

Kindergarteners

by Lynne Belluscio

This week we've hosted the kindergarten students from Wolcott Street School. They try very hard to sit quietly on the floor and concentrate on the program, but if you know kindergarteners very well, you know they are easily distracted.

The first group that walked over to LeRoy House were fascinated with Mrs. Furr's necklace. "Is your necklace made out of cereal?" one eager boy asked. "Well, no it isn't but I guess you're right it looks like cereal. But today we are going to look at the things in Grandma's trunk. Can you find something old to hold up?" And so it progressed.

An opportunity to compare old things in Grandma's Trunk with new things in the plastic tote. It's important to remember that for these five-year olds, anything before 2009 is old. But they do a great job. They hold up a candlestick and an electric lamp - - a feather pen and a ballpoint pen. There's a pad of paper and a slate - - a roll of paper towels and a cotton towel - - a pack of Kleenex and a handkerchief.

This year we added a digital game and a wooden Jacob's ladder. "A lot of these new things have electric cords on them. Do any of the old things need electricity?" "And what happens when we use the paper plate, or the plastic cup, or the paper towel? We throw them away don't we?" "We throw away a lot of stuff today, but grandma didn't."

Actually we are probably talking about great-great grandma. This activity is very appropriate for kindergarteners. And when they go back to their classroom, they have two activity sheets that reinforces their experiences.

The idea of kindergartens was developed in Europe in the early 19th century. Actually some sources trace the idea of schooling for pre-schoolers earlier. It wasn't until 1856 that a kindergarten was started in the United States and that was in Watertown, Wisconsin, but it was a German speaking school. The earliest English speaking kindergarten was in Boston.

In 1860, Elizabeth Peabody established an English speaking kindergarten and Conrad Poppenhusen offered a free kindergarten in 1870. The first publicly financed kindergarten was in St. Louis, Missouri, by Susan Blow. In LeRoy, Professor Russell, who was from Boston, is credited with initiating kindergarten classes in LeRoy. He was the principal of the LeRoy Academic Institute. He believed that students should



look forward to going to school and that school was a pleasure rather than a penance.

Early kindergartens were based on the premise that young children should learn how to interact socially and that when the parents were working, those opportunities were not available. It was important to learn manners;

how to listen to directions; how to take turns; how to follow directions and how to play well with other children. As the idea of kindergartens changed, they became more education oriented and it was important to learn the alphabet, to read numbers, to write your name, how to tie your shoes. Today a lot more is expected of

kindergarteners, yet they still have to master how to sit still and listen and how to follow directions. The experiences they have in kindergarten will last them throughout their entire school years.

I remember the kindergarten room at #49 school in Rochester and our teacher Miss Narramore, a very tall lady who had to fold her legs under her to sit on the little low chairs. There were wonderful wooden blocks and a toy area to play in. The painting easels were covered with paint, but it was always a special day when we had a chance to do a painting and not have it drip down the page!

We at the Historical Society, hope that the kindergarteners will remember their visits to LeRoy House fondly - and the lady with the necklace that looks like cereal.