

Dinner With The Queen

by Lynne Belluscio

I just returned from the meeting of the European Open Air Museum Conference in Denmark. It is held every other year and I have been invited to attend for the past several years because I served as the president of the Association of Living History, Farm and Agricultural Museums.

This year's conference was hosted by the Den Gamle By Museum in Aarhus, the second largest city in Denmark, about a three hour train-ride west of Copenhagen. Just before I left for the conference, I received an e-mail asking everyone to bring formal clothes for the closing dinner. Luckily I found out that it did not mean tuxedos and cocktail dresses. When we arrived, we learned that Margrethe II, Queen of Denmark would be attending the final dinner that was being held in the 17th Century Mintmaster's house at Den Gamle By.

Through the years, the Queen has been a frequent visitor at Den Gamle By and is the "patron" for the site. She had taken a keen interest in the reconstruction of the Mintmaster's house which opened earlier this year during the 100th Anniversary of the museum.

The Mintmaster's house was built in Copenhagen in 1863 by Gregorius Sesse-mann who served as the Royal Mintmaster. Later, in 1690, Christian Wineke was appointed Mintmaster and moved into the mansion. His hallmark in the shape of a small heart, appeared on all the coins from the Danish mint. But the heart did not remain on Danish coins until the monetary reform of 1873, when the heart once again appeared. Today most Danish kroner are marked with the small heart.

The Mintmaster's house was dismantled in 1944 for urban renewal and was intended for a museum in Copenhagen, which never materialized. In 1990, the City of Copenhagen gave the house to Den Gamle By. Restoration has been a slow, laborious process, which included analyzing the original paint colors, then grinding and mixing paint pigments identical to the paint used in the late 1680s.

During dinner, I was seated at a table in the Baroque room with a remarkable hand painted ceiling covered with exotic birds. Our table, with guests from Canada, Norway, Australia and the United States, was immediately next to the Queen's table. Other guests dined in adjacent rooms. It was quite an evening with delicious food, an array of wine, opera music and a party that lasted well into the wee early hours of the morning (after the Queen left).

As usual, I was on the lookout for connections to LeRoy and I did find some jelly (Jell-O) molds in a couple of the museum kitchens, but it was on my last day in Denmark, while walking around Copenhagen with Mogens With, an architect from Norway who was born in Denmark that I found

the LeRoy connection.

We visited the Radhus (City Hall) which opened in 1905 and was designed by Martin Nyrop. And we stopped at several huge churches, including the Vor Frue Kirke built in 1820 which features 12 huge statues of the apostles by Danish sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen. We had been searching for the round tower called the Rundertarn which was built in

1642 as an observatory. We finally found it on one of the side streets near the university. It is still in use today making it the oldest working observatory of its kind in Europe. Instead of stairs leading to the top, a cobbled spiral ramp, 686 feet long, winds itself, on the inside, to the top. Christian IV rode his horse to the very top, and not to be outdone, in 1716, Peter the Great, Tsar of Russia repeated the ride on his

horse.

We were looking for a place for lunch (which I should relate, was the first time I ever ate a hamburger on a bun with a knife and fork – a Danish custom, I am told) when I looked into a basement and discovered cases of French wine in neat white boxes – all labeled in large letters "LeRoy." The place was a wine distributor and since I couldn't bring home a case of wine, all I could do was to take a picture.

