June 8, 1812-2012 - Our Bicentennial?
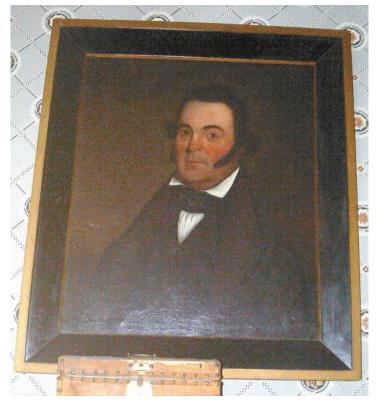
by Lynne Belluscio

Irene Walters, the Town Historian, stopped in today and we talked a bit about what the Town of LeRoy might do to celebrate its Bicentennial.

Of course the first thing I said, was that someone needs to decide what date we are going to celebrate. On June 8, 1812, the State Legislature set apart the western half of the Town of Caledonia as a new town by the name of Bellona. (It also established the Towns of Alexander, Bethany and Pembroke.) The original footprint of Bellona included the present Town of Pavilion, the present Town of Stafford and the western part of the present Town of York.

However, the law did not go into effect until March 1, 1813. (It reminds me that we celebrate the Fourth of July because the Declaration of Independence was "in the works" but we had to fight the Revolution be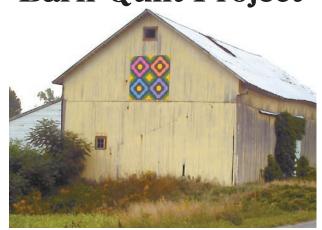fore we could exercise our right to be free of British rule.) So in the meantime, someone in the upcoming Town of Bellona didn't like the name. After all, Bellona was the Roman Goddess of War. (Another note: The US Congress had voted for war with Great Britain on June 4 and June 8, 1812 and the US declared war on June 12. War was certainly on the minds of Americans in June 1812!) In April 1813, the State Legislature decided it was OK to change the name of the Town from Bellona to LeRoy. It became effective on May 10, 1813.

The first Town meeting was held on Tuesday, April 6, 1813 at the "school house near Stoddard's Mill." It is generally believed that this school house was the building on what we know as Trigon Park. Perhaps the room was too small, but for some reason, they adjourned to the "square outside the house." The order of business: That $50 be

Doctor William Sheldon first Town Supervisor.

raised for the support of the poor; that William Sheldon be the first Supervisor and Thomas Tufts be the Town Clerk; Ella Smith to be the collector; John Ganson and Asa Buel be Overseers of the Poor; Zalmon Jewell, Daniel Biddleman and Harvey Prindice be Commissioners of Roads. They decided to choose three constables and to build a pound (for stray cows and horses). Boars were not allowed to run at large after a month old or the owner would be fined $3. There was not a bounty on wolves but there was a 50 cent bounty on every fox killed in the town. And they decided to raise $14 for the purchase of books for the town's minutes. (Those books are at the Town Hall.)

The first Town Supervisor, Dr. William Sheldon, came originally from Rupert, Vermont. Born in 1788, he came to the Genesee country on horseback in 1810. He had very little money and only a few medical instruments in his saddlebags, including a lancet for blood letting and a turnkey for extracting teeth.

He stopped at the Ganson Inn, not knowing how he would pay for his room and board. But Mrs. Ganson was ill and Dr. Sheldon treated her in exchange for his bill. He was encouraged to stay in the Ganson settlement and he married a young widow, Harriet Bates, in the fall of 1812.

Sheldon was also involved with the local militia and served as surgeon in seven battles during the War of 1812. He was appointed Aide de Camp for Colonel Davis from LeRoy. Davis was mortally wounded trying to retake Fort George and died in the arms of Dr. Sheldon. Sheldon was captured by the British and sent to Montreal where he was severely treated. He was released six months later but carried a deep hatred for the British all his life. He died in 1873.

After the Town of LeRoy was formed in 1812 (or 1813) it soon was being eaten away. In 1817 the southern part was combined with part of the Town of Perry to form Covington. In 1820, the eastern part of the Town of Batavia and the western part of the Town of LeRoy became Stafford. In 1841 and 1842, the southern part of LeRoy combined with part of Covington to become Pavilion.

So there are a couple of dates that might be used for a Town of LeRoy Bicentennial: June 8, 2012, March 1, 2013, or May 10, 2013 - - - or maybe we could just party for a year.

The Second of LeRoy's Bicentennial Barn Quilt Project

Last Sunday a small but dedicated crew erected the second Barn Quilt on Conlon Road. The barn, which is owned by Stein Farms, was probably built before the Civil War by Alex MacPherson and is a typical English style, three bay barn with a threshing floor with doors that at one time opened to allow the wind to blow the chaff from the grain as it was threshed on the floor.

For many years, the barn was part of the Baker Brothers cabbage and potato farm in LeRoy and cabbage storage units were added on two sides. The quilt pattern and color scheme was taken from a quilt owned by Shelly Stein's great grandmother and is known as "Nonesuch" or "Friendship Pattern." The Steins have already designed another 8 x 8 barn quilt that will be put up on their barn on Gully Road.