



# Jewelry at Valentine's Day

by Patricia Kelleher Bartram

Every February 14<sup>th</sup> we celebrate Valentine's Day, also known as Saint Valentine's Day or the Feast of Saint Valentine. A 3<sup>rd</sup> Century Roman priest, Saint Valentine is considered the patron saint of love, young people and happy marriages because, as the story goes, he continued to perform marriages after the Roman emperor at the time, Claudius II (or Claudius the Cruel) banned all marriages and engagements. Claudius took this drastic action in answer to his difficulty in getting soldiers to join his army, thinking their unwillingness to enlist was because of their strong attachments to their wives and families. Valentine's defiant response to the emperor's unjust decree was to keep marrying couples in love – just in secret.

For his trouble, Valentine was found out, and condemned to be beaten to death with clubs plus have his head cut off. His sentence was carried out on the 14<sup>th</sup> of February in 270 A.D.

## Demonstrating One's Love

How did the feast day of this Christian martyr become, centuries later, the celebration of love we know today? It took many centuries. Much closer to the present day it became very fashionable and a widespread phenomenon in the 1700s for lovers to exchange letters (*e.g.*, Napoleon wrote to Joséphine de Beauharnais of his great love for her in 1796). Letters were replaced, thanks to the



**Valentine Card**  
BHSM Archive Collection

innovations of the Industrial Revolution of the mid-1800s, by machine-produced Valentine's Day cards. The Victorians believed in specific meanings behind each type of flower and so began also to give flowers as tokens of love. The mass manufacture of chocolates became possible due to machines that enabled cocoa to be pressed and thus made into chocolates. Beginning with the ancient Aztecs, chocolate was believed to be an aphrodisiac, thought to inflame desire and make the beloved one more open to romance – the latter is why chocolates ultimately became a popular gift for Valentine's

## Gifts of Jewelry

More to the point, how did jewelry become one of the most popular gifts for Valentine's Day? Metal work advances stemming from the mid-1800s improved the design and making of jewelry, thus increasingly enhancing its quality and manufacture. This made it more affordable and accessible to the middle classes. Ultimately, major department stores (including Woolworth's) began working with jewelry designers to position jewelry as the perfect gift, one that could be extended beyond the traditional gift-giving Christmas season. Flowers wilt, chocolate candies get eaten, but ever-lasting jewelry became the perfect way to show one's love – for Valentine's Day.



**Jewelry Box**  
Padded Floral Design  
BHSM Collection

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the jewelry company De Beers began a marketing campaign designed to equate giving diamonds with the act of love. By the 1980s, diamonds for Valentine's Day gained a prevalence that continues to this day. (Many diamonds are given as engagement rings on Valentine's Day.)

## Jewelry Box in BHSM Collections

While unlikely that most Boylstonian women who were wives of Boylston's farmers and light manufacturers in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries became the owners of important, expensive jewels, they certainly had jewelry that they wore and treasured. These women were likely more interested in storing their jewelry in places that would keep it separate, secure and safe from tarnish or damage.

While we don't know if her jewelry resulted from Valentine's Day gifts, among those who did own jewelry was Marian Ethel (Brigham) Newell (1896-1982). Marian Ethel Brigham was born at home at 261 Main Street, Medford, Middlesex County, Massachusetts, where her father, Herbert Augustus Brigham (1869-1956), was working as a brewer's agent. Her father was a native of Boylston, however, and the family moved back to Boylston by the time of the 1900 federal census. Marian grew up there on the family farm on Green Street, later married Wilbur Kehoe Newell (1893-1970) with whom she had three daughters, and spent the rest of her life in Boylston. In later life, the Newell's lived on Main Street. Marian died in 1982 and was buried alongside her husband, who predeceased her in 1970, in Boylston's Pine Grove Cemetery.

Mrs. Newell, the widow of Wilbur Kehoe Newell, had in 1976 donated this jewelry box to the collections of the Boylston Historical Society and Museum (BHSM). It is round with a diameter of 12 inches and stands three inches in height. Its cover overhangs its edges to make it easy to lift to open and it is covered in a green and pink-flowered fabric. The inside is sectioned off to enable the owner to organize her jewelry by size and style.



**Internal Jewelry Box  
Compartments**  
*BHSM Collection*



**Hat Pins, Button Hooks  
and Glove Hooks kept in Jewelry Box**  
*BHSM Collection*

Mrs. Newell obviously used it for other things, as well, as it still holds several hat pins (including a fancy one topped with black beading) and a button hook. Part of one's toilette, button hooks were used to help one button shoes, gloves or other clothing. The need for button hooks faded as button-up shoes became less popular during World War I, and the button hook became relatively obscure by the 1930s, however jewelry boxes, jewelry, candy, flowers, and special dinners together continue to remain in fashion for our loved ones on Valentine's Day.

### *Acknowledgements:*

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