

# The Revenge Of Henry Ford

by Lynne Belluscio

This was going to be part of my April 1st article. Then I asked Terry at the *Pennysaver* to hold the presses and put this in this week instead.

When I attended the DOT meeting at the Town Hall and learned about their proposal for “calming traffic” on Main Street by making four lanes into two lanes, I really thought it was an April Fools’ Day joke. When they finished going over the new bicycle lanes, and the reduced traffic pattern, I expected them to say, “We’re just fooling. April Fools!”

But that didn’t happen and the situation got worse after hearing from the LeRoy Police who didn’t know what DOT had planned and had questions that had no answers; the Fire Department that said that they couldn’t get emergency vehicles out; the ambulance who gave statistics that showed that they had a lot of calls that required them to exit onto West Main Street, through what was now going to be a solid line of traffic. The Central School was concerned about slow moving school buses, that no one could get around and the hazard for students. The farmers and the truckers all expressed concern about getting through town.

At this point I figured that people would start avoiding LeRoy completely, just like most of us who avoid using Route 5 going into Batavia, now that the DOT has “calmed” traffic there. And then there were the folks on Main Street, who figured with the new traffic pattern, they had little chance of getting in and out of their driveways.

The folks of LeRoy deserve a lot of credit. It was a great public forum. Everyone was polite, concise, and expressed their concerns matter-of-factly. But after the meeting, we all wondered what was going to happen. It just didn’t make any sense why the DOT would even suggest the plan. And then it

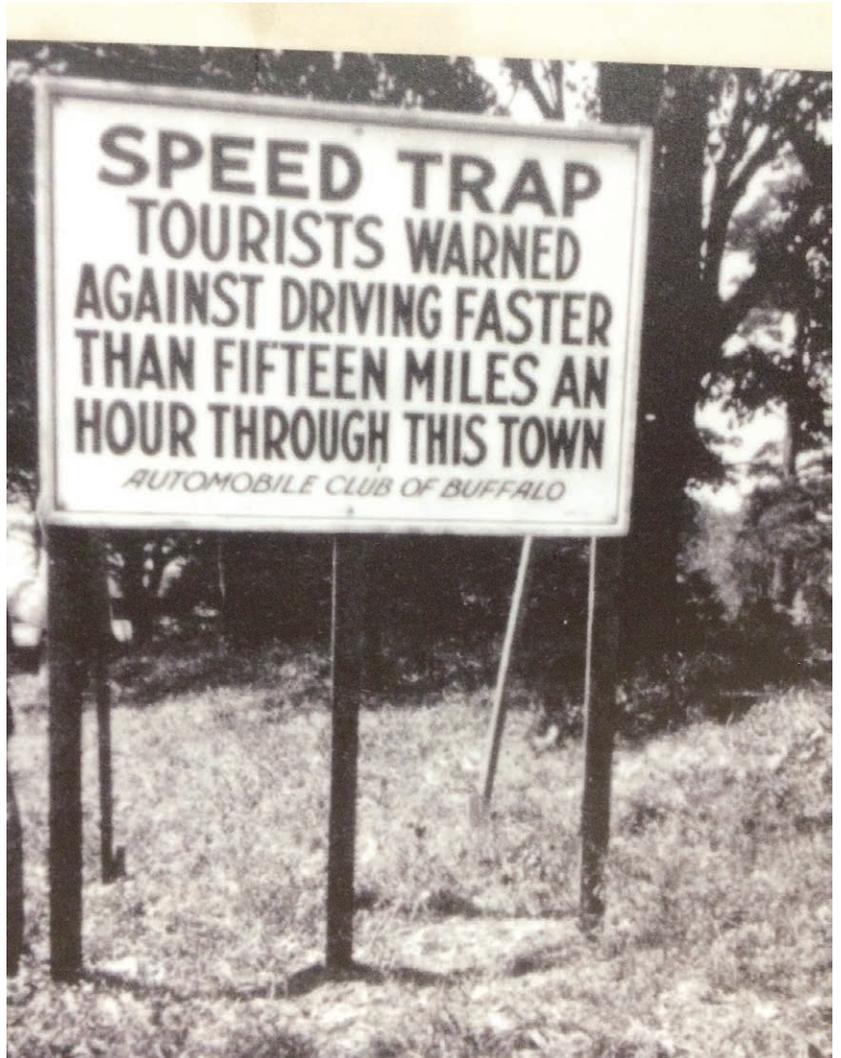
dawned on me. It was the curse of Henry Ford.

On August 1, 1922, Henry Ford – actually his chauffeur, George Burns was arrested for speeding, as they were heading west on Route 5. Ford had to pay a \$30 bond and was required to report several days later for a jury trial.

Ford was really mad. It was said that Henry didn’t like to argue, but he enjoyed a good fight. First he claimed that the letters on the speed zone sign were 1/8 inch too small. When that didn’t work, he claimed that the arresting officer, Ray Dampier, was outside the Village limits and thus beyond his jurisdiction. Dampier claimed that Ford was traveling 43 miles per hour and the Village speed was 15 miles per hour. Ford countered with the argument, that they had sped up after they left the Village limits and Dampier couldn’t prove their speed.

Ford was convinced that LeRoy was a speed trap. And indeed it was. New York State had agreed to let the local municipalities collect the money from the speeding tickets and most communities, LeRoy included, didn’t waste any time arresting people for speeding -- especially strangers. Ford was just one of many strangers who received a speeding ticket.

Ford had his secretary write to the president of the Jell-O Company to tell him that commerce and business in LeRoy was hampered by the traffic. That no one in their right mind would want to come to LeRoy for fear of receiving a traffic ticket. Ford suggested that LeRoy was nothing more



than a one-horse town, and that the policeman was incompetent and that the mayor was in collusion with the police and the judge didn’t deserve to hold the position.

Ford got nowhere. He enlisted the help of the Automobile Club of Buffalo and the Ford dealers to see if he could exert pressure on LeRoy. When none of that worked, he erected signs at the edge of town with huge letters that declared: SPEED TRAP – TOURISTS WARNED AGAINST DRIVING FASTER THAN FIFTEEN MILES AN HOUR THROUGH THIS TOWN. Someone stole the signs, and Henry had them put back up.

In April, 1923, it was reported that the Retail Merchants of LeRoy had held a meeting and that the subject of traffic

through LeRoy was discussed. “Tourists passing thru LeRoy ... would not be molested; that the traffic officer would be paid a salary and especially instructed that he was not to hide behind fences, in alleys and places of that kind to pounce out upon the public and make arrests.”

Apparently Ford was placated -- or was he? I think that Henry wasn’t finished with his fight with LeRoy and sooner or later he was going to get even, even if he had to wait ninety years. I could almost hear him chuckle as the DOT made its presentation. Well, we’ve learned that the DOT has had a change of heart. The new traffic patterns aren’t going into effect. Main Street will be resurfaced and there will still be four lanes on Main Street. So Henry, you lose this round.

