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### RANDOM THOUGHTS: We weren't always so romantic

By Dorothy Brush / [dcb1@frontier.net](mailto:dcb1@frontier.net)

Today romance reigns supreme. It didn't start that way. Eons ago early Romans threw a big rowdy festival every February. Fertility was accented at this feast of Lupercalia. As the Christian church gained influence the leaders looked for a way to counter the pagan festival.

In the third century a priest handed them the answer. Emperor Claudius II banned marriage for soldiers but this priest Valentine defied the order and secretly married soldiers and their sweethearts. He was caught and on February 14 was beheaded. The church made that date St. Valentine's Day honoring the friend of lovers and lessened the appeal of the Lupercalia festival.

Many gestures of love were added to the day over the centuries. Once young suitors gave gloves to their love which meant, "My heart is in your hands." Sailors, during long voyages decorated scrimshaw with carvings of hearts, flowers and doves to give their loved one on their return. In Wales, wooden love spoons were carved with hearts, keys and keyholes signifying to the beloved they held the key to the giver's heart. Though they lived in the prim and proper Victorian age they had romance in their souls.

The Romans left their mark on the day because their god of love Cupid was a popular symbol. In the years after 1908, over 50 million copies of the pictures "Cupid Awake" and "Cupid Asleep" were sold. They were favorite valentine gifts and were placed in metal frames produced by the Ohio Art Co. of Bryan, OH. Today that company is the maker of Etch-a-Sketch.

The very first valentine appeared in 1415. It was a heart-shaped love letter sent from the Tower of London by the Duke of Orleans, held prisoner there. As a member of royalty he was a pampered prisoner, which was nice since he was held there for a long 45 years.

Deep in the heart of Texas there is a library built as a tribute to a flesh and blood valentine couple, Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Located on the Baylor University campus in Waco, it houses a wonderful collection of Browning materials from their estate as well as all their literary works.

The Armstrong Browning Library was a dream of Dr. A.J. Armstrong, professor of English literature at Baylor from 1912 to 1952. Very early in his life Armstrong began collecting Browning memorabilia. Later he visited their estate in Italy and became friends with the Brownings' only child, a son Pen, who lived there.

This son was a sculptor and artist but he died without a will. Eventually all the Browning possessions were offered at a six-day auction at Sotheby's in London. For the next 34 years Armstrong raised funds to build a repository to hold as many of those possessions as he could buy or have donated to such a place.

In May 1948, ground was broken for the library of his dreams and it was dedicated in December 1951. This "library of love" is filled with light filtered through 56 rich blue stained glass windows. All have hand painted scenes of Italian gardens. In the entrance foyer phrases from familiar poems are carved in the marble. "How do I love thee? Let me count the ways," is there and "Grow old along with me. The best is yet to be." Here the famous couple's love lives on forever.

*Dorothy Copus Brush is a Fairfield Glade resident and Crossville Chronicle staffwriter whose column is published each Wednesday. She may be reached at [dcb1@frontier.net](mailto:dcb1@frontier.net).*



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