

# The Daughters of America

by Lynne Belluscio

As I write this on the Fourth of July, it reminds me of one of my favorite experiences while working as the events coordinator at Genesee Country Museum. And that was to listen to Barber Conable read the Declaration of Independence on the steps of the Town Hall. Barber would deliver those words written by Thomas Jefferson in true 19th century oratory style. And although there was a hidden microphone in the podium, I think that everyone could hear Barber without that modern contraption. Each year, Mr. Wehle – who was the museum’s benefactor, would ask me to “get rid of the speeches and shorten the Declaration.” Anytime anyone saw Mr. Wehle looking for me, I’d make a hasty retreat to avoid being asked if I had made the changes he had requested because I didn’t shorten the Declaration and there would still be a speech - - albeit, only ten minutes long compared to the speeches that went on for hours in the 19th century. And so, after the prayer, which was delivered with great emotion by Reverend Charles LePort from the First Presbyterian Church of LeRoy, the former Congressman and President of the World Bank, the Honorable Barber Conable would stand and grasp the sides of the podium firmly, and begin: “When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them to another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and nature’s god entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation. We hold these truths to be self evident that all men - - and women (And upon these words, the crowd would roar!) - - - are created equal that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. . . . “ I

**April 2, 1918 Delia Phillips first woman to vote in LeRoy**

**March 31, 1776 Abigail Adams "Remember the Ladies"**

**November 6, 1917 Women's Suffrage New York State**

**"Women do not want power over men, they want power over themselves"**

haven’t been back to Genesee Country Museum on the Fourth of July for a long time, so I don’t know if the Declaration of Independence is delivered with such fervor or “amendments.”

We would listen to all the grievances against King George: “ He has refused his assent to laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good. He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their public records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures. He has obstructed the administration of justice by refusing his assent to laws for establishing judiciary powers. He has made judges dependent on his will alone, for the tenure of their offices and the amount and payment of their salaries. He has excited domestic insurrections among us . . . “. And so we lis-

tened and the Declaration concluded: “ And for the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor.”

Then there would be an oration and music and finally the ceremonies ended with the thirteen traditional toasts. There would be a toast to the military, and to New York – the Empire State – to her agriculture, commerce, and manufactures – in their equal protection is found our real independence as a nation and happiness as a people. To Western New York – she owes her present prosperity to the Grand Canal. May she be ever grateful to its illustrious projector, Dewitt Clinton. To love of God, the love of country and the love of civil and religious liberty - - may our zeal for the first two, not forget the third article. ( Each year I rewrote

the toasts and researched them from newspaper accounts of the time, but I always kept the 13th toast the same and it was always delivered by Barber Conable.) “To the women – the daughters of America. The fairest of the fair because they are free. They are worthy descendants of their revolutionary mothers.

“In the exhibit on the second floor of LeRoy House, “Remember the Ladies” I have added a special label - - “Barber Conable, in his annual reading of the Declaration of Independence at Genesee Country Museum on July Fourth “amends” the Declaration to include women.”

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