

# Come To LeRoy House April 1st & 2nd and Look For Flamingo Eggs

by Lynne Belluscio

“There is not a person alive that remembers the excitement on April 1st when the flamingoes returned to LeRoy . . .”

It is a tradition in Washington, D.C. to have an Easter Egg Roll on the front lawn of the White House. In fact, a few years ago, when I was in Washington, I happened to see all the preparations being made for this colorful event. Thousands of people flock to the White House to find, roll and in some cases throw, Easter Eggs.

Although there are unsubstantiated stories that Dolly Madison may have had Easter egg rolls, it is generally accepted that the first Easter egg roll for the public was held on April 2, 1877, on the grounds of the United States Capital. Rutherford Hayes was President.

Many years later, Franklin Roosevelt halted the event but Dwight Eisenhower reinstated the event on April 6, 1953 and relocated it to the White House lawn where it has been held every year since. What most people don't know is that the Easter Egg Roll was a popular event in LeRoy, over forty years before Rutherford Hayes began the tradition in 1877.

As most of you know an unusual phenomenon occurred in LeRoy on April 1 every year. This was the day that the huge flocks of flamingoes returned to nest on the chimneys of the houses in LeRoy and to eat the large quantities of fresh water shrimp that lived in the waters of Oatka Creek.

You might have read several years ago that Jacob and Charlotte LeRoy always hosted the annual Flamingo Cotillion here at LeRoy House, and each year the decorations were unique and elegant.

One year – it was 1837 to be exact and the reason why I remember that day is because that was the year Marietta and Emily Ingham were invited to the party. They had gone first to Attica to begin a girls' seminary, but a committee of people went to Attica to persuade the Ingham sisters to come to LeRoy and establish a school on the banks of the great Oatka Creek.

Emily and Marietta arrived in town in the early spring – probably

around the end of March. They still hadn't made up their minds about moving to LeRoy, but the more they looked around, the more they liked what they saw.

Charlotte LeRoy, always a gracious hostess, invited Marietta and Emily to the Flamingo Cotillion. This was the year that Charlotte had decided that the theme for the Cotillion would center around eggs – flamingo eggs.

Since flamingoes only lay one egg each year, it wasn't in the best interest of the flamingoes to steal eggs from their nests, so Charlotte saved all the paper mache' packages that her silk stockings came in and asked her friends to save their L'Eggs, too. Flamingo eggs aren't pink, but Charlotte liked the color, so she painted all the eggs pink. She put them in nests of excelsior on the mantles and made centerpieces for the tables. In each egg she put a small gift.

Everyone said that Charlotte had really outdone herself that year. The next day, Charlotte asked her children to help clean up after the party. Thirteen year-old Thomas and twelve-year

old Augustus really didn't want to help, but they said they would gather up all the excelsior if Charlotte who was nine, agreed to gather up all the pink eggs. The two youngest LeRoy children, six year old Catherine and three year old Edward really wanted to help, but were

told they were too young. Besides, they were not tall enough to gather the decorations from the mantles.

It took all day to clean the house and in the evening while everyone was sitting around recounting what a great party it had been, Catherine and Edward, who were still mad about being told they were too young to help, stole the baskets of eggs and hid them. They went outside and hid the eggs in the bushes and trees. They had a great time! They were even surprised when their mother didn't get mad at them and instead suggested that they invite their friends over for a flamingo egg



hunt. It was so close to Easter that everyone thought that it would be a great idea to hold the egg hunt on Easter Sunday after church. So on Easter Sunday, 1837, the first Easter Egg Hunt was held in LeRoy.

To commemorate this historical event, LeRoy House will be open on Friday and Saturday, April 1 and 2, from 1 until 4. Come with your family and count flamingoes and find a pink flamingo egg. It's all for fun and it's free. And make sure to have your picture taken with our “new” Statue of Liberty, who has also returned to LeRoy.

