

# Charlotte LeRoy

by Lynne Belluscio

I've been portraying Mrs. LeRoy this week for the first grades, and to be honest, we really don't know much about Charlotte Downes Otis LeRoy. We do not have an image of her, although we do have a charcoal drawing of her mother—a woman dressed in the highest fashion of the early 1800s with a turban on her head.

Charlotte was born in Boston on October 15, 1800. Her father, Thomas Otis, was an importer of dry goods in Boston, with the firm of Otis and Holburn. In 1802, Charlotte's sister, Helen, was born in Boston and about that time, Thomas Otis dissolved the business in Boston and moved his family to New York City and established the business of Otis and Swan.

There is little information about the Otis family during this time. Thomas went to Manchester, England for business and apparently made a sizable fortune. Whether he took his family is not known, although some undocumented sources indicate that Charlotte was educated abroad. Her mother died in Paris in 1820 and was buried in Pere la Chaise Cemetery of Paris. It's possible that both Charlotte and Helen were with their mother in Paris.

A year later, on May 20, 1821, Charlotte married Jacob LeRoy. He was twenty seven and had attended Yale University for 3 years and then had gone to work at his father's firm in New York. It is not exactly clear when Jacob and Charlotte moved to LeRoy. Supposedly they came in 1822 and lived at the boarding house operated by "Auntie Wemple" until work was completed on their house. The original brick land office was enlarged, with a stone addition on the back and a third floor ballroom, which we now call LeRoy House.

On July 7, 1823, their first son, Thomas Otis LeRoy was born, followed thirteen months later with Augustus Newbold born August 23, 1824. Charlotte Downes LeRoy was born February 5, 1826 and a year later, Caroline Louisa on February

20, 1827. (She died four years later on December 15, 1831.) Helen Otis LeRoy was born Sept. 18, 1828. Another daughter, Catherine Augusta was born May 4, 1830. Edward Augustus was born June 14, 1833. Julia Edgar was born November 28, 1834. (She died July 29, 1836.) Louisa was born July 6, 1837 and the last child, Mary Caroline was born May 16, 1841 after the family moved back to New York City. So it is safe to say, that most of the time that Charlotte LeRoy lived in town, she was pregnant.

With a house full of children, it is believed that she had a governess and we know she had a cook. A couple of the boys could have attended the school at the Round House on West Main Street. Probably, the children were educated at home.

There are a few clues in the objects that remain from the LeRoy family that give us a glimpse of their life style. Jacob's desk is of French design and the brass candlesticks were made in France. Perhaps Charlotte, if she indeed attended school in Europe preferred the French designs. From her manuscript collection of receipts (recipes) we can see that she very much liked lemons. Lemons were very expensive, coming all the way from the Mediterranean region and Spain. And the white sugar to sweeten the lemons came from sugar plantations in the Caribbean. Most people in LeRoy probably had never seen lemons, much less had white sugar to sweeten them.

Of course, Charlotte had her cook prepare all the food for family and friends in the basement kitchen and then served upstairs in the back dining room (now the 1930s kitchen). There is account that Mrs. LeRoy always had afternoon tea in the back parlor, set directly on the mahogany tea table, as was the fashion of the time. Her gold band china sugar bowl was given to the Historical Society many years ago, along with her Britannia tea pot.

In 1833, Charlotte received a letter from Caroline LeRoy Webster, her sister-in-law, who was married to Daniel Webster.



The Websters were coming from Boston and were stopping by for a visit, but only for one day. That was probably a good plan since Charlotte was more than eight months pregnant. She gave birth to her seventh child, Edward Augustus, two weeks later.

It was said that Mrs. LeRoy played the organ at St. Mark's Church, but we don't know for sure. And there has always been a story that the LeRois bought the bell for St. Mark's Church and Mrs. LeRoy would have the bell rung at the end of the service to notify her carriage driver to bring the horses around to pick her up. This may be one of the LeRoy legends that will always be hard to prove.

Another story, is that she bought the first piano in LeRoy and eventually it was sold and the working parts removed and the piano cabinet was made into a table. At one time I was told that

the piano case table that we have in our archives was the LeRoy piano, but again, the research is not conclusive.

Jacob and Charlotte moved back to New York and not much is known about their city life -- to be exact -- nothing is known about their life in New York City.

Charlotte's father died in 1841 and left his sizable estate to Charlotte and her sister Helen. (Helen was married to one of Jacob's cousins, Jacob Rutgers LeRoy, to make matters confusing.) Charlotte Downes Otis LeRoy died in New York City on November 26, 1851 and was buried in the LeRoy family plot in Woodlawn Cemetery. Two years later, Jacob married Charlotte Downes Otis' cousin, whose name was Charlotte Otis Downes.

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