

Batten Down the Hatches



erly, no water could get into the hold. The cover for the roof hatch on LeRoy House was built of wood, covered with tarpaper. The door is secured from inside. The interesting detail about the roof hatch at LeRoy House is that it has the original hand-wrought iron hooks that hold it in place. These are not ordinary iron hooks, but finely crafted hooks with a twisted shank. Unfortunately the original hinges were replaced with heavy-duty gate hinges and more than likely the original hinges were wrought iron strap hinges.



The frame seems to be rotten and will have to be replaced in the spring when a new hatch door is made. New metal roof hatches and frames can be purchased, but we want to preserve as many historic details as possible. We have contacted the architectural firm of Bero Associates in Rochester to help with this project. First they will examine and photograph the existing hatch and then using those drawings, draw up plans for a new frame and hatch.

I have been looking on the internet for buildings of the same period with roof hatches and so far haven't been able to find anything. I suspect that if a building had a roof hatch, it might have been covered up when it began to leak. And indeed the floor boards under our hatch show signs of deterioration. So I'll be glad to "batten down our hatch" as soon as possible.

The recent windstorm brought down a tree across the enclosed porch of the old Steuber Funeral Home on the east end of Trigon Park and it looks like there is some pretty severe damage. Luckily the damage at LeRoy House wasn't bad. Anne Frew said to me, "The roof hatch has blown off." And sure enough, it was wide open. I went up to the third floor and opened the little door under the eaves, and there was lots of blue sky and cold air. Anne's husband Tom came over, and we pulled the hatch door back inside and he secured it until we can do something a little more permanent in the spring.

This roof hatch probably dates to the 1820s when the LeRoy House was enlarged. I have been told that the hatch was a way to get onto the roof from inside, but it was also a fire escape. In case of fire, and you were trapped upstairs, you could get out through the roof. The hatches were built like hatches on the deck of a ship with a frame around the hole. The hatches on ships were open so cargo and people could get to the decks below, but a lattice top covered the holes that allowed light and ventilation below deck. In heavy weather the hatches had to be "battened down." Heavy canvas was attached by wooden strips of wood called "battens" to the hatch covers and if secured prop-



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