

Medieval Valentine's Day Traditions

During the Middle Ages, Valentine's day was quite a festive event. Parties were thrown that including so called love-lanterns made out of hollowed-out turnips. There, young men and women would draw names from a bowl to see who their Valentine would be. They would then wear these names on their sleeves for one week. The phrase to "wear your heart on your sleeve" is derived from this custom.

In France, during the 1400s a society known as the "Court of Love" was established as a distraction from a particularly nasty bout of plague. Each February 14th they were to meet at a banquet that included dancing, sing and jousting. Male guest were required to bring a love song of their own composition that would be judged by an all-female panel. This panel would also hear and rule on disputes of lovers.

Did you know before chocolates, people use to give there special someone a quail's egg on Valentine's Day? A popular European folk belief during medieval times, was that February 14th was the day on which all birds chose their mates for the year.

Another folk tradition believed that the first bird a woman saw on Valentine's Day would predict the character of her future love. Valentine's Day food reflected this idea and included foods they felt enhanced fertility such as apples and pears, and pheasant and quail eggs. To receive a quail's egg on Valentine's Day was consider the height of romance!

Medieval "love potions" were also quite common and included ingredients that were thought to influence the body's humors, including garlic, onions, dill, mandrake, musk, myrtle and even sparrow hawks. A 16th century potion even included earthworms and leeks squashed together! It was believed that those that consumed such elixirs would either find love or strengthen the love they already have.

