

Kindergarten

by Lynne Belluscio

Jacob starts kindergarten today. He's very excited about his first day in school and has a list of things to bring in his back pack: markers, pencils, Kleenex, hand wipes. He'll be riding the school bus, which is another adventure, but he has assured grandma, that he has a friend on the bus who will look out for him.

I'm sure he'll tell me about his first day at school when I see him tonight. Carolyn, who lives in California, started kindergarten a few weeks ago and I haven't had the chance to talk with her yet, but I'm sure she has a few stories to tell.

As far as I can tell, the first kindergarten in LeRoy started in the fall of 1906 at the Union Free School (where the Jell-O Gallery is located.) I suspect that kindergarten would not have been available in the rural schools, only in the Village. The *LeRoy Gazette* noted that the school census included 729 children between the ages of 5 and 18, of which 344 were males and 385 were females. Of those students, only those between the ages of 8 and 16 were subject to the compulsory law to attend school.

"The attendance of those coming under the laws the past year has been very satisfactory and there was not an arrest of either pupil or parents." There were 56 children between 4 and 5 who were eligible to attend kindergarten. I have not been able to find out how many kids attended kindergarten in 1906, but I suspect it was not a very big class. There are thirty seven children in the picture above, which was about the number of kids in my kindergarten at #49 school in Rochester.

I still remember the arrangement of the kindergarten room, with the bay window and wooden window seats and the tables on one side and the paint easels to the left of the door. Who doesn't remember the smell of the poster paint and the big brushes on the easels? Circle games such as duck-duck goose were pretty popular. The boy in the center of



Unidentified photograph from the Historical Society files from the Adrienne Sanderson Estate.

the circle in the picture is holding a ball, so "I'm not sure what game they are playing.

Jacob and I played a game of Simon Says last night, just to get ready for kindergarten. He's going to have to practice a little to keep standing. He already knows his alphabet and his numbers and tying your shoes isn't an issue now days with Velcro.

The idea of a kindergarten had been around for quite a while. It started in Germany by a man named Friedrich Froebel in 1837. His basic concept was that children needed play in order to learn. Many thought his theories were ridiculous. His book about child education in kindergarten were burned in some German communities. However, his ideas came to the United States and in 1856, Margarethe Schurz founded a German-speaking kindergarten in Watertown, Wisconsin. She is credited with encouraging Elizabeth Peabody to open an English-speaking kindergarten in 1859 in Boston.

In 1870, Conrad Poppenhusen, a German industrialist and philanthropist settled in College Point, New York and established the Poppenhusen Institute, which offered kindergarten programs.

The Poppenhusen Institute is still in operation today. In 1872, in the United States, kindergartens gained support from the National Education Association. In 1884, the Association established a department of kindergarten instruction. The first publicly financed kindergarten in the United States was established in St. Louis in 1873 by Susan Blow. So it was quite a while before LeRoy stepped on the kindergarten wagon.

According to the 1906 *LeRoy Gazette*, Rinna Pinner was listed as the kindergarten teacher. The

School Budget for 1906 amounted to \$12,303.50 with \$8,700 for teacher's salaries. Insurance was \$178.50 and the truant officer was paid \$90. There was a \$4,503.50 shortfall which was \$1,000 less than the previous year. Taxes would be levied to make up the difference. There were only 12 people who showed up to vote at the annual school meeting to review the budget. The election of board members followed and J.P. Samson, Dr. W.A. McPherson and W.C. Donnan were elected to the Board.

LeRoy Historical Society

Barbecue

Chicken 'n Ribs

Sunday, Sept. 20th

Trigon Park, Le Roy, Noon Til Sold Out!

Chicken BBQ - \$8.00 • Chicken 'n Ribs - \$9.50

Take Out Dinners Only, Curb Service Available

9/20

