

LeRoy Trade Cards

by Lynne Belluscio

The Historical Society recently purchased a significant collection of trade cards. These small, colorful cards document many of the LeRoy businesses that were on Main Street in the late 1800s. Trade cards were like business cards of today. They were a way of advertising. Not only did they advertise a business or store but the products that were sold at the store.

Black and white trade cards were printed in the late 1700s, but the development of color lithography after the Civil War, transformed the common trade card into a popular collectible. Shoppers would be given a card whenever they visited a store. In fact, many Victorians collected trade cards and put them into scrapbooks.

The cards were mass produced and then the business would have their name printed either on the

back, or sometimes in a blank space on the front. Some of the cards came in sets - - either different flowers or birds - - beautiful children - - or ladies. Some of the cards advertised products - - such as medicines, pianos, stoves, or sewing machines that could be purchased at the store.

Some of the cards are called "die-cut" cards. They were cut in a variety of shapes. In fact the earliest Jell-O advertising piece by the Genesee Pure Food Company was a die cut card. After a sheet of cards was printed, a die - much like a cookie cutter - cut the shapes. Some collectors only search for die cut cards and very little is known about the companies that made them.

While some cards were popular for their beauty, others were an attempt at humor. And what the Victorians thought was humorous is perplexing.

The series of the four "dudes" that were given out by D. Scanlan are strange. They show an ostrich dressed up like a "dandy." I'm not sure what was so funny about the "dude." The "dude mashed" shows the ostrich with a broken leg. There are four dude cards and all four are in the collection. Doing a little search on the Internet I found the same card used for other stores, including one in Geneva, New York. There are other trade cards that would be considered racially inappropriate, but at that time were perfectly acceptable.

I found it interesting that Tuttle and Miller, who were book dealers,



James Morton Boots & Shoes.

also sold Liver Pills. John Wiss offered many different trade cards. The card offered by Taintor & Howard for the Conqueror wringer is important because it gives the address of the store at 10



Die cut cards.

Main Street. Now that we have this collection, we hope to do a little more research about all these

stores to find out where they were located and when they were in business.



Eaton & Billings at 38 Main Street.



D Scanlan Hats and Caps - The "Dude".



Jewelry, books, pianos and organs on the Lampson Block.