

The Black Diamond

by Lynne Belluscio

I've been working with Dan Diskin at Crocker's to come up with a barn quilt for the side of Crocker's store and they thought it would be great to use "railroad crossing" for the design, because at one time, the Lehigh Valley Railroad passed right behind the store.

When I looked up the design, it was prophetic, because running through the design are two strips of diamonds. And the name of the passenger service on the Lehigh? It was the "Black Diamond." So without hesitation, I painted the diamonds black with silver gray stripes for the rails and bright Ace Hardware red in the four triangles. It will be an eye catcher for sure.

As I was talking with Dan, he said, "Hey, I have a photo of the North LeRoy Lehigh station that was here." "I've never seen a photo of the station. I have plenty of pictures of the Black Diamond wreck of 1922, but nothing of the station." Dan said that Ed Mooney had given him the photo, so I have made copies for the files. I did a little research on the Lehigh and called Ed Mooney, who filled me in on some great stories.

The Lehigh Valley Railroad had its beginnings in Pennsylvania in 1846. It was designed to haul anthracite coal. It moved into New Jersey and finally into New York in the early 1880s, eventually connecting with Buffalo. In 1896, the Lehigh began passenger service between Buffalo and New York City. This became known as the Black Diamond line, named for the black anthracite coal.

A wreck of the Black Diamond in 1922 near the North LeRoy station killed 5 people and injured forty more. At that time, the crossing of Lake Road was at grade. It



The North LeRoy Lehigh Valley passenger station located on the south side of the tracks (near Crocker's Ace Hardware). In 1932, Clarence Crocker was the local GAF agent and he unloaded bags of stock feed at North LeRoy. Coal was stored in hopper cars on the siding and delivered to homes in the area. In 1969, the Crocker brothers built the store on the corner and moved the hardware business from Selden Road. Judd Crocker's son, the third generation and Dan Diskin own the business now. Crocker's Ace Hardware and Potter Lumber are helping with the Bicentennial Barn Project.

wasn't until later that the trestle was built across Route 19. (That trestle and the one in Caledonia were removed nearly 15 years ago.) The Lehigh had stations in Stafford and Batavia to the west and Caledonia to the east.

Ed Mooney told me that when he was working on the farm near Cox Road, the Lehigh would come through in the morning at 11:00 am and back at 7:00 pm. You could set your watch by the train, it was almost always on time. During World War I, seven men from LeRoy who worked at the Jell-O factory, had joined the army and were transported from Buffalo, on the Lehigh to Camp Wadsworth in South Carolina. His father was one of those soldiers, and as the train came into North LeRoy, the engine slowed so the men could wave to their wives and sweethearts.

His father wrote a note to his wife and wrapped it around a broom handle, and threw it off the train. Ed said that the broom handle was in their house for a long time, but he doesn't know where it went. He also told me, that during that time, soldiers were assigned to guard

the bridge over the Oatka Creek near Buttermilk Falls. (I am still trying to find out when that bridge was built.)

In 1936, the station at North LeRoy burned and it seems that passenger service was disrupted. Passenger service declined and the Lehigh ended all service in 1961, but retained freight service into the 1970s. A chemical spill east of LeRoy, at the Lehigh crossing at Gulf Road in 1970, contaminated wells east of the site and continues to be monitored today. I remember working at Genesee Country Museum in the early '70s when the Lehigh freight train still ran on the tracks behind the Museum access road. It was a very sad day for the Director, Stuart Bolger, an avid railroad buff, when service stopped.

It will take a little digging to find out more about the Lehigh Valley Railroad in LeRoy. I hope to find out when the station was built and I'm sure I can find out more about the bridge, if I look to the studies for its use as a bypass for the gravel trucks. So if anyone has some history or photographs to share, let me know.

5th Barn Quilt For The LeRoy Bicentennial



Crocker's Barn Quilt, "Railroad Crossing" in the process of being painted on the back porch of LeRoy House.