

Spiders and Eggs For Brunch

by Lynne Belluscio

This Sunday the Historical Society is hosting a brunch for all of its volunteers. Usually it is held at Christmas time, but someone thought that it might be nice to offer the event at a time when it isn't so busy.

My task has been to prepare the repast in the open hearth fireplace and usually it has been a hearty soup with fresh baked biscuits. But with the decision to offer a brunch I have decided to do a breakfast of hash brown potatoes with ham, eggs and cheese.

This means I have to bring out the long handled spiders. I have several. Some have rounded bottoms and some are flat. In case you're not acquainted with the term "spider" it is the name for a frying pan with long legs that can be used over an open fire. In the time before stoves, the spider sat on the hearth and a small pile of hot coals could be shoveled beneath it for cooking. Spiders were common camp equipment.. Imagine trying to fry eggs in a frying pan without legs over an open fire.

Unless you have a long legged trivet or a grate, it's pretty difficult. Long after the pan lost its legs and could be set on the top of the stove, the frying pan was called a spider. Both my grandmothers called their frying pans (without legs) spiders. It is generally believed that the term spider is of American origin. The mention of spiders is found in cookbooks from the 1790s and there are a few recipes from the 1800s that mention spiders.

Lydia Child's book, *The American Frugal Housewife*, printed in 1833 mentioned that flat-jacks or fritters should be fried in a well greased spider. Obviously the flat bottomed spiders were better for fritters and pancakes. The round bottomed ones could be used for deep frying or like a modern wok.

I have an original sheet metal, round bottomed spider with long legs and log handle. It would have been made by a blacksmith. I liked it so much, I had a reproduction made in both a large and small version. A couple of years



ago, I donated the reproductions to the LeRoy House. I also have a cast iron version, with a flat bottom, that swivels on the legs. It's pretty handy when the pan gets too hot on one side, to just swivel it around.

Last night as I was reading through a scrapbook of newspaper clippings about LeRoy Industries, I noticed a reference to Icabod Swift's Foundry that was located at the corner of Wolcott Street and Clay. Icabod cast tire rims and plow points and did not live up to his name. A common saying at that time was "Oh, you're slower than old Swift!"

The Foundry was operated by five or six men who worked for Mr. Swift. Huge wood fires were kept burning to smelt the iron. The neighbors weren't too happy about the Foundry, especially

the women on wash day who had white sheets on the line. The great fires at the Foundry belched out thick black smoke that left a layer of black dust on everything downwind.

Miss Margaret Jones wrote an essay about the Foundry in 1927 and won a \$5 prize. Included in her essay was an interview with a lady of LeRoy: "One lady with whom I talked spoke of a cute little spider which she had obtained from this place. Since the spider was delicately fashioned and possessed those spindly legs, which supported its frail body, it must not be said that artistic ability was in any way lacking in its production."

Ruth Harvie tells a story that when she first moved here, her mother-in-law asked her to get out the spider and not know-

ing what it was, she turned and asked, "Tell me where you keep your spiders."

Our Pioneer Sampler program that we offer to the 4th grades, has an activity in the kitchen and I tell the kids that Mrs. LeRoy's cook would tell them, "It's time for breakfast. Go get the spiders and eggs." "Euw! That's gross!" Well in any event, brunch will be cooked in the spiders and if I have a little room left over, I might even make some spider corn bread. The Historical Society relies heavily on its volunteers to give tours of LeRoy House, to keep the sidewalks plowed and the gardens neat and tidy. We are most appreciative of their time and dedication. If anyone has the interest in becoming a volunteer at the Historical Society, please don't hesitate to give us a call.

FIREWORKS *over The Oatka*

9:00 pm - December 31st
at First Night Celebration!

The L.B.C. is selling raffle tickets to support this event!

RAFFLE

Dinner For 6 at LB Grand & an S&S Limo Ride!

Pick up your tickets at local businesses.

The drawing to be held December 5th at LB Grand

Sponsored by

Le Roy Business Council, LB Grand, S&S Limo
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For Info

