

When The Eagles Return To LeRoy

by Lynne Belluscio

My daughter sent me a photo on Saturday of the eagle that has been in the neighborhood. The picture was taken over on Conlon Road near Frost Ridge Campground. I know that there have been eagles in the area for the last couple of years and whether this fellow will stay around for a few months is not certain.

I do know that I'm not letting my chickens out, and I'm keeping an eye on my cats for a while. Then I got to wondering, if the return of the eagles is the reason why the flamingoes haven't been seen in a few years. Each year I put out the flamingo decoys in the front yard of LeRoy House, hoping that it will attract the pink feathered friends, but no one has seen a flamingo in quite a while. Just in case you don't know about the LeRoy flamingoes, here is the story as it was printed in the *Pennysaver* in the April 1, 1989.

"One of the most unusual stories that has surfaced recently is that in the good old days – when the first settlers came to Bellona (that was the name of LeRoy before the LeRois arrived) there was nesting on Allen's Creek (that was the name of Oatka Creek realized that it would be confused with a similar place in Pittsford) of a small flock of pink flamingoes. They were often feeding on shrimp above Buttermilk Falls (that was before the dam was in place and the rapids in town were known as Buttermilk Falls.) It would be much later when the Falls up north – or downstream – would be called Buttermilk Falls.) The birds would often roost in the "Beeches" an area on the east side of the creek. The birds would winter in Florida and arrive in LeRoy every spring on April 1st. They would build their nests on the tallest chimneys in town and it was considered good luck to have a flamingo on your roof.

A tavernkeeper on the west bank of the creek, named his establishment after the birds, but when the village fathers decided to hold their first village meeting at the tavern, they insisted that he change the name, and so it became the Eagle Hotel – which sounded a whole lot better than the Flamingo Bar.

It is told that on a particularly balmy evening, while Caroline



Photo by - Ameka Cooper.

LeRoy and Daniel Webster were strolling down to the creekside to watch the flamingoes feed, that Daniel was so overcome by the beauty of the birds, that he proposed to Caroline on the spot. Later when asked what prompted him to propose, he said that he just felt "in the pink" which was the origin of a familiar phrase still used today.

In the 1860s, it was evident that the birds were not as healthy as they should be, and it was determined that they suffered from lice. A young boy, only thirteen years old, by the name of Orator Woodward, would invent plaster-of-Paris eggs that could be medicated and placed in the flamingo nests that would kill the lice. Orator went on to adapt the eggs for the use with chickens, and he would make a handsome amount of money, even before

he bought the rights to the Jell-O recipe. Few people know that the first Jell-O molds were actually the old molds that Orator used to cast the plaster flamingo eggs.

Suddenly, one year, although no one knows for sure which year, the flamingoes disappeared. Some people blamed it on all the fried shrimp dinners, shrimp scampi, and shrimp cocktails served in the local restaurants that depleted the birds' source of food. Some said that they flew to Cheektowaga. Others said they flew to Cypress Gardens. In any event, LeRoyans were sad to see the birds go. Hoping to attract flamingoes flying over the Village, many people bought decoys and placed them in their yards. Through the years, the decoys have never attracted one single flamingo and today there is not a person alive that remembers the excitement on

April 1st, when the flamingoes returned to LeRoy."

I have been putting flamingo decoys in the front yard of LeRoy House since 1989. This will be the 25th year and in all the years, this year is the first that I wonder if I'll be able to get the sticks in the ground because it is so frozen. Some years it has been balmy. Some years, they have gotten pretty wet in April showers. Other years, the birds have stood in the snow, but the ground has always thawed. Which brings me to another fact about the LeRoy flamingoes. You can always tell if it's a LeRoy flamingo because they always stand on one foot, and that's because the water in the creek is always so cold. I just was uptown and this year, the creek isn't cold - - its still frozen!!!. Not much hope for the return of the pink flamingoes.



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10am - 4pm

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