



Here's an excerpt from: "Tall Tales and World History"

Valentine's Day is near! So, what can we learn about the holiday's match-making mascot?

Cupid

The arrow-shooting Valentine's Day mascot



A Fun Fact

When he was in his early twenties, legendary artist Michelangelo made a sculpture of Cupid, then tried to pass it off as an ancient work of art.

The Holiday Tradition...

Cupid is a strange fellow. Wearing only a loincloth and a pair of wings, he flies around with a bow and a handful of arrows. When he's so inclined, he'll shoot an unsuspecting victim, causing him or her to be overcome by love.

In one sense, Cupid is the good guy, spreading around the gift of love, and helping to arrange millions of happy marriages through the year. On the other hand, he's a trickster, tempting people with lust and debauchery.

Apparently, Cupid must do more good than he does harm. We honor him, after all, every February 14th on Valentine's Day. That's the day everyone celebrates love and romance. The holiday was originally in honor of Saint Valentine, but Cupid has become sort of the mascot. It's his image that you see on hundreds of Valentine greeting cards lined up in neat rows at the shopping mall.

Since Cupid is responsible for everyone falling in love, it shouldn't be a surprise to learn that he was around long before there was a Valentine's Day. When the holiday was born, however, it just became obvious that he should be a part of it.

What it tells us about World History...

Valentine's Day is actually a pretty serious holiday. The story begins in Rome around the 3rd century. That's when Christianity was just starting to make an appearance, and Rome was starting to show signs of crumbling.

It's difficult to believe, but the Romans of that era were beginning to enjoy life a little *too* much. The daily routine of the average Roman citizen was full of corruption and excess. This sharply contrasted with the discipline and order that helped make the nation an Empire.

As a Christian, Valentine didn't partake in such a rebellious life. For example, many Roman men at the time preferred to socialize with many girls rather than marry just one. Valentine did not. The worst offense was a festival known as Lupercalia, in which girls were literally won in a "lottery."

Along with the other Christians of the time, Valentine was pressured to abandon his faith and worship the Pagan Gods. There are numerous legends about the actions of Valentine, but what is known for sure is that he stood by his beliefs. Valentine remained a Christian, despite the stress it carried.

At the end of the 5th century, over 200 years after his death, a feast was declared in honor of Saint Valentine.

The feast became a celebration of the "good" side of love, which brings with it marriage, commitment, and security – all of the things Saint Valentine stood for.

As a part of Roman Mythology, Cupid became a natural part of this celebration. He was the son of the God of Love, whose name was Venus. The Greek name for Cupid was Eros, and his mother was named Aphrodite. While Cupid had his wicked side, he also helped (*and helps*) many happy couples fall in love.

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