

George Washington

by Lynne Belluscio

The east section of the Washington Block has undergone some renovation and a new coat of paint and it looks great. Just in case you're not acquainted with the Washington Block, it is on the north side of Main Street and extends from the Church of the Living Waters to the Bank.

Above each of the thirty windows is an image of George Washington. I always assumed that the Georges were carved from stone, but Jim Delooze, who owned part of the building at one time, thinks that they might be cast metal. I suspect that the men who painted the building might know, and I'm going to contact them to see what they know.

I wrote about the Washington Block in October 1997 and at that time I said that it must have been built in the early 1850s or earlier. I know now that it was probably built after the January 11, 1855 fire which wiped out almost all of the north side of Main Street down to Mill Street. According to the *LeRoy Gazette*, businesses began rebuilding almost immediately.

One clue appears in the November 1855 *Gazette* which mentions that C.J. Lungrane's Barber Shop is located in a "shop over Drake and Waterman's Grocery." An engraving of the Washington Block appears on a 1856 map of the Village of LeRoy. It includes Drake & Waterman, Groceries, Provisions, Crockery and Glassware at #24. J.G Barbor, Apothecary and Dentist is located at the west end at #28. S.F. Comstock, clothing made to order, already made shoes & boots was located at #26 and on the far right at the east end, (where Java's is now) was Morgan & Jackson, Dry Goods #22. (It should be noted that the numbers on Main Street changed in the early 1900s.)

In the undated photograph above, there is still a barber's pole on the street and in the doorway between #22 and #24. The photograph may be from the 1860s. Some of the stores have changed. F.W. Foreman and S.F. Comstock have replaced Drake and Waterman, but Morgan and



Jackson are still on the east end and there is a drug store on the west end.

The only mention of the Washington Block that has come to light is in the *Gazette* in 1858 which mentions that a "New Tin Shop" opened west of the "Washington Block." The photograph has some other great details. On the cornice above the building there are big signs "Drugs", "Dry Goods", "Groceries" and "Carpets". (The cornices were removed probably in the 1880s.)

Notice the two carpets that hang outside the second floor windows on the right. And all along the street are limestone hitching posts. The large sign for water lime above Foreman's store, advertises a type of cement lime that hardened under water. It was also known as hydraulic lime. And if you look closely, you can see the cobble stone "crosswalk" that allowed folks to walk across main street during the mud season. It's hard to tell if the strips are wood or stone.

The Washington Block has undergone a lot of changes in 160 years. Some people remember the Bette Shop, LeRoy Hardware, Encore Florist, and Heaman's Clothing Shop. Batavia Optical was located on the west end and they closed up the façade with clapboard siding. We are looking

for photographs of what that part of the building looked like when it was the Bette Shop. Somewhere in the files, we probably have a picture but if you have one let us know.

Historical buildings make LeRoy's downtown significant, but only if they can be utilized for a viable business. On Monday March 4, the LeRoy Business Council will be meeting at the LeRoy Family Moose Center on Bank Street at 5:30 pm. Their

guest will be Cynthia Howk from the Landmark Society of Western New York. She will be answering questions about the economic advantages of historic preservation and landmark designations. Don't miss this opportunity. A follow-up meeting concerning residential designations and the new extension of the New York State program for funding for landmark designated buildings will be announced soon.



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