

## Hearts and Ashes

Mardi Gras Day falls on February 13th in 2018, *ergo*:

Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent, 2018, is also Valentine's Day.



Since Mardi Gras, Ash Wednesday and Easter are all moveable feasts, this phenomenon has happened before and will happen again. It happened on that very Carnival in 1872 when Rex first made his appearance on the streets of New Orleans, which was also a "*leap year*," as reported in the *Daily Picayune* on February 10, 1872, a few days before the Grand Duke Alexis of Russia was entertained by the King of Carnival's royal parading entourage:

### "ST. VALENTINE'S DAY

Close upon the heels of Mardi Gras, this year, comes St. Valentine's Day. Comus casts aside his sceptre with the booming of the midnight gun on the night of the 13th; and fast upon his wake stalks in the new monarch, St. Valentine, who, on the 14th of February, for time almost out of mind, has ruled with a roseate rod all who are affected by matters of the heart. Those who laugh on Mardi Gras may sigh on Valentine's Day, and who would be so unkind as to imagine the sighs tokens of grief? Cupid's darts will fly around tender hearts, and many a poor mortal will no doubt fall, a victim to his unerring marksmanship.



*Characters in John Milton's Comus (cup in hand), London, published May 21, 1815, The British Museum*

The young ladies are reminded that it is *leap year*, and they then enjoy privileges which unemployed, may be forever lost. They may commit their assaults upon the hearts of 'old bachelors' with perfect

propriety, and custom will proclaim their warfare a just and legitimate one."

Although forgetting that Comus held not a "sceptre," but a bejeweled enchanter's cup, and with no mention of Rex, who was to make his debut the day before Valentine's Day in 1872, the *Picayune* article continued:

"Comus will doubtless greatly assist Cupid in his mischievous work in bringing loving couples together, that the little rascal may ply his arts to better advantage. But, just think of it! the day goes out with the God of Mirth laughing at the approach of the God of Love! To some who fall victims to this combination, it may prove, after all, no great laughing matter."



*Beware of this "little rascal"!*

The *Weekly Louisianan* newspaper also commented on "LEAP YEAR AND THE LADIES PRIVILEGE" on February 11, 1872:

"In addition to the peculiar privileges this year according to tradition affords to the ladies, to reverse the general order and 'pop the

question' themselves; Wednesday next will be Saint Valentine's day, giving them additional opportunity of safely divulging many of the pent up secrets of their affectionate hearts."

## A King *and His* Chariot . . .



*Mardi Gras 1941*



*Mardi Gras Day 1945*

Today the big parade is in the various theatres of war . . . a parade of khaki-clad boys and rumbling war machines on blood-drenched highways leading to Berlin. Were it not for the lust of few to rule the world today would be Mardi Gras and Rex, King of Fun, would reign in New Orleans. There would be parades and music and dancing in the streets—but today when practically every family has one of their loved ones away at war it has been wisely decided to hold no Mardi Gras celebration . . . instead, so that we may all have the right to sing and dance we must all stay on our jobs . . . work harder to speed the day of Victory!

It is the earnest plea of our President and the leaders of our forces on the sea, on land and in the air that we redouble our efforts in the production of supplies and that on this day in particular we buy at least one additional War Bond!

Buy Bonds at  
Holmes War Bond Booth  
First Floor Near Elevators

**Holmes**  
New Orleans' Quality Department Store

*Mars, the God of War, reigned over Mardi Gras 1945, when Ash Wednesday and Valentine's Day both fell on February 14th, Times-Picayune, February 13, 1945.*

Beginning in 1699, when Iberville and Bienville first celebrated Mardi Gras at a spot along the Mississippi River in Plaquemines Parish they

named *Pointe du Mardi Gras*, the years when Ash Wednesday and Valentine's Day shared a February 14th date are as follows:

1714; 1720 (New Orleans was almost two years old); 1725; then not again until 1866; 1872, when Rex first rolled the day before; 1877; 1923; 1934; and 1945 (the last year of World War II and therefore no parades). That was the last time Ash Wednesday and Saint Valentine's were the same day until 2018. And, apart from 1872, 1720 was the only other time it was also a leap year.

Looking ahead through 2050, there are two more times these two holidays will coincide: 2024 (a leap year) and 2029.

With Cupid and Comus, there's quite a bit of classical mythology that has made its way into the celebration of our Christian holidays. Let us not forget about New Orleans' large Catholic population and the observance of Lent. And just how does one reconcile fasting and the fast-beating heart?

The Lenten season, traditionally observed by Catholics and some Protestant denominations, is not just a period of fasting, but one of moderation and self-denial. This leads us to realize that the practices of Valentine's Day and Ash Wednesday conflict in a significant number of ways.

Ash Wednesday: a day of fasting. Valentine's Day: an evening often celebrated by a romantic dinner.

Ash Wednesday: the act of giving up something. Valentine's Day: the act of giving something, especially a gift, such as flowers or a box of chocolates.

Ash Wednesday: not eating meat. Valentine's Day (on that romantic dinner): Sorry, my darling, no steak for you! Or perhaps your sweetheart is a vegan or vegetarian – and, if so, how is that truly fasting?

What are Catholic lovers to do in the Crescent City?

In a city with bountiful seafood and excellent cuisine, it's really no hardship to fast as compared with Catholics in other parts of the country. And, as for the giving of one's heart, moderation just won't do.

**NED HÉMARD**

New Orleans Nostalgia  
"Hearts and Ashes"  
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