HAPPY VALENTINES DAY

from the Alice!

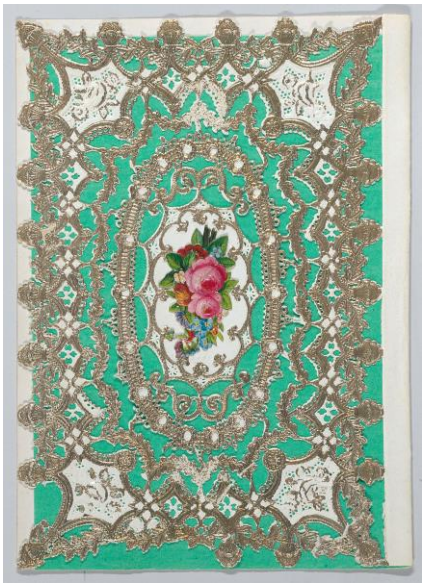
February 2021

People have exchanged letters, poems and other gifts to celebrate love on Valentine's Day for hundreds of years, but mass-produced paper Valentines originated in England in the early 1800s and crossed over to the United States, where they became popular in the late 1840s and 1850s. In 1847, a young woman named Esther Howland started the first major Valentine-card business in the US in Worcester, MA—meaning some of the first producers of Valentines on a large scale were the other girls and women she employed to make cards with her.

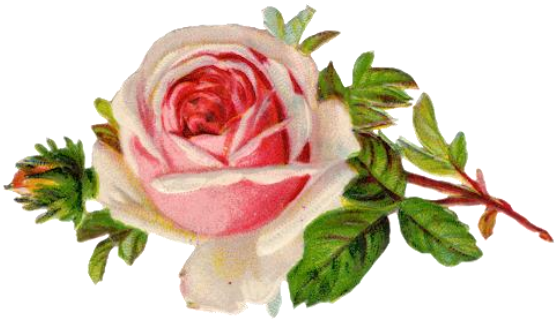
By the second half of the 1800s, consumers could buy simple color-printed Valentine's cards—and even jokey, critical or downright rude cards and verses known as “Vinegar Valentines”—very affordably to send to friends and loved ones. The introduction of cheap and regular mail service in both Britain and the US also helped popularize the sending of cards.

However, many nineteenth-century Valentines were elaborate, complicated constructions—much like Esther Howland's originals—where pictures were decoupaged onto cards along with colored paper, lace, foil, ribbons, pressed flowers, and even small mirrors, coins or seashells. These ornate Valentine cards could be purchased from stationers who would often sell batches of supplies as well so that buyers could craft their own personalized cards at home.

The following pages have an assortment of Victorian-style romantic images to print and cut out for use on your own Valentine creations. Assemble the perfect design on plain paper and add your message—or gather up any doilies, glitter, ribbons and other supplies you think might make your Valentine stand out. (If you made any pressed flowers with our summer camp kit this year, this could be an excellent way to use them!)



(Embedded images from the collection of Valentines in the Metropolitan Museum of New York Drawings & Prints Department)



From a
fond heart

To my
Valentine

The face of
one behold
Who loves thee more than gold

To One I love.

A Gift of Love