

Uncle Sam and the Historical Society Wants You

by Lynne Belluscio



This image of Uncle Sam was used during World War I to recruit men for the army. It was an illustration drawn by James Montgomery Flagg, who borrowed a similar pose in England, of Lord Kitchener. Flagg's drawing of an elderly white haired man with a goatee, wearing a top hat with white stars on a blue band and a blue tail coat and red and white striped pants, became the iconic image that is still used today. The LeRoy Historical Society, in commemoration of the 2018 World War I exhibit, is borrowing the same image to "recruit" some new members.

Our new recruits will not be expected to report for duty, or to turn out for inspection. You won't need a physical and there will be absolutely no marching!! All new recruits will be issued a membership card that entitles you to free admission all year to the Jell-O Museum and a coupon for a 10% discount in the gift shop. The best part of the membership, will be four newsletters with historical articles on a variety of topics. And you will have the knowledge that you have made it possible for the Historical Society to preserve LeRoy's great heritage and share it with thousands of visitors and hundreds of

school students

So why would you think of "enlisting"? First, your membership helps support our school programs. We offer "Hands on History" programs for kindergarten, first, second, third and fourth grades. And the classes bring "History Home." We see all of these students at least twice a year. Our recent fourth grade program about early lighting included the story of how Lapp Insulator Company was a pioneer in manufacturing insulators, so that the electricity produced at Niagara Falls can be brought to their home and school. For the third grades, we bring out old tools and kitchen gadgets and talk about simple machines. The One Room School program for the fourth grades teaches "reading, writing and 'rithmetic" and this year we added some local geography. Kids looked at old maps of LeRoy and found familiar landmarks. Some even found their houses on the old maps. Maybe last year you saw all the flags around the Statue of Liberty. That was part of a program we offered the third grades on immigrants.

We rely heavily on our "veterans" for support. Many of these people have been members for over 20 years. I'd have to check the records, but there are a few who have been members for over 50 years. But it's time to bring in the new recruits

and we hope we won't have to rely on a "draft."

Here are some things that you may not know about the Historical Society. It was founded in 1940. We have 400 members today, but back in 1940, there were 600 members. Some of our members no longer live in LeRoy and our newsletter is their contact with "home." We have nearly 90 Life Members and all of their membership money is invested in our endowment. We employ 10 people to keep the doors of the Jell-O Gallery open. Some of our income is derived from sales in the gift shop and we also charge \$5 for admission. That helps pay the electricity and heat bills. (But if you are a member, you get in free.) Although we are a tax-free educational institution, we are required to collect and pay sales tax on what we sell in the gift shop. We have about 40 volunteers who work at the LeRoy House during the summer. They have the opportunity to meet a lot of interesting people from all over the world and share the history of LeRoy. The Historical Society raises money with two BBQs on Trigon Park and the Annual Dinner Auction. To maintain the billboard on the Thruway, we are very thankful for our partners, D&R Depot, the Genesee County Chamber of Commerce, LeRoy McDonalds, LeRoy Subway, LeRoy Business Council and Kraft-

Heinz. (The billboard costs \$700 a month!)

If you've managed to read this far, you now have an opportunity to join the Historical Society (see membership below). And if you are interested in knowing a bit more about the history of Uncle Sam, keep reading.

The story of Uncle Sam is obscure. Some historians claim that Uncle Sam and Brother Jonathan from the Revolutionary War were one and the same. Another story connects Uncle Sam with a meat packer from Troy, New York, who supplied barrels of meat to the U.S. Army. His name was Samuel Wilson and he stamped all of his meat barrels with "U.S." for United States. Soldiers, often said that the U.S. on the barrels stood for "Uncle Sam (Wilson)." Which ever story is true, on September 7, 1961, Congress officially named Uncle Sam as the permanent symbol of American strength and idealism. On September 13, 1989, President George Bush proclaimed the day "Uncle Sam Day" in commemoration of Samuel Wilson's birthday in 1766. It just happened to coincide with the bicentennial celebration of the City of Troy, where Wilson lived and worked. There were a variety of images of Uncle Sam in the 1800s, but it is Flagg's image that we recognize now.

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 VISA OR MASTERCARD #: _____ EXP DATE: _____

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MAIL TO: LeRoy Historical Society
 23 East Main Street, PO Box 176
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ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP DUES

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