

The Missing Picture

by Lynne Belluscio

Last year when I was collecting photographs for the book on LeRoy, I looked high and low for a picture of the cattle drive over the Main Street Bridge, but to no avail. I simply couldn't find it. Last week, I opened an envelope and there it was. In fact, I found the negative and ten prints and two others shots of the steers on the bridge.

Each was carefully labeled on the back: "July 6, 1909 – About 1/3 of drove of fat cattle on the way from the Keeney Stock Farm north of LeRoy Village to the N.Y.C. & H. R.R. depot in LeRoy where the drove filled 18 stock cars to carry them to East Buffalo for sale." According to the *LeRoy Gazette*, the steers were being taken to the New York Central stock yards in Buffalo then shipped to New York City.

The 251 head of cattle belonged to Schwarachild and Salzberger & Company of New York, who had sent them to the Keeney farm to be fattened for market. Keeney had been conducting experiments with cattle feed and these steers averaged 1,300 pounds apiece, with only 50 pounds difference between any of them. The steers sold for 6 ¾ cents a pound, for a total of \$22,025.25. Some were to be exported and others were to be slaughtered in New York.

As you look at the picture, notice that Main Street is not paved. The new concrete bridge had

been completed, but it would be a while before the bridge would be paved.

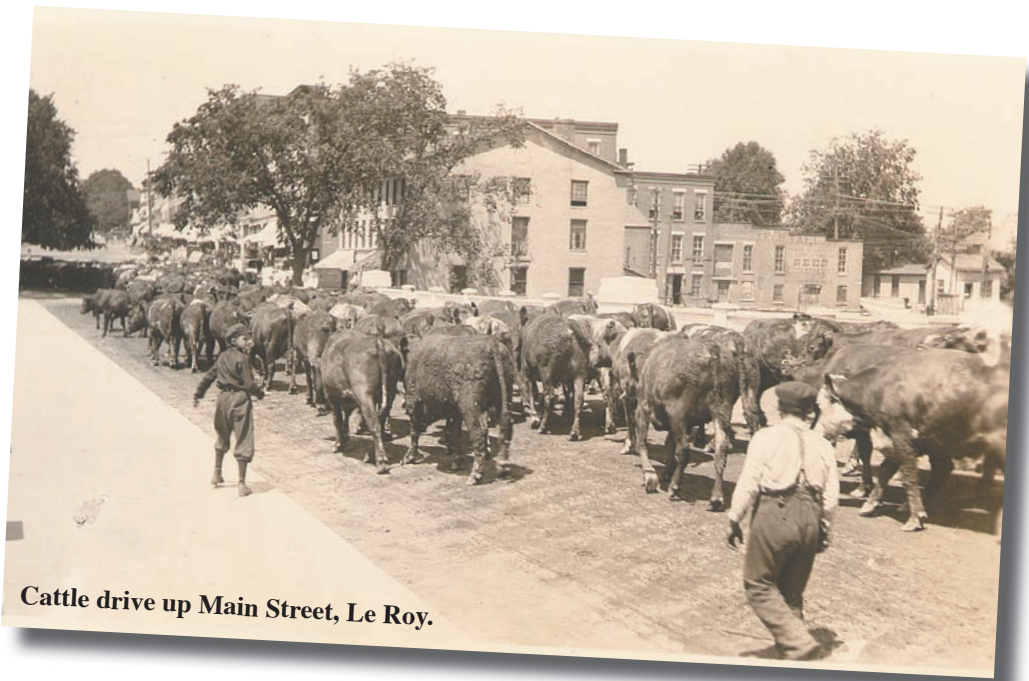
Although it seems strange to see a cattle drive on Main Street in 1909, in the late 1700s, cattle were driven to the Niagara Frontier from the East Coast. In Turner's *Pioneer History of the Holland Purchase*, the following account is recorded: "In the summer of 1787, Silas Hopkins was one of a number of young men who assisted his father in driving a herd of cattle from New Jersey to Niagara. They followed the Susquehanna River to Tioga, in general, the route of Sullivan's army in 1779. Then, using for the most part, Indian trails, they proceeded to Newton Point,

Horseheads, Catherine's Town (at the head of Seneca Lake), Kanadesaega (near the present-day Geneva), Canandaigua, Canawagus (now Avon), the Great Bend for the Tonawanda (Batavia), Tonawanda Indian village and thence to Niagara. (There is a good chance they came through LeRoy) The New Jersey drovers sold their cattle principally to men who, during the Revolution, had composed the force known as Butler's Rangers . . ."

Up until 1835, settlers were able to pay off their debts with wheat, but sometimes the cattle market was better and the company agents for the Holland Purchase agreed to take cattle in payment. In 1827, the Company's

agents bought up cattle from the settlers and when sold, the cattle brought over \$30,000. In the summer of 1830, 149 head of cattle were collected in Cattaraugus and Allegany Counties. The cost had been \$3,014.50. Advertising and the cost of driving the cattle to market brought the total expense to \$3,464.32. The cattle were driven to Philadelphia and sold for \$2,825.80. The Land Company lost over \$600. A year later, a smaller herd was gathered and it too lost money for the Company. Yet, the Holland Land Company believed that at least they were collecting something against the land mortgages, which otherwise they would have lost.

Between 1822 and 1836, the Holland Land Company's total expenditure on the cattle account was \$510,117.26. The cost of collecting and bringing the cattle to market was about 15% of the total. During that same period of time, the Company accepted only \$115,000 in the payment of wheat. It is hard to imagine the difficulties of driving herds of cattle through the thick woods and underbrush, much less crossing streams and rivers on the way to markets in Philadelphia. The Keeney cattle were loaded into cattle cars and taken by railroad to market. An undated photograph in the Keeney collection shows the long line of cattle cars on the Lehigh Valley train headed for Jersey City.



Cattle drive up Main Street, Le Roy.



Cattle cars to New Jersey.