

A Sense Of Place

by Lynne Belluscio

I am writing this a few days earlier than usual. Actually, it is April 1, so it is hard not to mention the pink birds that appeared in the front yard this morning. Of course they are all standing on one foot because it is so cold. I was expecting a larger flock, but they seem to know that the weather is not warming up as early as usual. I promised that I would move them up to the Museum of Curiosities tonight and they can stay there for the summer. They will be able to share the true story of the LeRoy flamingoes with all the visitors.

This Sunday I am heading off to Buffalo for the annual meeting of the Museum Association of New York. It will be interesting to find out what's going on. From what I hear, more and more people are going to museums, but because many of them rely on government funds, they are short staffed. Since we don't rely on government money, we have to rely on gift shop sales, chicken BBQs, the dinner auction and admission. We are doing OK.

Our attendance this year is about what it was last year. People still want t-shirts and brain molds. Already, since January, we have had visitors from 24 different states and several foreign countries. Starting last weekend we are open seven days a week and attendance will be picking up. We're waiting for a shipment of brain molds from California. So spring must be right around the corner.

The museum conference sent out a questionnaire today and the final question was "In three words state the value of museums." Actually that was easy. I e-mailed back: "A sense of place." I truly believe that. If we are to have any idea of why we are here, and what we are doing, we need to have a strong sense of place and the only way we can know what that is, is to know what has gone before. With that said, I would add that "the past is a guidepost not a hitching post."

Sure, I enjoy reading the old *LeRoy Gazette*, but I am always amazed at how history repeats itself. Right now Ruth Harvie is



reading through the 1911 *LeRoy Gazette*. A day doesn't go by if she doesn't laugh and say, "Lynne, you won't believe this." Yesterday she found an article in the February 1 issue about a letter that was sent to James Smith who owned a harness store on Main Street. The letter was written from a man in Spain who claimed that he was imprisoned in Madrid. He asked Mr. Smith for money so he could obtain records from America that would prove that he was innocent. If Mr. Smith would send the money, he would receive one third of the \$480,000 that was being held in a secret place in America.

The letter read: "Dear Sir, Although I know you only from good references of your honest, my sad situation compels me to reveal to you an important affair in which you can procure a modest fortune, saving at the same time that of my darling daughter. Before being imprisoned here I was established as a banker in Russia as you will see by the enclosed article about me of many English newspapers which have published my arrest in London ... I beseech you to help me obtain a sum of \$480,000 dollars I have in America and to come here to raise the seizure of my baggage. ... As a reward I will give up to you the third part ... Awaiting you cable to instruct you in all

my secret ..." The *Gazette* went on to say that "There are always victims to such schemes and it is said that considerable money is secured in this way by the swindler. Their plan in securing the money is so safely guarded that it is hard for the authorities to arrest or convict them." (I think I received an e-mail last week that was like this!)

And on to other news in the 1911 *Gazette*. It seems that Governor Dix of New York was having trouble with the State Highway Commission and he was proposing to abolish the commission. He had blocked the bidding on contracts, which would have given Tammany

contractors a chance to submit bids. "It is far from anybody's belief here that the Governor intentionally is interfering to give Tammany contractors a chance to get the cream of the \$3,750,000 but the result is going to be just that. So speedy a procedure can be accomplished since the Governor has both houses of the Legislature with him." It also appeared that the former mayor of Syracuse, had been making several visits to Albany and he was a selling agent for a large asphalt company. (I guess state politics has always been about how much power the governor has.)

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