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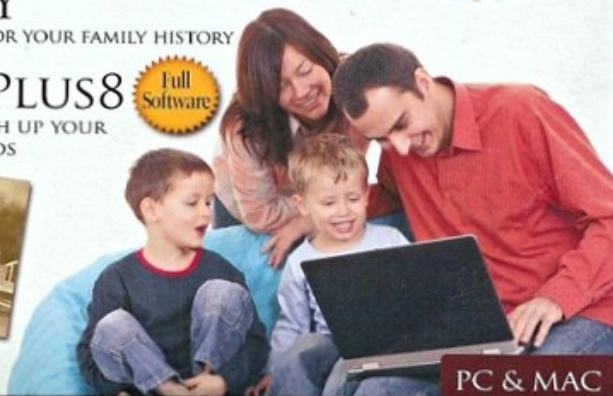


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The Collector in Everyone

With the support of an encouraging husband, **Nancy Claire Peikin Rosin** became a passionate collector of mementos and ephemera; treasures and clues to the past and to important moments in lives gone by.

I have neither family heirlooms, nor knowledge about my distant relatives. There is neither a family tree, nor a family coat of arms. Arriving in America from Eastern Europe, among the wave of late 19th century immigrants, my ancestors carried only the weight of their dreams. The past was meant to have been forgotten, as they looked forward to a new life. I am the saver. I honour them by gathering the heritage of their dreams, and recording it for future generations. Hopefully, the family memorabilia I've assembled will be a resource for my children and grandchildren, as we cherish the moments, proudly create our scrapbooks, and take the time to record our genealogy.

Celebrations of life

I became a passionate collector of antique Valentines. During the process, I evolved. I don't collect 'things' as much as I collect stories, personal histories, and the 'missing pieces' of my puzzle: the ways in which people have celebrated the important moments in their lives. The absence of my own personal family history provided greater incentive to save the treasures I found. I became an archivist, researcher, and lover of *all* the old relics. Items made by hand, or by machine, in every period, in every social stratum – all acquired historic relevance as vital components of the historic social documentary I was developing. No longer disparate, fulfilling

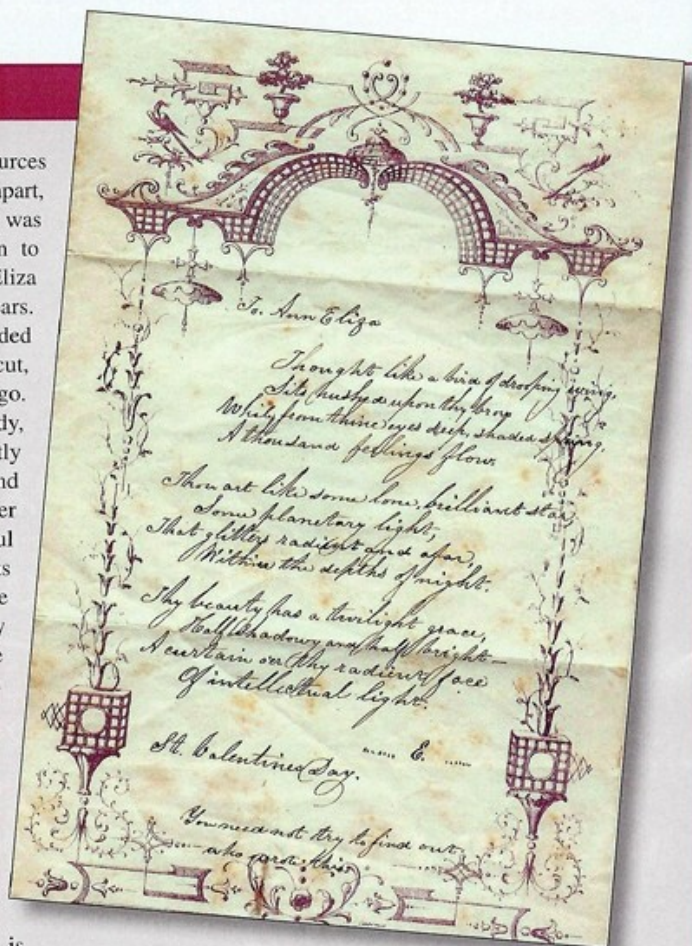
**There is neither a family tree,
nor a family coat of arms.
Arriving in America from
Eastern Europe, my ancestors
carried only the weight of their
dreams.**

