

## Coffee at LeRoy House

by Lynne Belluscio

The LeRoy House has two kitchens. The one in the basement is the 1820's LeRoy family open hearth kitchen which was the domain of the family cook. On the main floor is the 1930s kitchen, complete with electric stove and refrigerator, and a sink with running water. The two kitchens provide an opportunity to show a century of change. This summer there is a small exhibit about coffee.

In the 1820's coffee took a long time to prepare, which explains why tea – even herb tea – was more popular. All you have to do to make a cup of tea is to steep some tea leaves in a pot of hot water, but coffee was a different story. Green coffee beans were bought at the store and then had to be roasted over the fire. Sometimes they were roasted in a skillet, but it was best to roast them in an enclosed tin canister. (shown in the photograph). This process was not easy and if the beans were not roasted properly, the coffee could be terrible. Once roasted, the beans had to be ground. Using a mortar and pestle did not produce good results, but for many people, it was the only way to grind coffee. There were a variety of coffee grinders introduced at this time, but since Charlotte LeRoy may have spent a few years in France (we think) it made sense to buy a French coffee grinder on ebay. It is somewhat similar to a Turkish coffee grinder or pepper grinder. Most people made boiled coffee. One recipe, which I have used: “Allow two tablespoons for each person, grind it just before making. Put it in a basin and break into it an egg, yolk, white shell and all. Mix it up with a spoon to the consistence of mortar; put it in warm hot boiling water in the coffee pot; let it boil up and break three times; then let stand a few minutes and it will be as clear as amber and the egg will give it a rich taste.” The egg coagulates around the coffee grounds and if you throw

in a teacup of cold water, the grounds and the egg will settle and you can pour out the coffee (or strain it through muslin). It was thought that coffee made with a biggin was much better. The biggin had two compartments with a perforated metal sieve between the two pots. It was introduced in France in 1780. It was very similar to the Neapolitan, which has an upside down pot on top of another pot, with a metal strainer in between.

Coffee cups were shaped different than tea cups. Tea cups often did not have handles and imitated the Chinese handleless tea cups. Coffee cups, with handles, were sometimes called “cans.” Again I went to Ebay to find some 1820 coffee cups and discovered several “cup sets” that included a tea cup, a coffee cup and one saucer. These were manufactured in Colchester, England, and were made of porcelain, which was expensive. So to save money, and since coffee and tea were never served at the same time, there was only one saucer. I checked with a friend in England, and she verified the story. Suspecting that Charlotte LeRoy – wanting to imitate the latest fashion – might have bought “cup sets”, I bought two sets for the exhibit.

I also learned that American interest in coffee came about when England began taxing tea - - remember the Boston Tea Party. Although some people began drinking herb teas, many switched to coffee and the popularity of the coffee house started.

During the Civil War, the soldiers were given coffee rations. (Green beans that had to be roasted and ground.) By the late 1800s, coffee could often be bought already roasted. In fact, one of the “inventions” that promoted the sale of roasted coffee beans, was the introduction of a mass produced small paper bag. It was also the time when brand names were being introduced.



1930's kitchen with electric percolators, Caccamise Coffee, and coffee pot

(Such as Jell-O.) Maxwell House Coffee was introduced in 1892, named after a hotel in Tennessee. In 1928, like Jell-O and Postum, Maxwell House Coffee became part of General Foods. By 1930, Americans were coffee drinkers - - not tea drinkers. Coffee percolators consisted of a coffee pot with a metal basket inside and a glass knob on top, so you could see how the coffee was brewing. By 1930, several companies had introduced an electric percolator.

In the 1800's, there were a variety of coffee substitutes. During the Civil War, confederate soldiers often could not get coffee, and so chicory, roasted grains, even burned toast, was used to make something that imitated coffee. In LeRoy, Orator Woodward, even before he owned Jell-O, was making money with a coffee substitute, called Grain-O. The Postum Company offered Graino without the hyphen. Another roasted grain coffee substitute was packaged by the Genesee Valley Cereal Company in the old brick school house on East Avenue. It was called Co-Fe-No.

Some stores packaged their own coffee - - such as A&P.



1830's Kitchen with coffee roaster, coffee pot and cup set, coffee grinder and Neapolitan (on the left)

The little store on North Street, owned by the Caccamise family, (now Woody's Deli) packaged their own coffee. These cans of coffee were vacuum packed. This process had been introduced in the early 1900s and the can came with a metal key to open them. Then the lid could be securely put back on to store the coffee. And one other little bit of LeRoy history and coffee. Jell-O manufactured a coffee flavored Jell-O for a short period of time. (Actually, you can still buy coffee flavored gelatin in Japan today. It's wonderful. If you want to make coffee gelatin, use Knox gelatin and make it with hot coffee. Then put some whipped cream on top and it makes a nice dessert. Or put some Bailey's in it to make some great Jell-O shots.)