

# One Hundred and Seventy Five Years Ago

by Lynne Belluscio

This year, Rochester, Toronto and LeRoy will celebrate their 175th Anniversaries. It seems like only yesterday that we were celebrating our Sesquicentennials.

The event that we are celebrating in LeRoy is the incorporation of the Village which was approved by the New York State Legislature. The *Genesee Gazette*, dated February 6, noted that "Notice is hereby given that application will be made to the Legislature at its present session to pass an Act to incorporate the Village of LeRoy by the name of "The Trustees of the Village of LeRoy." The Legislature approved the petition on May 5, 1834 and the new village government was organized at a meeting at the Eagle Hotel on July 12.

Hinds Chamberlain was the chairman of the meeting and Joshua Lathrop, John Lent, Rufus Robertson, Theodore Dwight and Dennis Blakeley were elected as trustees. From that group, Joshua Lathrop was elected to be the first "president" (mayor) of the Village. Seth Gates became the Village Clerk and Herman J. Redfield was the first Village Treasurer. The Village of LeRoy at this time was pretty well established.

There were four churches, two flour mills (both owned by the LeRoy family who also owned the local brewery), at least six taverns, four schoolhouses and the Round House (site of the former Masonic Temple) for higher education. Main Street was lined with shops. Lake Road was busy with wagon traffic north to the Erie Canal in Brockport and there was talk of building a railroad. But the newspapers foretold of impending financial troubles in other parts of the country.

The *Gazette* reported: "A large number of industrious workmen were thrown out of employ, is much more serious character than we had before supposed; many being entirely destitute and owing arrears of board are turned out of doors and others with families dependent upon charity for food and shelter" "... four wholesale clothing establishments have within a few days discharged

from their employ nearly one thousand persons. There are in this city (New York) employed by the various clothing establishments ten thousand persons all of whom will be out of employment in a few days, if this state of things continues" and from the same issue of the *Gazette*: "We may add that one hundred workmen were discharged last week from the extensive iron foundry. It is computed that two thousand laborers were discharged by their employers on Saturday and that ten thousand have been thrown out of employ within the last fortnight." The New York papers reported in the *Gazette* that "Saturday as the hardest day they have experienced. Two heavy failures were announced. Stocks were still further depressed."

In 1834, Andrew Jackson was serving his second term as President, but his political views were being challenged by the new political party known as the "Whigs" led by Henry Clay of Kentucky, John C. Calhoun of South Carolina and Daniel Webster of Massachusetts. Never the less in the congressional elections, the Democrats took a 27 to 25 Senate majority over the Whigs and held the majority in the House 145 to 98.

Cyrus McCormick patented an early model of his reaper in 1834. (In 1845, he would manufacture reapers in nearby Brockport.) And while we are celebrating the 175th Anniversary of the Village of LeRoy and while we are looking toward 2009 as a year when the electric automobile may help solve the impending climate change, let us remember that in 1834 Thomas Davenport, a Vermont blacksmith, developed a true prototype of the modern electric motor. Davenport adapted Joseph Henry's electromagnet and connected four electromagnets to a battery and set them up on a wheel that rotated rapidly when the current was turned on. This was the basic design for the electric motor of today. Davenport received a patent in 1837, but was not able to create a market for the device.

And it was in 1834 that the



legend of Davy Crockett was published. He was featured as a great bear hunter and congressman. Crockett was one of the "Anti-Jacksonians" and hoped to profit politically from the embellished image that was published. His opponents characterized him as "fresh from the backwoods, half-horse, half alligator and a little touched with the snapping turtle."

In March the *Genesee Gazette* published a letter from Col. David Crockett: "... If I am elected I shall just seize the old monster party by the horns and sling him right slap into the deepest place in the great big Atlantic Ocean." Certainly a statement declared in fine Crockett-like form. (Crockett would be killed in the Battle of the Alamo in 1836.)

But the clincher for the 1834 *Genesee Gazette* of March 13 is a small four line announcement: "The following question will be debated by the Young Men's Association at the Round House (on West Main Street) next Tuesday evening: -- Ought the females to have equal rights with the males." (Too bad the *Gazette* a week later didn't carry a review of the debate. I think I can guess the outcome.)



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