

# School's Out

by Lynne Belluscio

"The boys of this village are in trouble. The schools have closed, and we boys are to have our usual summer's vacation from the fatigues of school life. But the question is, how and in what way shall we be permitted to enjoy the sports and pleasures which vacation brings us? Willie Huyck and I have been looking over the field and we don't find, after a days hunt, a play ground in town where the boys can get off a pound of fun of any kind. No place to play ball, nor fly the kite, nor swim, nor to sport in any of the games we are master of. There is



nothing in the way of play that the boys take delight in, but we are told wherever we go that 'there is some law against it.' We are met by this kind of talk no matter where we go. We think this is some tough on us boys. Please tell us what we shall do and where we can find a playground where we can play unmolested."

Things were pretty tough in July 1879, when John Anderson wrote this letter to the *LeRoy Gazette*. And a week later Eltie Cochran chimed in and wrote: "I and Willie Bolt have been looking for a place to play ball but we have not found one yet. If anybody knows of a place let us know." And to make matters worse, it looked as if the local swimming hole was going to be closed: "We understand with regret that a manifesto has gone forth that the boys of our village are to be deprived of the only sport left to them within the limits of the corporation—that of bathing at the hemlocks or the willows were their fathers bathed unmolested forty years ago – or as long as LeRoy has been a village. It seems to us that this should not be done and especially in the absence of swimming baths so essential to health and cleanliness in towns and cities and which is so rapidly gaining favor in the public mind.

Where else can the three hundred boys of our village go to deport themselves in this most enjoyable and healthful pastime? These old swimming places should be perpetually secured to the boys or places equally available for sanitary reasons if for on other. Would it not be a good plan at least until we have something better provided for the trustees of the village to designate some portion of the creek above Lodi bridge between two points where our boys can without molestation enjoy this most useful and delightful exercise."

I haven't been able to find out what happened that summer. Did the Village fathers change their minds? Were the boys allowed to go swimming at the Willows? Did someone offer a field for the boys to play ball? Or was it the summer that the boys couldn't "get off a pound of fun," as John Anderson wrote.

It would be another fifty years before LeRoy established a recreation program. In 1922 Mayor H.B. Ward created the LeRoy Recreation Commission. There would be swimming at Red Bridge behind the Munson Street dam. The old Kellogg house on the corner of Church Street (later demolished) was the local community center with a reading room and table tennis and other indoor activities.

The Recreation Commission also oversaw skating in the winter on the Creek and the flooded tennis courts. The athletic field behind the high school was used for baseball, volley ball, soccer-football and track events. There were plans to build a pool along Mill Street next to the creek. (Behind the present-day post office – which hadn't been built yet.) The tennis courts and the Clubhouse at Summit Street and Wolcott Street had been donated to the Village by Donald Woodward.

The Village had made it possible for boys to go camping at Lake Ontario and Conesus Lake and utilized a camp at Silver Lake. All of the activities were under the direction of Daniel Carroll who had been an instructor at the Department of Health Education at Edinboro State Normal School in Pennsylvania.

In a little book, published in 1925 "Where and How LeRoy Plays," the Recreation Commission listed several additional "needs" that would enhance the Recreation Commission. "A new and safe swimming pool. A regulation playground with wading pool for smaller children. At least two bowling greens for men, in the new park. A basketball floor available for boys and girls outside of school hours. A permanent clubhouse for boys

and girls, for scouting and other organizations. And someday, a fine modern indoor swimming pool for everybody."

The introduction in the book includes this paragraph: "It is often said, 'My generation grew up without being so pampered. We made good citizens. Why all this fuss and expense over organized play? Very good and wise words these would be if conditions facing our young folks today were the same as they were a generation ago.

A multiplication of interests, and enormous expansion of entertainment, a magic facility for transportation have brought complications into the lives of our boys and girls. He who trusts them solely to the undirected regime of the simple days before the movies, the modern dance, the new liquor problems and the motor car will doubtless come to the conclusion some morning that the whole world is going to the dogs - - which isn't the case at all. Any disasters will only mean that there are a lot of indifferent adults that have to be painfully taught that the world changes."

