

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Frozen Valentines

Valentines among the Eskimos seems a strange story to tell this valentine time, but we think it is quite seasonal and at the same time quite interesting that the charming old-fashioned custom should be known to our northern neighbors even before there were many English-speaking persons in residence there.

"Discovering that holidays were excuses for whole-village celebrations, and the villagers liking just that, the teacher rang in all the feast days he could think of, and they were brand new events to the village," writes Laura Buchan and Jerry Allen in their book "Hearth in the Snow."

Such a one was Valentine Day. When February came, she told the school children about St. Valentine and the way the day was celebrated on the "outside." They apparently went home with a wonderful tale.

For one cold, blustery evening, several of the Eskimo mothers came into the schoolroom where the children were busy with their various projects. For some time these mothers sat shyly, enjoying the comfort and warmth.

"Why don't we all sleep here tonight?" piped up little Andy. "It's too cold to go home and it will soon be morning when we come right back."

"You'd all freeze, Andy," the teacher said, smiling at Pete's youngest motherless boy, who was always looking for some reason to stay at school. "We don't have enough blankets to keep you warm."

"We go home and get some and come back," he answered brightly.

Laughter swept around the room as everyone heard Andy's scheme. Through the bubble of good humor Molly relaxed and spoke what was on her mind.

"You got pretty colored paper, maybe?" she asked.

"And paste, too?" added Annie.

"We surely do. Would you like some?"

"Maybe you let us make valentines for the children then," Molly said, glowing.

Molly, so young herself, already was the mother of a large family. She had just heard of Valentine's Day from

her children, and, as eager as any child, wanted to make the pictures and show "love in the heart."

For several evenings the mothers came to the school and worked with colored paper, paste, odds and ends of ribbons, and a few paper dollies to make their first Valentines. By the time Valentine's Day arrived the mothers, and the children working with them, had made enough for each person in the village to have at least one. It would have soured the gifts if anyone had been missed. Chuckling over this new and happy idea, the villagers hung the pictures in their homes and since that day brought so much delight, they wanted to have it more often.