELOPES

ESTHER HOWLAND'S VALENTINE

Written by herself.
27 Esther Howland's Valentine

28 Esther Howland's Valentine
Little missive inside with date 1851

29 Esther Howland's Valentine

30 Esther Howland's Valentine
On Japanese paper

31 Esther Howland's Valentine
With the original box

32 Esther Howland's Work Box

33 Set of Valentines
Given to Miss Esther Howland by the firm from whom she bought her materials after she had been in business two or three years. They represent love tokens issued in honor of the marriage of Queen Victoria and His Royal Highness Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, February 10, 1840.

34 Large Valentine and Envelope
Circular vignette