

The Jell-O Wagon

by *Lynne Belluscio*

I noticed in the Batavia Daily that American Pickers will be coming to the area, so before my phone starts ringing off the hook, and my email box fills up, I thought it might be a good time to tell the story of American Pickers and the Jell-O Wagon. I became aware of the Jell-O wagon several months ago, when I was making plans for a bus trip to Buffalo for the LeRoy Historical Society. One of the places that we were going to visit was the Pierce Arrow Museum, which is now known as the Transportation Museum of Western New York. When I called to make reservations for our visit, Jim Sandaro, the owner of the museum answered the phone. And as I am apt to do, I mentioned that we were from the Jell-O Museum. He said he had a real surprise for us. He couldn't talk about it, but it had to do with Jell-O and it was probably the most valuable thing ever discovered that had to do with Jell-O. Well that piqued my interest, but I didn't press him. However, by the end of the conversation, he said he had just bought a Jell-O wagon, and he asked if I could send him any information on the Jell-O wagons - - how many were there - did we have pictures - -anything I knew about Jell-O wagons. So I sent him all that I could - - photos - - articles that I had written - -a copy of the great story written about working on a Jell-O wagon in Ohio in late 1915 or 1916 when they took the Jell-O wagons off the road. Jim told me that he hadn't picked the wagon up yet, and he was concerned about transporting it without doing damage. In subsequent conversations with Jim, I learned that he couldn't tell me much more because he had an agreement with the producers of American Pickers that he wouldn't divulge any infor-

mation about it until the show aired, but he would call me when he had picked it up and I could see it. I did go to see it in his warehouse. I assured him it truly was an original Jell-O wagon. The seat wasn't original and one wheel was in pretty poor condition. I encouraged him not to "restore" it for it would lose its value as an artifact. The paint needed to be stabilized, like our pleasure wagon in our transportation exhibit. Our project cost nearly \$8000, with a grant for \$7500, making it possible. I would think that it would cost more than \$10,000 to stabilize the Jell-O wagon. Jim and his wife came to LeRoy to visit the Jell-O Gallery. In May our bus trip went to Buffalo, and Jim invited everyone to see the wagon in his warehouse. Martha Tabone - Pearlle Wait's granddaughter and Connie Constantine - - Orator Woodward's great granddaughter posed with Jim at the back of the wagon. Everyone was sworn to secrecy. In the meantime, I sent photos to New York City to the research editors of American Pickers and signed a contract that they had permission to use them. I also said to them, that the folks in LeRoy weren't too happy that we didn't have an opportunity to bring it back to LeRoy to the Jell-O Gallery. Shortly after, the first American Pickers show aired, the phone rang off the hook. Facebook was filled with people wanting to set up a fund to buy the wagon and bring it back to LeRoy. Finally I had to post a note saying that the wagon had been purchased - - not by us. And it was not offered to us, nor was it for sale. Jim had told me that he would be promoting the Jell-O Museum when he put the wagon on exhibit, and would be willing to put out our brochures. In the meantime, the second American Pickers show about the Jell-O wagon was aired. Jim



Martha Tabone, granddaughter of Jell-O inventor Pearle Wait; Jim Sandaro, new owner of the Jell-O wagon; Connie Constantine, great granddaughter of Orator Woodward, owner of Jell-O



Close up of manufacturer Geo Higgin, Rochester NY.

walked into a warehouse, and they asked \$10,000 and he offered \$9500 and it was a done deal. Jim claimed there were 50 of the wagons and that this was the only one left - -I'm not sure that's true. And he said that Jell-O was made of ground up bones - - Ughhhh Not true. But anyway, folks now know who bought the Jell-O wagon and where it will be. At least one other person has offered to buy it and bring it back to LeRoy, and Jim isn't interested. I called him the other day to see if I could come up some time to photograph the wagon so there would be a record of it in case he planned to restore it, and he has agreed to let me do that. He has also told me that he is planning an event to unveil the wagon in September, and that he has signed the contract with American Pickers to have Danielle Cushman come to Buffalo to talk about the

discovery of the Jell-O wagon. The event will be a fundraiser for his museum, invitation only. And that's what I know at this point. Don't call me or email me to say that it should be in LeRoy. Yes, it should be at the Jell-O Gallery in LeRoy, but it's not for sale. Maybe we can put a photograph of it in the exhibit.

**HATS
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We've got'em

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LP GRAPHICS