

Route 63 Through LeRoy??

by Lynne Belluscio

A while ago, someone asked if the Historical Society had a photograph of the side entrance to the Wiss. I finally found the photo buried on top of my desk. It shows the intersection at Lake Street and Main Street with a traffic light in the middle of the road. But what caught my attention was the Route 63 sign on the corner. Shouldn't that be a Route 19 sign? Well a quick trip to the Internet verified, that at one time, Route 19 was Route 63. It was designated Route 19 in 1939. But the concept of numbering roads is an interesting story - - at a bit confusing.

With the invention of the automobile and the popularity of "motoring" it became increasingly evident that villages and towns, who maintained roads, needed help. When the Automobile Association of America was organized in 1902, it's primary focus was road conditions.

In 1908, the New York State legislature created a statewide system to oversee the major roads. (Percy Hooker from LeRoy, whose home was in the building now known as the Creekside,

was the first Highway Commissioner.) Also in 1908, the New York state legislature created 37 "legislative routes", although they were not given numbers. (Both Route 19 and Route 5 were legislative routes.) Never the less, it was still an adventure traveling from town to town, city to city, or across the country. Getting lost in the middle of "no where" was a serious problem.

Road maps were few and far between and often wrong. Attempts were made to establish "trails." These trails were marked with symbols or colors - - sometimes nothing more than a slash of paint on a telephone pole. Trails were named. In New York, what was to become Route 5, was called the Yellowstone Trail and was part of a national trail that led from Boston to Seattle. The Dixie Overland Highway led from Savannah,



Georgia, to San Diego. The Old Spanish Trail led from St. Augustine, Florida to San Diego. The Theodore International Highway went from Portland, Maine, to Portland Oregon, through portions of Canada. The Victory Trail led from New York City to Baltimore and then to San Francisco. The Lincoln Trail led from New York City to San Francisco. Many of the trails had associations that promoted and marked the highways. (Very much like snowmobile trails today.) Never the less, the trails were poorly marked, and caused a lot of confusion.

The federal government stepped in to solve some of the issues in 1916, establishing The Federal-aid Highway Program. Meetings and hearings were held but not much was done. In December 1924, Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover organized the first national conference on street and highway safety. One of their recommendations was to standardize signs throughout the county. Unfortunately this idea was met with resistance, especially from the trail associations. They were reluctant to turn over control of the trails to the government. In addition, some states opposed the federal regulations, stating that it was in violation of states rights. They didn't want the federal government taking over state highways.

I found it interesting that in 1922 a group of men suggested that the shapes of signs should be

standardized. They suggested that stop signs should be octagonal. Round signs were for warning signs at railroad crossings. Diamond shaped signs were for "slow" warnings. Square signs were to caution or "attention" messages and rectangular signs were for directional and regulatory information.

New York State started numbering their roads in 1924. I am assuming that was when Route 5 and Route 63 through LeRoy were designated. (Wisconsin was the first state to adopt highway numbers in 1917.) But like other New York State regulations, the rules often changed. I can't help but wonder how anyone knew where they were going. And I wonder who had the contract for making all the signs - - - and I wonder who was hired to change all the signs.) Route 63 through LeRoy was changed to Route 19 in 1939.

Route 19, today is the longest state highway in the region and the only road that connects the Pennsylvania state line with Lake Ontario, except for Route 14. Route 19 does not serve any metropolitan area and is predominately a two-lane rural road. It passes through Willing, Wellsville, Belmont, Angelica, Belfast, Caneadea, Hume, Pike, Gainsville, Warsaw, Pavilion, LeRoy, Bergen, Brockport, Clarkson and Hamlin, and the counties of Allegany, Wyoming, Genesee, and Monroe for a total of 108.62 miles.

