

Welcome to American Mosaic in VOA Learning English. I'm June Simms. On the show today we explore the history of Valentine's Day.

Happy Valentine's Day! Americans celebrate the holiday each year on February fourteenth. So do candy companies, jewelry stores and people selling flowers. Marsha James tells us more about Valentine's Day in the United States.

Valentine's Day is for lovers. It is a good day to ask your boyfriend or girlfriend to marry you. It is also a popular day for marriage ceremonies.

But, other couples might celebrate with dinner at a nice restaurant.

The holiday is named for Saint Valentine. He was an early Christian clergyman who was said to have helped young lovers. Valentine was executed for his Christian beliefs on February fourteenth, more than one thousand seven hundred years ago. But the day that has his name is even older than that.

The ancient Romans celebrated a holiday for lovers more than two thousand years ago. As part of the celebration, each girl

reportedly wrote her name on a piece of paper and put it in a large container. Each boy reached into the container and pulled out the name of a girl. That girl became his girlfriend for a year.

Lovers still put their names on pieces of paper on Valentine's Day. They send each other cards that express their love. Sometimes they send other gifts, too, like jewelry... or flowers... or candy...or all three!

So Valentine's Day is big business in America. The National Retail Federation is a trade group. The federation represents retail stores in the United States and other countries. It expects the average American to spend about \$134 for Valentine's Day this year. That is up about three dollars from 2013. The organization also says men will spend about twice as much on their partners as women will. And it says it expects total spending for Valentine's Day in the United States to reach about \$17.3 billion.

I'm June Simms. Join us again next week for American Mosaic from VOA Learning English.