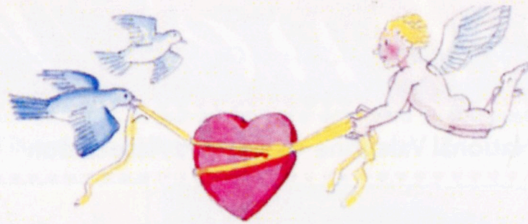


# VALENTINES FROM ROCKWELL KENT

by Robert Rightmire

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Rockwell Kent! Some of you know the name, others are thinking, sure Norman Rockwell. Those of you who have in mind the multitalented political activist who once was a dominant figure in the American art scene are on the right track.



Rockwell Kent 1882-1971

During the mid 1930s Norman Rockwell, now so very revered, wrote to Rockwell Kent that he hoped that someday he'd be as famous as Kent. But history would layout a hazardous route for Kent so that by the 1960s he was persona non grata in his homeland. His socialist leanings and his sympathy for the people of the U.S.S.R placed him in the direct line of fire of Senator Joseph McCarthy and his Permanent Investigations Subcommittee.<sup>1</sup> When he gave 80 of his paintings and several hundred drawings, prints and books to the people of the U.S.S.R. in 1960 and in return won the Lenin Peace Prize in 1967, his doom was sealed. Fortunately the political climate today is more lenient; several books, exhibitions and a highly acclaimed documentary film by Frederick Lewis have reintroduced the public to the wonders of Kent's art.<sup>2</sup>

While the paintings, prints, drawings, greeting cards, bookplates, postcards and books by Rockwell Kent have been well documented, his

illustrated Valentine letters, from the 1960s, to the Mackinnon children, who lived nearby Kent's farm in the Adirondacks,<sup>3</sup> have received limited attention. When we think of Valentines it is almost a given that they be collectable; that more than one copy of a card exists. Thus illustrated letters with drawings celebrat-



How time does skip along! Oh dear!  
Again St. Valentine is here!  
His bow tight strung to shoot its dart  
Into some tender little heart!

But how much harder than before  
To choose the girl to most adore!  
How can a little boy like me  
Pick just one sweetheart out of three?

Come, Mirror, mirror on the wall,  
Which is the fairest of them all?  
Speak! Anne, or Maribeth or Jane?  
Which one will have my heart again?

*Rockwell Kent continued on page 3*



*She is dressed like a princess  
And looks like a queen:  
The sweetest young lady  
That ever was seen.  
Try guessing her name  
If you possibly can.  
Why that's easy! Of course  
It can only be Ann.*



*To Maribeth*

*A girl I love has golden hair  
And rosy cheeks and eyes of blue.  
Let's see: who can my sweetheart be?  
I'll give you just one guess: It's YOU!*

ing holidays, like Valentine's Day, fall beyond the periphery of most Valentine collectors. Envelopes (covers) individually designed, postcards with hand drawn images and illustrated letters are

frequently relegated to history buffs, ephemera collectors with deep pockets and library or museum collections. They belong in our collections too.

Think about how you feel when someone sends you a greeting that has been specifically designed just for you. We've entered the age where even a post-marked envelope or card rather than an emailed message or web e-card is special.

Now back to the 1960s and the joy that the Mackinnon children felt when they viewed the Valentine drawings of their neighbor, Rockwell Kent.<sup>4</sup> The tenderness, playfulness and love the artist projects in these Valentines makes us wonder why history has portrayed him so harshly.

Robert Rightmire



TO MY VALENTINAS

How simple Valentine's Day used to be!  
First only one sweet girl; then two; then three!  
And now, my goodness gracious, there are four!  
How in the world choose one to most adore?  
Fluck daisy petals? Good idea! - but no!  
Imagine picking daisies in the snow!  
And tossing up a coin just will not do  
When there are four to choose from, not just two:  
Anne, Maribeth, Jane, Megan - yes, that's four.  
(Whatever shall I do when there are more!)  
But wait! I have, it seems to me, a bright idea!  
This is, let's not forget, that funny year  
(Leap-year they call it); it's the silly time  
When girls, not boys, must choose their Valentine  
Of you four darling girls, each has a voice  
To pick, this year, the boy-friend of her choice.

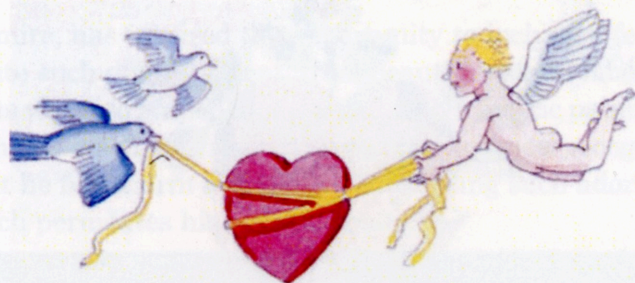
And as for me, I'll simply wait and see  
Hoping, meanwhile, that each of you picks me.



St. Valentine's Day  
1968

This Valentine's Day what a shame  
That one of my four girls is lame!  
And that--though two are without harm  
Another fell and broke her arm!  
(Which lets Anne give--how very sad--  
Just half a hug to Mom and Dad);  
Though little Maribeth--look! see!  
Wears works of art from toes to knee!

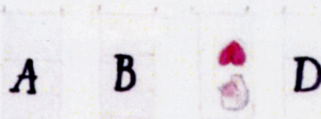
But, darling girls, as Valentine  
I send you all this heart of mine.  
One heart divided into four?  
Just one?--how sad I haven't more!



To Megan, Jane, and Maribeth and Ann  
on St. Valentine's Day, 1966

A mile or so, just up the road,  
Four lovely girls have their abode  
(Abode, a word you can't have known,  
Is just a fancy name for home).  
Well, on this hill there live four "cuties"  
(A vulgar germ, you know, for beauties).  
Their cheeks are pink, their lips are red,  
And silken tresses crown each head.  
(Where else, you'll ask, should tresses be -  
Unless you'd have girls bald, like me?)  
Cheeks, lips and hair--what else?--oh eyes!  
Well, these are like the summer skies,  
Each eye (and there are eight all told)  
Seeming all Heaven to enfold.

Four lovely girls, and I'm just me!  
If I choose one, that leaves out three!  
So, darlings, please, for Valentine  
Draw lots to see which shall be mine.  
From slips marked A, B, C and D  
You'll find which one of you gets Me.



<sup>1</sup> When Sen. McCarthy, in 1953, asked Kent about his membership in the Communist Party, Kent invoked his Fifth Amendment right. Once out of the committee room, Kent then stated that he was not a member of the Communist Party and that everyone knew it.

<sup>2</sup> For additional background information see: Ferris, Scott R. and Ellen Pearce. *Rockwell Kent's Forgotten Landscapes*. Camden, Maine: Down East Books, 1998.

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<sup>3</sup>*Permission to reproduce these Valentine illustrations has been granted by Anne Mackinnon who first wrote about them in "I Send You All This Heart of Mine," Adirondack Life, Jan./Feb. 1999; pp. 50-53. Note: Special word of thanks to Adirondack Life for securing this permission.*

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*