

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.