

Thirst Parlors

by Lynne Belluscio

Through the years, LeRoy has had its share of taverns and bars. And in the early years, there wasn't a shortage of corn liquor. According to the *Beers* (now that's a coincidence) *Genesee County Gazetteer* published in 1890, "there were over a dozen distilleries in this vicinity."

Most of the farmers raised corn and it was costly to ship corn to eastern markets before the Erie Canal. But the corn could be distilled into whiskey and shipped in barrels. Many farmers had their corn made into whiskey on shares and at the distillery hogs and cattle were fattened (on corn mash.)

Thomas Tufts, an early settler, operated a still and it was the last still to be operating in LeRoy. Elisha Stanley had a still near Fort Hill in 1812 and William Morgan had one above Coe's brick yard (wherever that was located.) J & M Colton and John Lent owned distilleries. (John more than likely served his brand of corn liquor at his tavern on West Main Street.) A man by the name of Dickey ran a still on the West side of Prentice's mill race (probably on Mill Street.) W. Merry operated a still near Roanoke Road. Fred Foot and Joseph Annin made corn liquor and there was a still at the Beechnut lot (at the end of the creekside park off Wolcott Street.)

Jonathan LeBarron operated a still north of the village on Red Mill Road near the still owned by Jacob LeRoy. LeRoy's still was the largest west of the Genesee River and "was devoted to the manufacture of proof spirits for the Albany market." In 1831, Jacob LeRoy offered his brewery for sale along



with the fixtures "all of which are in good order, together with a quantity of barrels."

While I was in Denmark this last summer, I had an opportunity to visit a large museum that actually makes beer the old way. We had a chance to sample some of the brew and some of it was pretty good, but one was so thick, you had to chew it and another so bitter, it almost brought tears to your eyes. I understand that Genesee Country Museum will be brewing beer this next year in their 19th Century brewery, but I suspect there won't be any samples.

So in LeRoy, there certainly was a good supply of liquid refreshment. As the temperance movement gathered momentum before the Civil War, there were attempts to limit and prohibit the

production and consumption of alcohol. But with the issues of slavery and the Civil War, the temperance movement was all but forgotten. It would not become an issue until the turn of the century and although corn whiskey was no longer produced in LeRoy, it certainly was consumed in many bars and taverns.

The photograph was brought in by Ed Mooney and it was taken in 1910 at Giles & McCarthy's Saloon at 54 Main Street (in the old Lampson Block.) On the left is Dan McCarthy and on the right is Ned Giles. An array of stuffed animals, including a fox and pheasant look down from a lofty perch and McCarthy and Giles have brought out some of their "curiosities" which appear to be a collection of small guns, re-

volvers, bayonets, powder horns and pistols. (Wonder where that collection is today?)

McCarthy and Giles are listed in the 1905 Village Directory, along with Callan & Keenan at 5 Bank Street (which advertised the Best Brand Ales, Liquors and Cigars, as well as Canandaigua Ale always on draught), A.J. Kavanaugh's at 14 Main Street (which offered a First Class Sample Room with Smith's Philadelphia Pale Ale and First Class Bowling Alleys with Pool and Billiards), Lally's at 39 Main Street, W.C. Reed at 31 Main Street and Vanderberg & Murphy's Restaurant and Thirst Parlor at 44 Main Street - not a saloon, but a thirst parlor!



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