The first part of this series discussed the Marquee tools. The Lasso tools are a very powerful set of selection tools that provide an ability to quickly select an area, a subject made-up of straight edges, or a subject defined by a contrasting edge line.

Right click the small arrow at the lower right corner of the lasso tool icon. This will reveal a menu of the other tools in this package. The letter to the right of the tool name is a keyboard short cut to get to the tool.

This package consists of a smooth lasso tool, a polygonal lasso tool, and a magnetic lasso tool. Across the top is the tool option bar.

Select the smooth Lasso tool:

The option bar is similar to that of the marquee tool.

1- The modifier set is identical to the “new selection”, “add selection”, and “subtract selection” of the marquee tool.
   a. A ‘new selection’ simply starts a new selection each time you drag the mouse.
   b. The “add selection” keeps your old selection and adds to it your new selection.
   c. The “subtract selection” will subtract from your selection the selected area of your new selection. Holding “alt” while dragging to create a selection will place the modification into “subtract selection”. This avoids having to first click the “subtract” icon.
   d. The “intersect selection” will select the intersection of your old selection with your new selection.
2- Feathering:

The feathering is used to provide a transition between what is selected and what is not selected. The number of pixels that you would like this transition to occupy is typed into this window. This provides a softer edge and appears more realistic when cutting and pasting selected elements of an image. In most cases this is a function of the image resolution. For a resolution of the order of 300 ppi (pixels per inch) a feather of two (2) pixels is adequate. For lower resolution one would use a smaller number of pixels to feather. One can use fractional pixels, like 0.2.

3- Anti-alias:
Since the image is made-up of square pixels, the edges will have a stair-case character when going around a curve. **The anti-alias check box allows you to include some software that will try to smooth the edges for you. I always leave this box checked.**

To make a selection:

Click and drag the selection tool around a subject and create a curved selection. When you get back to the start point releasing the mouse key will close the selection. Also, double clicking the left mouse key will draw a straight line from where the cursor is to the start point and close the selection. “Marching ants” will outline your selection.

After you have taken the time to select a subject, it is prudent to save your selection so that you can activate it again if necessary.

To save a selection:
Go to select>save selection to open the save selection window. Name your selection and click OK.

To load a saved selection:
Go to select>load selection. From the load selection window select the name of the desired selection.

**Select the Polygonal Lasso:**
The polygonal lasso tool joins straight line segments to follow edges that are straight. It is useful to quickly outline something made up of straight edges, like a building. You can also quickly surround a subject, similarly to the lasso.

The option bar is the same as the lasso tool option bar.
Select the Magnetic Lasso:

The option bar for this tool adds some additional windows. “Width” is the number of pixels that the tool will examine from the cursor to locate an edge. The “edge contrast” is the change in contrast that the edge should have before deciding that it sees an edge, “frequency” is the number of pixels along an edge that the software will place a new anchor point. I have found that a good compromise in establishing a capture of an edge is width=13px, Edge Contrast=10%, and Frequency=57.

Making a selection:
To make a selection place your cursor tip close to the place you want to start at. Then click and release the left mouse button and start to follow the edge with the mouse button UP (you can hold the mouse key down if you like, but as you will learn in the next paragraph, you can change to the polygonal – straight line lasso by holding the alt key down with the mouse key UP). The selection will hug the contrast line. As you proceed along the edge the tool will automatically place fastening points along the way. If you want to place a fastening point yourself simply click the left mouse key and release. I find that at places where the edge changes direction abruptly it is a good idea to place an fastening point. The software tends to like to take a smoother curved path and this way you can change directions sharply. When you have completely gone around your subject, click on the start point, or double click or hit “enter” to complete your selection with a straight line to the start point.

Hint: With the mouse key UP while you are tracking an edge, you can change to the polygonal lasso to capture straight lines by holding the “alt” down, while with the mouse key down you can change to the regular lasso tool to capture curves by holding down the “alt” key.

When you are done, enlarge your view and look closely at the selection and the edge you tried to follow. Add and subtract from your selection to fix any areas that were not selected to your liking. Use the fastening ability to place points close together in places that do not have a contrasting edge to follow.

Hint: Before you start a new (add or subtract) additional selection you can change the modifier by using the shift key to “add” a selection, or the “alt” key to subtract a selection.