

An Afternoon of Music for a Good Cause

by Lynne Belluscio

The LeRoy Historical Society is a United Way agency and can be chosen as a designated recipient of your United Way donations. When you designate your money, you are guaranteed that your donation will go to the agency that you have specified. However, you must make sure that you have a designation form and that you identify the agency of your choice. Of course, you can also make a donation without specifying and United Way will use the money for any of their worthwhile causes. We just received notice of those people who designated the Historical Society to receive their donations. We would like to thank the following people for their generous support: Ed Henry, Khamkevane Vorasane, Jean Wood, Keith Zemaitis, Mickey Hyde, Richard Lathan, Margaret Murphy, Cynthia Osborne, Michelle Panepento, Michael Perry, Michael Riggi, John Sherman, Ray and Shelley Stein, Brenda Carlson, Shelley Carlson, James Carr, Roxanne Coleman, Kirstan Crowe, Patricia Daansen, Thomas Dintruff, Anne Fox, and the Genesee-Wyoming Railroad.

The United Way of Genesee County, had a fundraiser in LeRoy last Sunday at Mercygrove. About a hundred folks attended their Summer Serenade. The weather was beautiful and the setting on the back lawn of Don Woodward's estate was serene. S. Shade Zajac, Music Director and Conductor of the Genesee Symphony Orchestra offered a selection of music. The program began with Haydn's Concerto for Cello and Orchestra in C Major. The second selection was Mozart's Symphony No. 31 in D Major "Paris." Mozart is a challenge, and the orchestra did a great job. This classical music was followed by an arrangement of George Gershwin's 1935 Porgy and Bess. Zajac inserted a beautiful contemporary piece "Dusk" by Steve Bryant before concluding with Leonard Bernstein's West Side Story.



United Way's Director Eric Fix had introduced the evening with a reference to a song from Bernstein's masterpiece, and I think I heard him singing along with the orchestra on a couple of the songs. Marjorie Fulmer from LeRoy was in the orchestra. It was a beautiful setting for a musical evening. Next year, I hope to see more people from LeRoy in the audience.

Historically, there have been many musical programs at Mercy Grove. The huge estate was built by Don Woodward, the youngest son in the Jell-O family. Florence Woodward, who was Donald Woodward's first wife, lived in the house in the 1930s and 40s. Ironically, she and Donald were going through divorce when the estate was being built, and Donald - - who paid for the construction - - never lived there. When plans were made for the house, it included the installation of a huge pipe organ. The keyboard console is in the large room between the living room and dining room. The pipes are throughout the house. Some are in a room off the hall on the third floor. Many are in the wall on the main floor, behind fabric covered panels. The huge air unit and the largest pipes are in the basement and the sound travels upstairs through air chutes. It was made by the Aeolian Company from New York City. It is number #1599 and it also plays

like a player piano with paper rolls, although most of the rolls at Mercy Grove are too fragile to play. Aeolian manufactured residence or "chamber" organs for wealthy patrons. They never made church organs. The oldest known surviving Aeolian organ is in the Vermont home built by Abraham Lincoln's son. The huge house is known as Hilldene and is now open as a museum. (The LeRoy Historical Society visited Hilldene on one of their bus trips.) They often play the organ for visitors. George Eastman in Rochester had two organs installed in his home. We recently toured Eastman House and learned about his passion for organ music. (He hated Bach. And he had an organist play every morning between 8am and 9:30.)

Florence Woodward hosted several benefit music events at Mercy Grove. In August 1933, she hosted a garden party for the benefit of the hospital in Batavia. After guests parked their cars they were given maps to the gardens where "many lingered in the quiet beauty of the flowers and birds as music from the organ transplanted their thoughts from the disturbing things of everyday life." The Woodward boys, Reid and William sold model airplanes and gliders at their cabin behind the house while young Barbara sold all her "Pinkies" and calico dogs.

(I'm not sure what "Pinkies" are, but the calico dogs are little cloth animals.) The party raised \$376.90. Over 450 guests attended the party. Two years later, Florence opened her home to over 600 Presbyterian women. As they enjoyed the gardens and grounds, Margaret Gillette played the organ, which was heard throughout the grounds "by a system of amplifiers." The organ at Mercy Grove requires restoration, but never-the-less, three hundred members of the Organ Historical Society will be in Rochester next year, and they have planned a visit to Mercy Grove for lunch.

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