Keepsakes

Assembled from sources thousands of miles apart, a group of material was sent by the same man to his beloved, Ann Eliza Bigelow, over the years. Ann Eliza Bigelow resided in Hartford, Connecticut, a century and a half ago. A popular young lady, and apparently greatly admired, she received and cherished the five tender treasures, wonderful examples of paper gifts of the era. Delicate stationery, ornately lithographed with the designs of an elaborate garden arbor, is folded twice, addressed on the back page, and hand delivered to Eliza's home on Main Street. Poetry has been beautifully penned, and the letter, dated, 'St Valentine's Day' is

curiously signed, simply with one initial, but with the notation: 'You need not try to find out who wrote this.' It was apparently a beloved keepsake, for it had been saved – but *who* was the mysterious sender?

Kept pristine, this letter, and four others, create a fascinating archive – a window into a life at that time – with emotions so similar to our own. One day, I hope a family sleuth will connect Ann Eliza's genealogy to theirs, and fulfil my charge!



This ornate Valentine, from an unknown sender, signed simply 'E', as it was, and still is, the custom to send them anonymously!

**It was apparently a beloved
keepsake, for it had been saved
– but who was the mysterious
sender?**

their bleak ephemeral destiny, I read new life into these paper treasures, and every one played an important role. The word, *ephemera*, assumed new meaning, as I now felt it was all meant to be saved!

Tokens of love

As new items were acquired for research and projects, I found myself immersed in a category I had unknowingly created, *the ephemera of love*. Peripheral mementos celebrating, birth, romance, marriage, and even mourning, added another dimension, and made it cohesive. As a curator of cherished love tokens, I have touched their hearts as well as their fingerprints, and feel the obligation to preserve them, forever. To discover that I might be part of a genealogical excursion is thrilling, as postmarks, addresses, penmanship, and names establish connecting links and add opportunities for exploration, helped by today's comprehensive internet search resources. Despite the fact that these documents, recording life's momentous occasions, do not emanate from just one family, they effectively create a time line, our shared heritage.

Occasionally, items may signify a special relationship, such as a lock of hair, carefully woven into an endless knot of love, tiny paper gloves, suggestive of betrothal, or even a golden paper wedding band – symbolizing a sincere offer of marriage. A cryptic message might incorporate the poetic 'language of flowers', enabling a secret to be sent wordlessly in an era of strict etiquette and socially proper decorum.

A collector's dream

Perhaps, once in a lifetime, *magic* happens to a collector. Such was the serendipity of finding the papercut Valentines of Elizabeth Cobbold. The experience brought together all the best – the excitement of discovery, new friends, and new

Clues to the past

Colonel Robert Cross sat for his photograph at a studio in Troy, New York, just prior to leaving for the Civil War. Like so many other soldiers, the image was presumed to be a lasting memory, in case he failed to return. Fitted into a most elaborate, silvered paper-lace page, it was a costly parting gift. It is presumed to have been created by the American entrepreneur, Esther Howland, as it bears her characteristics. Happily, Colonel Cross *did* return from the war – even from the ravages of the famed Battle of Bull Run. When I acquired this Valentine, an accompanying folder contained a treasure-trove: copies of his military discharge papers and even his application for a government pension. My handsome hero had been hospitalized with injuries for so long, that his wife had remarried, and after his unhappy return, he worked as a night watchman for very little money. In this instance, my gorgeous Valentine, both the paper one, and the person, survived the Civil War, yet that did not assure a happy ending.



Glowing in his new uniform, as shown in this studio card portrait made in Troy, New York, Captain Robert Cross embarks on a career that is documented by records from the National Archives, in Washington, DC. This majestic quarto valentine, on silvered English cameo-embossed lace-paper, is adorned with embossed flowers and satin. 9 1/4 x 7 1/2 inches.

experiences. The initial appeal was the beauty of the papercuts – then I became mesmerized by her story, the history, and the genealogy.

In a series of coincidences, 12 years ago, I found myself in a London shop admiring glorious framed papercut Valentines, unlike any I had ever seen. A few days later,



Left: Engraving of Elizabeth Cobbold, creator of the papercut Valentines, circa 1800, which became the hallmark of her annual Valentine ball in Ipswich. Carefully wrapped, they were placed in a basket, and, when the music ceased, were anonymously drawn, in the fashion of the ancient Roman lotteries. The cryptic poetic message and the papercut design would reveal the Valentine partner.

unable to walk away from them, the coveted pieces came home with me. Hanging along the stairway, they are still loved at *least* twice daily!

