

Charles Judson Brooks

by Lynne Belluscio

I'm going through the files to pick out photographs for a new book on LeRoy to be published by Arcadia Press this next spring. There are wonderful pictures in the collection and it's a problem deciding which pictures not to include. The cover picture is the Ingham students sitting on the porch of Ingham Hall at the corner of Wolcott and East Main. I had to submit ten views for the editors to work with and that's the one they chose.

In the meantime, I am trying to organize the other photographs into chapters that make sense and then I have to write captions with correct information. I'm beginning to think it's a formidable task. However, it has given me an excuse to really look at the collection and it certainly is rich. I've also come to appreciate the talent and ability of our local photographers.

Charles Judson Brooks was a very prolific photographer. Our collection has many images by Brooks. Luckily for the Historical Society, Bill Lane wrote short biographies of the LeRoy photographers which included the following information:

Charles Judson Brooks was born in Brooklyn in 1870 and

came with his family to LeRoy at the age of three. He attended Ingham University's primary department when he was nine. At first he worked as an amateur and the *LeRoy Gazette* noted in January 1, 1894 that he was the "owner of a camera" and was taking views from the Methodist Church tower.

His first studio over Eaton's Drug Store on Main Street was shared with artists P.P. Staunton and Jay Bannister. Brooks listed his studio in the *Gazette* on February 5, 1896 and by April he was selling "cabinet" photos (which refers to the size) for \$1.50 a dozen.

Two years later, in May 1898, he bought George Hoffman's studio at 5 Clay Street, opposite the Presbyterian Church. This building was erected after 1873 when the Congregational



Church was torn down. Known as Strobel's Corner, it contained Frank Strobel's Barber Shop and the photograph studio. Later it became a gas station and was torn down to make way for the Municipal Building. Brooks moved into the house at 18 West Main Street, which he purchased in 1922.

Brooks' photographs are wonderful. His major work is portraiture in gum bichromate art prints that often have the quality of fine pastels or pencil sketches. He produced a lovely series of romantic portraits of women. In our collection are several pages from a Brooks' scrapbook with babies and kids, families and beautiful ladies. Fortunately most of the people are identified. One of my favorite portraits is of the LeRoy artist Antonio Barone. Another picture is a fat little baby sitting in a wash basin.

In 1905, Brooks teamed up with Fred Seyffer, a talented

amateur who worked as a book-keeper for Orator Woodward. Brooks and Seyffer published a pictorial viewbook of LeRoy which was printed by the *Genesee Courier*. Many of those views were reprinted as post cards.

Brooks retired in 1934 and later moved to Buffalo to live with his son. He died in 1947 and is buried in Machpelah Cemetery. The Editor of the *LeRoy Gazette* wrote that Brooks "was kind, charitable and tolerant, and his sweet artistic temperament found such happiness in the successful photo studio he operated for about forty years."

Brooks' equipment was purchased by Harold Lunn from Penn Yan and he operated the studio on West Main for several years. In 1946, Philip Tompkins bought the house and studio which he operated until his death.

LeRoy's Annual
Halloween Parade
 Starts at 6:00 p.m.
 Saturday, October 31st
 behind The Bank of Castile

Follow the Town Clown to the Fire Hall where donuts and cider will be served and candy will be passed out.

