

# Water Over the Dam

by *Lynne Belluscio*

Thursday night, before dinner, (and a wonderful dinner it was at the newly renovated Creekside Inn) we stood looking at the Oatka Creek from the deck and commented on how much water was rushing over the dam. Can't say that I've seen it that high in July. It's not uncommon in the spring to see a wall of water going over the dam, but the recent rainy weather has saturated the ground and the rain storms seem to dump inches of rain in a short period of time. Added to that, the rain south of LeRoy swells the creek, even more. In May 1916, LeRoy was hit by some pretty heavy rain. On Tuesday and Wednesday May 16th and 17th, LeRoy suffered the worst flood in its history when all local records were broken. Heavy rains had started on Sunday and continued to midnight of the 16th. The high water overflowed the nine-foot retaining wall that guarded the old LeRoy Flour Mill. (Of course this was before the "new" dam was built south of the bridge.) The old dam was north of the Main Street Bridge and the water surged under the bridge as seen in this postcard.



Written on the back of the post card: "This is one record high water. 9 feet over dam. two feet higher than ever before." There was a lot of concern for the new dam that had been built to form Lake LeRoy at Union Corners, south of town. Three and a half feet of water was rushing over the spillway and it was still rising. Wilbur Scott, the superintendent of the water plant at Union Corners reported seeing a wall of water two feet high bearing down on the dam and the flow of water over the dam increased to 8 1/2 feet. The telephone lines were out, and they had to send Engineer Rider to town to call Engineer Wells in Rochester to come to LeRoy to monitor the situation. He arrived by train at 9 o'clock but had to walk into town from Limerock because a train that was stalled in the water. He was driven to the dam and helped organize a

group of men to open the dike at the upper end of the lake if it was needed. But fortunately it wasn't necessary and the water receded.

There was a lot of damage in the Village. The area west of St. Marks Church along the creek was completely submerged. The old cooper shop and sawmill on the west side of the creek, north of the Main Street bridge were damaged beyond repair. Eventually they were torn down. The water reached the engine shop of the LeRoy Cotton Mill on Church Street. Portions of LeRoy Plow Works were flooded, west of Lake Street. Numerous bridges in Pavilion and Caledonia were washed out. Students walking to school on Black Street reached the bridge just as it was swept away and they had to turn back and spend the night with friends. The quarries at General Crushed Stone were filled with water and the B.P. and R railroad switch had washed away. Trains coming into LeRoy from the south, through Pavilion could not get past the flood. A westbound train on the Erie that was due in LeRoy at 5:45pm was approaching the village (behind the Oatka Hose Clubhouse) and

several wooden ties had floated onto the track. They were struck by the engine and the engineer was injured. Water ran in the streets and filled many cellars. But just as quickly as the water rose, it receded and the flood of 1916 became history.

This year, as the waters rose, it created another problem. With the water so high, the 29th annual Duck Derby had to be "rerouted." The fire department said it was too dangerous to put boats in the water and too many of the little yellow ducks would be lost forever over the dam and downstream over Buttermilk Falls - - a fate that none of us would want. So the Duck Derby was held on Wolcott Street. The LeRoy Police Department came to the rescue, and armed with leaf blowers, the little ducks tumbled their way "upstream" on Wolcott Street. None were lost in the windstorm and it was a happy ending to a dilemma that mother nature had created. And as they say, "There's always next year." And that goes for the regatta too. It was a wonderful weekend in LeRoy. The weather was beautiful. The parade was glorious, with something for everyone. Class reunions were held. Brides were

married. Golf was played. Families got together. Music was played. Food was eaten and crafts were bought. Certainly Oatka Festival can bring out the best in this community. And a special thanks to all the volunteers and the committee for making it happen.

SCREEN  
PRINTING

LP GRAPHICS  
1 Church St.  
LeRoy, NY 14482

585.768.2201

www.lpgraphics.net

