

# February – The Search for Love Tokens

By Marcia Harmon, Cottage Jewel Antiques

All “hunters and gatherers” need a bit of direction to guide their search or add meaningful purpose to the hunt each month. If you love old world mementos, then your collecting may be inspired by the colorful floral language of our ancestors. During the mid 19th Century the Victorians wrote hundreds of books and dictionaries documenting Floriography, the art of sending messages communicated with flowers.

The interpretations were adapted from classical mythology, religious symbols, medical uses, ancient Eastern & Western lore and creatively applied as botanical discoveries were made. Floriography is not an exacting science in the 1800’s but was meant to express and awaken feelings or emotions at a time when social etiquette suppressed openness.

The February flower of the month is Violet, so shop for purple anything this month and consider celebrating Valentines 2012 with Love Tokens beyond the classic heart motif by borrowing some old world inspiration. For instance, since the Romantic period of the Victorian era the doves were portrayed as a loving duet and the swallow was considered the “messenger of love”. Queen Victoria exchanged finely twisted gold and gem encrusted snake jewelry with Albert to announce their “eternal love”. If your betrothed is not fond of reptiles, then try the Celtic “eternal knot” pins from Circa 1910 or a leafy brooch of ivy, meaning “cling to me”.

Our February 14th traditions may have their origins rooted in the ancient Pagan festival of Lupercalia which honored a rural god as patron of husbandry and guardian of the secrets of nature. It was believed that birds chose their mates for the coming season on this very day so their imagery is as important as the heart and cupid.

The art of exchanging Valentine cards has evolved from the early 19th Century focus on original handwritten prose and fanciful handmade assemblages incorporating ribbons, paper lace, spun glass hearts, gold

lace, embossed papers & felts, bird feathers, floral seeds and drawings. Some of these early “cards” were so thick with embellishments

**FEBRUARY**  
*A Meaningful Month*  
**Birthstone:**  
Amethyst (or Onyx)  
**Flower: Violet**  
“Faithfulness & Virtue”



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that they came in presentation boxes and hid lavish gifts. By the late 1800's with the expansion of die cut lithographs, a booming commercial printing industry and an active postal service, Valentine's were in mass distribution and carried messages of affection, humor or anonymous vulgarity.

Antique love token jewelry you may find today includes porcelain and pierced celluloid courting scene brooches, war-time sweet heart jewelry, engraved coin bangles, Valentine ephemera and hand-carved cameos depicting Cupid or his bride Psyche. Most rare and valuable are the hand-painted portrait miniature pins and the mysterious Lover's Eye gems. With

the addition of a precious photo or lock of hair, a locket can become a prized emblem of affection. In the 18th & early 19th Century a lady would have woven or commissioned an ornate "hairwork" watch chain for her husband to "keep her close" when he traveled. While this service is no longer available, one can still be creative with the prose they insert in a vintage locket. Now that you have found a POINT to your hunt, enjoy the Sunday search at Alameda Point's Antiques by the Bay.

For more meaningful collecting and gifting tips visit Marcia at Danville's Cottage Jewel or visit [www.CottageJewel.com](http://www.CottageJewel.com)