

Monthly Report

Each February the Postal Service aids the cause of love and lovers by delivering millions of Valentines and love letters. In 1973 a "LOVE" stamp was issued. And there are many around who can still recall the childhood joys of a kissing game called "post office."

But there was a time when some postal workers apparently didn't care much for the exchange of Valentine greetings, according to "Notes from the Diary of a Special Agent of the Post Office Department," published in Philadelphia in 1874.

"We must utterly protest," wrote the Special Agent, "against the custom which has obtained of late years, making him (St. Valentine) the tutelary Saint of silly lovers, mean mischief-makers, and vulgar letter-writers generally."

He described Valentines as "the offspring of weak sentimentalism of foolish buffoonery; an encumbrance to the mails, an annoyance to those who receive them, a tax to all parties and a temptation to post office clerks..."

Today's Postal Service doesn't share that view. Later this month, from February 24 through March 1, the Postal Service, with the cooperation of the National Council of Teachers of English and numerous other organizations, will sponsor a National Letter Writing Week. It considers Valentine cards and love letters a most desirable category of correspondence.

Men and women of letters have long had difficulty agreeing on a definition for love. Webster's Seventh College Dictionary uses 150 words in an effort to define it.

And, according to Bartlett's Familiar Quotations, love has been described as being "like the measles," "like a red, red rose," "the lord and slave of all," "a sickness," and "something so divine."

A love letter is about as personal a document as anyone can write or receive and most of those recorded for posterity tend to be lengthy.

It was a musician, however, who was able to distill an ocean of emotion into a few singing lines. Robert Schumann, the composer, wrote to Clara Wieck in 1838, "What a heavenly morning! All the bells are ringing; the sky is so golden and blue and clear—and before me lies your letter. I send you my first kiss, beloved."

His "beloved" later became his wife.

And one of the briefest and most direct exchanges of love letter in history occurred between Prince de Joinville of France and the celebrated 19th Century actress, Rachel (Elisa Felix). Having seen her perform, the prince wrote to her: "Where? When? How much?" The actress replied: "Your place. Tonight. Free."

Today's frustrated lovers seek advice and solace through letters to "advice to the lovelorn" columns in numerous newspapers. Some even go farther than that.

Shakespeare's fictional 16th Century heroine, Juliet Capulet, whose romance with Romeo Montague ended in tragedy, today receives 400 to 500 letters a month, addressed to her in Verona, Italy, the scene of the Shakespeare play.

Most of the letters seek her advice on matters of love, and all of them, according to the Smithsonian magazine, get replies — from a university student who has assumed the unpaid, unofficial job of "secretary to Juliet."

"When I sit down at my desk to answer the letters, I feel useful to someone," the surrogate Juliet says.

George Jean Nathan, the late drama critic and writer, also had praise for love letters.

"The public," he wrote, "will always give up its right to read love letters."



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NORTHSIDE SHOPPING CENTER
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