I had learned a brief history about the artist, and, through a search, acquired an 1827 book, written by a beloved son, which revealed much more. Elizabeth Cobbold (1766-1824), the second wife of the Ipswich brewer, John Cobbold, was a rare woman during that period

Left: A Valentine Rebus, a word and picture coded message.

The Quadrille, as danced at the Valentine Ball.



Valentine traditions

Victorian Valentine cards were customarily home-made, such as:

- Acrostic cards, in which the first letter of each line combined spelled out the beloved's name.
- Pinpricks, in which paper was pricked with a pin, giving the impression of paper lace.
- Puzzle cards, in which a new verse was revealed as each fold was opened.

Visit the online Postcard and Greeting Card Museum at www.emotionscards.com/museum/museum.html, with details of Valentine, birthday and Christmas cards.

See Nancy Rosin's collection of Valentines online at www.victorian-treasury.com, which also has directions how to relive tradition and make your own puzzle purse.



Fancy, Queen of Fairy Pleasures.

'I am Elizabeth Cobbold's great-great-great-grandson.' The papercuts, and, in fact, *everything* I had collected, now took on a new significance.

in history. Under the name, Eliza Knipe, she wrote plays and poetry, and even an abolitionist essay, placing her in the rarified company known as the 'female British Romantic poets of the 18th century'. While raising 15 stepchildren, and seven from their marriage, she continued her artistic and charitable involvements, including the creation of her poetry-filled papercuts. Her artistry reveals extensive knowledge of botany, conchology, foreign languages, music, mythology, and literature – astounding achievements at that time.

The unique papercuts became the hallmark of her annual Valentine party at her graceful home at Ipswich: they were placed in a basket, and, when the music ceased, were anonymously drawn. The cryptic poetic message and the papercut design would reveal the Valentine partner. Naturally, everyone wanted to be invited to the Cliff Ball!

The fanciful story, made even more credible by Elizabeth's engraved portrait in the book, was no longer hearsay, and I became determined to research and write about this phenomenal woman (*Ephemera News*, January 1995 and *Victoria Magazine*, February 1995), my dear new friend from the wistful era of Gainsborough, Constable, and Sir Joshua Reynolds.

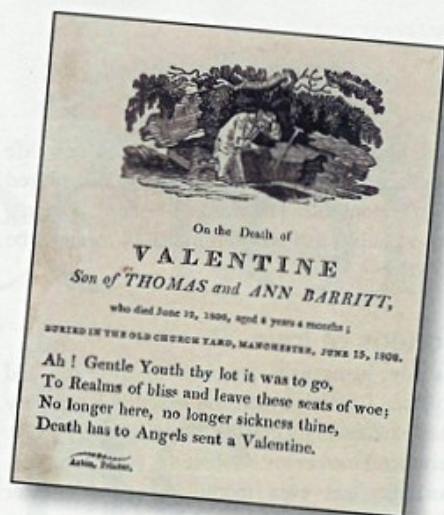
I was unaware of her impressive genealogy, or her potential impact on my life, until an unimaginable connection happened. Someone in the United States had seen the article – in his doctor's office – and curiously mentioned it to an English friend, with the surname, Cobbold. When the gentleman visited New York, he completed the circuit by telephoning me and saying, 'I am

Elizabeth Cobbold's great-great-great-grandson.' The papercuts, and, in fact, *everything* I had collected, now took on a new significance. They were the threads connecting actual people. That these people claimed centuries of history was exciting; that they were warm and friendly descendants of my Elizabeth was more than I could ever have imagined.

The Cobbold Family History Trust, maintained



The Slide, depicting merry pleasures at Valentine time.



Contemporary with Elizabeth Cobbold's papercuts, this mourning Valentine was penned in memory of a deceased child – unfortunately not all mementos tell of happier times, but all are worth collecting and treasuring for the future.

by Anthony Cobbold, preserves their formidable history, genealogy, and contributions of the family, and is fascinating to this American author, for whom titles and peerage exist only in fairy tales.

I fell in love with the purity and magic of the designs, as significant assets to my comprehensive collection. I became enveloped by the rest of the story, and the serendipity of the discovery has been quite a delightful part of my life, and my collecting.

Through these examples, and numerous others I could share, I encourage you to embrace my enthusiasm. The people who created, received, saved, or cherished these mementos are not anonymous, and the missives are not disparate. They belong in family histories, as a story of love. ✍