

Finding Treasures

There's always a market out there for classic Valentine uses.

Fred Schmitt



Valentine mail is probably among the most ephemeral ("File this in the nearest receptacle—it's from that guy I once knew who keeps calling me!") of all mails—much of it being tossed out and the small handful that are kept are retained as keepsakes because they were sent to true loved ones who would cherish them on into the future years.

Much of the Valentine mail from the past 60 or 70 years is pretty worthless as philatelic material goes. Some people like to keep first day covers of the various "Love" stamps, but by and large, there simply isn't much postal history in the Valentine mail from much of the 20th century—very few things standing out at all (the above naval cover is an exception).

The big exception to this rule of Valentines being on the cheap side of the

marketplace are the colorful, often lushly artistic, Valentines and the envelopes (covers) they came in from the 19th century and on into the early two decades of the 20th. With the exception of the neat little naval cover, all items shown here are from that era.

Even before postage stamps were used to carry the mails, love was a key theme among correspondents pretty much as far back as the mails go. One can imagine a nobleman in Elizabethan England sealing his love letter with red wax and giving it to a carrier on horseback to convey it to the love of his life.

In the mid-19th century, Valentines in the United States began to be created by sophisticated printers and envelope makers. Covers were often embossed with carefully-engraved scenes of flowers and cupids—and the Valentines, themselves, took advantage of new printing methods

that allowed techniques like six-color lithography. One can acquire Valentines franked with any of the early U.S. stamps and sometimes the stamps were affixed to their envelopes upside down which, I hear, is a form of secretly conveying one's love for the recipient.

In any case, I have found that Valentines carefully preserved with (and in) their original envelopes are highly sought after. There's even a National Valentine Collectors Association (see the article by its president, Nancy Rosin, on page 24) that places high emphasis on Valentines as they relate to American postal history.

In essence, if you ever see any early Valentine in its original cover at a price less than \$100—take a second look. Many of these little treasures are truly good investments. And some of them, actually, are quite rare! ☒