

For Immediate Release

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LOOKING FOR LOVE BEFORE THE INTERNET

19th Century Personals Have Much In Common With Today's High-Tech Versions - And Some Interesting Differences

A Valentine's Day Information Sheet Prepared for the Council on Contemporary Families
by Pam Epstein, Rutgers University

On Valentine's Day, it is only natural that our thoughts turn to love. Those who think they have found it use the occasion to celebrate their relationship, making Valentine's Day the busiest day of the year for candy sales and romantic restaurant dinners. Those still looking for love often feel lonelier than ever, so that web dating sites see their numbers spike in February.

Much attention has been paid to the explosion of on-line dating and the posting of personal profiles, but Americans have been advertising for partners for more than 150 years. I have collected thousands of personal ads from the 19th-century, and it's worth reading what men and women said they were looking for then, and how they went about it, to see what has and has not changed.

PUTTING THEIR BEST FOOT FORWARD

Then as now, some people were surprisingly candid and specific about what they wanted in a partner -- and not shy about tooting their own horn:

- "A green youth from a country village, tired of having young ladies fall captive to his good looks, desiring to be loved for his good qualities alone, desires to correspond with an intelligent young lady not over 22, having in view an ultimate matrimonial alliance. She must be a blonde, rather below than above the medium height, well educated, and refined, domestic in her tastes

and not afraid to make herself generally useful in a home which he considers himself qualified to make happy. Sincerity will be proved by enclosing carte de visite. Address Verdant Green, Stamford, Conn." *New York Herald*, August 8, 1863

- "A lady, twenty-two years of age, of fastidious taste, wishes to correspond with a gentleman of refinement with a view to matrimony; he must possess rare mental endowments, superior education, be attractive in person and manners, have good social position; also entitled by noble qualities of heart, mind and birth, to the title of gentleman. She possesses every necessarily qualification to correspond with the requirements asked; wealth of no consequence. Address for one week Lydia Languish, Herald office." *New York Herald*, October 18, 1862

LOVE -- OR SOMETHING ELSE -- AT FIRST SIGHT

Then, also as now, people sometimes tried to track down strangers who had caught their eye. Anyone familiar with Craigslist.org has probably encountered its "missed connections," in which people address someone they saw on the subway or the street, but such ads long predate the internet. In the *New York Herald*, advertisers tried to contact men or women with whom they had shared a fleeting glance on stagecoaches, restaurants, or the street.

- "Beautiful eyes, black dress and gloves, white lace shawl, left Fifth avenue stage about 5 o'clock Wednesday, near Society Library - Vouchsafe interview to admirer who sat near by, spellbound. State particulars to avoid mistake. Address Discretion, box 215 Herald office." *New York Herald*, July 3, 1869

- "If the two gentlemen who followed two ladies down and up Broadway, on Saturday afternoon, and spoke to them, will be at the corner of Twenty-third street, by the Fifth Avenue Hotel, at half-past two next Saturday, they will meet the same ladies. Answer through "Personals" as soon as possible. E & L." *New York Herald*, January 16, 1862

SEEKING COMPANIONSHIP AND SHARED VALUES

Sometimes, despite the dated language, we can recognize the same interest in companionship and shared values that motivates modern men and women:

- "Matrimonial. - A widow of the highest respectability desires to correspond with an elderly gentleman of means and intelligence, with a view to matrimony. Being the recipient of a good English education, a fair linguist and pleasing musician, also of a lively and domestic temperament, she might propose to go happily down the hill of life with a suitable companion, being by no means young and far from old. Address F.L.N. New-York Post-office." *New York Times*, March 15, 1866

- "Matrimonial. - The world is so full of poetry, beauty, and glory, and I have no one to share it with me; no one to read with me my Shakespeare and Milton, to enjoy with me nature, art, letters, society; I seek, therefore, my other and better half, my complement and peer, equal, though not like; myself a New-Englander by birth, of liberal culture and pursuits, of about 35 years of age, a gentleman and a Christian in my aspirations. Ladies so minded will please address Mr. CHRISTOPHER LEIGHTON, Box No. 144 Times Office. " *New York Times*, March 9, 1866

