

There's no doubt about it. Valentine's Day is one of America's most ____ (1) ____ (2). More than 62% of Americans celebrate by sending greeting cards and ____ (3), giving ____ (4) or other gifts, enjoying ____ (5) ____ (6), or all three.

But the history behind Valentine's Day turns out to be somewhat surprising. For example, the roots of Valentine's Day go all the way back to a raucous ancient Roman ____ (7) ____ (8) held in mid-February called Lupercalia. Later, the Christian church chose mid-February for Saint Valentine's Day in order to ____ (9) ____ (10) ____ (11).

But who was Saint Valentine? Not much is known about the holiday's namesake. First of all, there was more than just one Christian ____ (12) named Valentine. One of them was sentenced to death for performing ____ (13) ____ (14) in secret after Emperor Claudius II banned marriage for ____ (15) Roman ____ (16), thinking single men made better ____ (17).

Pope Gelasius declared February 14 as a day for honoring the ____ (18) Valentine at the end of the 5th century. It wasn't until the 1300s, though, that the holiday became definitively associated with ____ (19) and ____ (20). Back then, people believed that February 14 was also the beginning of ____ (21) mating season.

The first written ____ (22) ____ (23) appeared in the 15th century, and by the 17th century, people in Great Britain had begun a tradition of exchanging Valentine's Day cards or ____ (24). Valentine's Day soon caught on in the U.S. as well.

The first mass-produced holiday cards emerged in the ____ (25), and Valentine's Day soon exploded into a major consumer ____ (26). Today, an estimated ____ (27) ____ (28) Valentine cards are sent each year, more than on any other holiday except for Christmas. More than 35 million ____ (29) ____ (30) ____ (31) ____ (32) are sold, and more than 220 million ____ (33) are produced for the holiday in a typical year.

Altogether, Americans spend almost ____ (34) ____ (35) ____ (36) on Valentine's Day, or an average of some \$130 per person per year. While the most popular gifts were ____ (37) and ____ (38), nearly 20 percent of Americans splurge on ____ (39), shelling out as much as \$4 billion annually.

And those who prefer the ultimate romantic gesture are definitely not alone. A recent survey revealed that as many as six million ____ (40) are likely to ____ (41) ____ (42) on February 14th, continuing a long romantic history that we bet you didn't know.