



## *A Sailor's Valentine*

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A collection of heart shapes created with delicate shells is known to be part of a legend when lovesick sailors created these symbols of love as gifts for their sweethearts during their long voyages at sea. Often, apart for three, sometimes four years, these Sailor's Valentines enticed many waiting women to welcome their homesick voyagers home from sea.

Made by carefully arranging and gluing various seashells into intricate symmetrical designs and encased in two side-by-side, octagonal-shaped wooden boxes, they were hinged together and topped with an overlay of glass that protected their precious creations during sea travel.

The designs often included hearts, flowers, anchors and other nautical symbols all made with sea treasures. The smaller shells of various colors were sometimes used to form messages expressing love and longing like, "forget Me Not" or "Home Again." They were considered a sentimental token of affection.

This charming sea art was made popular between the 1800's and 1900's. Today, one of the largest collections of vintage Sailor's Valentines can be viewed at the Strong Museum in Rochester, New York. You can find reproductions in collector's boutiques and knick-knack shops, especially in Nantucket, Massachusetts.



These antique souvenirs have sparked a renewed interest from collectors, producing avenues for shell kits and patterns to be sold in craft shops. The Sailor's Valentine has achieved global recognition and status in the world of collecting nautical souvenirs. A testament to this fact is that a small Sailor's Valentine, many years ago, would be sold for up to \$600, and today they can sell for upwards of \$8000.

Many prefer to believe the romantic tale that the sailors created these beautiful sea souvenirs, but

we would be remiss if we did not share with you another legend that suggests that a large number of the Sailor's Valentines originated on the island of Barbados which was a vital seaport during 1800s. Historians believe that the women of Barbados made these sentimental gifts using local beach shells that were then purchased by the sailors.

Both tales are inspiring and enchanting. So, we leave the question of where the Sailor's Valentine originated in the hands of creative history.



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