BUT SOMETIMES, JUST SEEKING RESCUE

Sometimes we get a startling reminder of how much has changed - especially in the options open to women:

- "A young lady who is handsome, highly accomplished, and who on coming of age will possess a handsome competence, is anxious to avoid a matrimonial alliance which her relatives are forcing upon her. With this view she wishes to make the acquaintance of a gentleman of education, refinement, and pleasing personal appearance, who would rescue her from her impending unhappy fate. Address, for three days, Dulcina, Madison square Post office." *New York Herald*, October 15, 1859

- "A wealthy Southern young lady, whom circumstances compel to live with strangers, where she is not happy, wishes to make the acquaintance of a thorough gentleman, not over thirty years, who would be willing to form an immediate matrimonial connection, as she don't like to return South. Address for two days H.M. ---y," *New York Herald*, August 12, 1869

For more information or other examples of such ads, contact Pam Epstein, adjunct professor of history at Rutgers University-Newark. 848-391-7607; epsteinp@andromeda.rutgers.edu

For Further Information on Related Topics

On the history of matrimonial ads in Great Britain from 1695 to the present, contact Francesca Beauman, author of "Shapely Ankle Preferr'd: a history of the Lonely Hearts ad 1695-2010," at francesca@finshark.com

On the history of courtship and the changing etiquette of dating in the U.S. from its beginnings through the sexual revolution, contact Beth Bailey, Professor of History, Temple University: bbaily@temple.edu
215 908-0159.

For more information on finding love on the internet, or on the special dynamics of finding love in one's 60s, 70s, or even 80s, contact Pepper Schwartz, Professor of sociology, University of Washington: pepperschwartz@hotmail.com ; 206 910 7586

On the relation between hooking up, dating, and courtship -- or looking for love versus looking for sex - contact Barbara Risman, Professor and Head, Sociology Department, University of Illinois at Chicago: 919 349 0090; brisman@uic.edu

On men's and women's changing preferences in mate selection, contact Christine Whelan, Visiting Assistant Professor, University of Pittsburgh: 646 522 6456; whelanc@pitt.edu

On interracial romantic relationships, contact Virginia Rutter, Associate Professor of Sociology, Framingham State University, vrutter@gmail.com ; 508-626-4863

For information on the recent Match.com poll of singles about what they are -- and are not -- looking for in mates, contact Helen Fisher, Research Professor, Department of Anthropology,

Rutgers University: (212) 744-9870; HelenFisher@HelenFisher.com

On the way that the invention of the pill changed dating, courtship, and marriage, contact Elaine Tyler May, Professor of American Studies and History, University of Minnesota, mayxx002@u.umn.edu,
612-626-7847

On negotiating healthy sexuality and disclosing sexually transmitted infections when dating, contact Adina Nack, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Sociology at California Lutheran University: nack@callutheran.edu ; 805.493.3438

On the differences between courtship and marriage in the 1950s and today, contact Stephanie Coontz, Professor of History and Family Studies, The Evergreen State College, Olympia, WA: 360 556-9223; coontzs@msn.com

ABOUT CCF: The Council on Contemporary Families is a non-profit, non-partisan organization of family researchers and practitioners dedicated to providing the press and public with the latest research and best-practice findings about American families. Founded in 1996 and based at the University of Illinois at Chicago, the Council's mission is to enhance the national conversation about how and why contemporary families are changing, what needs and challenges they face, and how these needs can best be met.

CCF will hold its annual conference April 8-9, 2011, at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Entitled "Tipping Point? When Minority Families Become the Majority" (<http://www.contemporarifyamilies.org/frontpage-news/14thannualconference.html>), the conference will feature nationally known experts discussing how class, racial, and ethnic diversity requires new therapeutic approaches to couples and family and changes our understanding of marriage, sexuality, care work, and parenting. For more information or a complimentary press registration, contact Stephanie Coontz, CCF's Director or Research and Public Education, at coontzs@msn.com