

Herstory



by *Lynne Belluscio*

Everyone is invited to LeRoy House this Sunday, May 7, at 3 in the afternoon to get a sneak preview of the new exhibit "Remember the Ladies." This year is the 100th anniversary of the vote that gave women suffrage in New York State - - three years before the federal acceptance of the 19th amendment. It is not strictly an exhibit about women's suffrage. It includes stories and artifacts that illustrate "herstory." It's going to be a challenge to get it ready, because I keep thinking of something else I need to include. Right now I'm spending a lot of time going up and down the ladder, trying to get a time line around the ceiling. My knee is reminding me that this idea wasn't so good. I'm also trying to find a LeRoy Girl Scout uniform; high school sports letters that were given to a girl; and regalia from the Eastern Star. I feel like I'm on a scavenger hunt. The objective of the exhibit is to engage everyone in learning more about the contributions and challenges of women. I have learned a lot and I have met some interesting women along the way. As I have

said before, the written histories and newspaper accounts often refer to these women, as the "wife of", the "sister of", the "mother of" or the "daughter of." It's time to recognize these women.



Hopefully this exhibit will stir up some interest in learning and collecting more of the stories and history of LeRoy's women. First came the Pioneers. These were the women who walked here into the wilderness and raised their families in log cabins. They dealt with rattlesnakes and bears. They existed on cornmeal and salt pork. They dealt with malaria and dysentery. They buried their babies and husbands. Could you have survived? Meet one of these women and hear her story. Next the "settlers" arrived with wagonloads of furniture and

moved into sturdy built Greek Revival houses, and bought fashionable hats at the stores on Main Street. They sent their children to school and spent all day on Sunday at church. They joined the temperance movement but could do nothing when their inheritance was given to their husbands. Charlotte LeRoy was one of these women. Educated in Paris and living in New York City, she followed her husband to LeRoy. She raised nine children in LeRoy House before returning to the City. What is her story? Then in 1837, LeRoy took a step in the direction of women's education, when Marietta and Emily Ingham were asked to come to LeRoy and establish a school for women. This was the beginning of almost fifty years of progressive education. The contributions of the students and their legacy has been understated. Eight thousand women attended Ingham University. They were scientists, artists, politically motivated women who changed the world, and we need to know more about them. And we will look at the story of Marietta Ingham - a woman who perhaps chose not to marry so that she could control the finances of both her family and the university. The women's rights movement did not go unnoticed in LeRoy. Very early there were women who believed that to make change it would be necessary to secure voting rights for women. They knew Susan B. Anthony. They spoke to the legislators in Albany. They formed labor unions. Have you ever heard of them? What are their stories? And what about the ninety-one year old woman who cast the first ballot in 1918 - - do you even know her name? Her story and many others will be included in the exhibit. Who was the LeRoy African-American woman who was a pioneer in aviation? What Ingham University graduate was the teacher of Annie Jump Cannon - a member of Harvard's "computers" who analyzed astronomy

data. Cannon created the stellar classification system still used today and credited her teacher with preparing her for her groundbreaking research. And "Remember the Ladies" acknowledges the sacrifices and hard work of the immigrants who came to LeRoy. They did work that no one else wanted to do. Learn about their story. As one of the women said, "If you lived my life, you'd be dead!"



The exhibit will continue through the summer and LeRoy House will be open weekends starting in June. In the summer, LeRoy House will be open almost every day. The hours depend on the availability of our volunteers.



Please feel free to join us this Sunday for this sneak preview and perhaps share some of your family's herstory.