

# The Post Office

by Lynne Belluscio

The image on the Festival shirt this year depicts the LeRoy Post Office. Last week I included a history of the ZIP code, but this week I thought it would be good to have information on the building which was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1990.

LeRoy would have been stuck with a rather drab building if it hadn't been for the tenacity of Ernest Woodward. It took over eleven years to complete the project. In 1927 Ernest Woodward offered to donate the property on the corner of Mill Street and Main and the end of the bridge. At that time the yearly receipts collected at the LeRoy Post Office surpassed those collected in nearby Batavia and more than double the amount collected at the post office in Canandaigua. Yet both Batavia and Canandaigua had federal buildings and LeRoy still rented office space on Main Street.

In June of 1928, the Congressional Committee on Allocations asked that a deed to the property owned by Ernest Woodward, be procured. In February 1929, \$100,000 was allocated for the LeRoy Post Office but a month later it was noted that even though the money had been allocated, the work would not begin.

In November, the *Gazette* noted that the Public Building Program initiated by President Hoover would further the project along. But a month later, hopes were dashed when LeRoy was not included on the list of post offices to be built in New York. Ernest was determined to get a new post office. In April the LeRoy Post Office was on the Presidential List and by August, the federal government was accepting proposals. In September, the Fourth Assistant Postmaster General, John Philip, visited LeRoy to view the property donated by Woodward. In November, Julian Morton of Washington, Inspector of Federal Buildings and H.E. Niccloy, acting inspector for New York State, met with Mr. Woodward. After a ground inspection, they took a plane from the D.W. Airport to view the site

from above. Although the property did not have the frontage that was usually required, both men stated that the site possessed so many other advantages, that they would officially accept the offer made by Woodward.

However, in December Woodward was asked to acquire additional land to the East and to the North from the Niagara Hudson Company, which he did. The Treasury Department refused to accept the deed because of the liability of potential flood damage. Woodward was undaunted and traveled many times to Washington. Eventually the problem was solved when Woodward purchased a surety bond absolving the Niagara Hudson Company from any damage by flood water.

It was now April of 1932 and a dispatch from Washington stated that James Arnold of Rochester had been selected as the architect, at the suggestion of Woodward. Preliminary plans were submitted in June after Woodward insisted that stone be used instead of the customary brick. A month later a petition was signed by Village officials, Congressman Saunders and Postmaster Houston and submitted to the Treasury Office for consideration. Not only did they want stone, they wanted "native" stone.

In February 1933, the plans were approved and it was time to advertise for bids, but not before Woodward had to sink some more money into preparing the site as required by the government. Then on May 10, President Franklin Roosevelt ordered the abandonment of the Post Office project. It was decided that the Reforestation Project was more important. But,



once again, hopes were revived a month later and in September it was estimated that of the original \$100,000 appropriated, \$10,000 was needed for the furniture and equipment and a very large portion of the money was necessary for the retaining wall along the creek. Only \$21,000 was left for the building itself. The architect estimated that the project would need \$65,000.

For two years, Washington haggled over the appropriation for the Post Office. And in the meantime new plans were being drawn up by staff members in the office of the supervising architect in the Treasury Department. The plans were said to be "almost an exact replica of the famous Radcliffe Memorial Library in Oxford England."

The retaining wall project began in June 1935, but the Village declined the WPA proposal stating that the Village had already placed fill in the site and that the government should assume the entire cost. Work was finally started on the retaining wall, but there were problems with the building. Although everyone wanted native stone, there were no longer any stone cutters in the area who could do the work. So it was decided to acquire Indiana limestone that was very similar to the local Onondaga limestone.

The contractor, William Watson of Kenmore, who had submit-

ted the low bid for the building, went bankrupt in March of 1936. Work began again in April with Werner Spitz from Rochester. The corner stone was laid August 19, 1936 without any ceremonies.

Over and over, the dedication of the building was postponed. Finally a dedication was set for March 31, 1937 but no sooner had the date been set when plans for remodeling the building were announced. Ernest Woodward didn't like the short squatty look of the building. He wanted to raise the roof - literally. With work on the roof still being talked about, the building was occupied on June 19, 1937.

Once again, bids for the roof project were recalled and frantic phone calls and letters were exchanged with Washington. Eventually work was begun on the roof and clock tower. The electric clock was placed into position on January 10, 1938. The grounds were graded, seeded, trees were planted and an ornamental fence installed along the retaining wall -- again at the expense of Ernest Woodward. It was said that Ernest Woodward put more money into the post office than the federal government. The building was finally dedicated on August 20, 1938. It took over 11 years to complete the project, but finally LeRoy had a suitable post office -- a tribute to the tenacity of Ernest Woodward.