

Colchester History Connections Newsletter

September 1, 2018, Colchester Historical Society, Box 112, Downsville, New York 13755

Volume 8, Issue 4 Preserving the history of Downsville, Corbett, Shinhopple,
Gregorytown, Horton and Cooks Falls

Website: www.colchesterhistoricalsociety.org

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/colchesternyhistorian/>

Historical Society Room, 72 Tannery Road, Downsville, New York is open
by appointment, please call

Kay Parisi-Hampel, Town Historian at 607-363-7303

Colchester Town Hall Display—September–November 2018—Farming Heritage

Stop in to view photographs of barns, farms and farming techniques throughout Colchester's history.

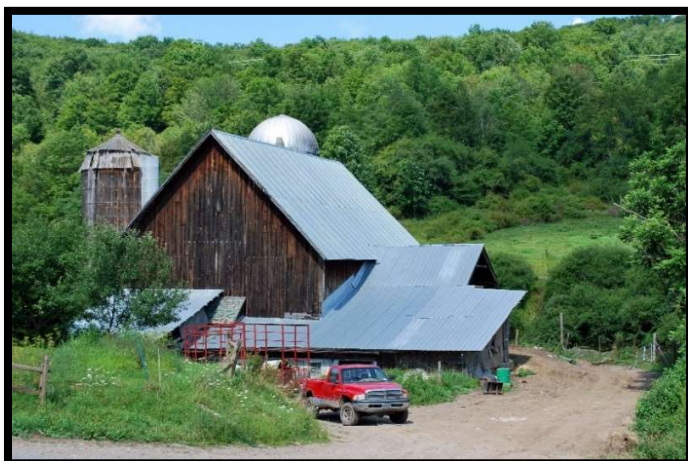
2019 Historical Society Calendar



The 2019 calendar contains 44 pages of photographs and history of farming in Colchester Township. These fundraiser calendars are \$20 and make wonderful holiday gifts. Pick up your copies at the Historical Society, Town Clerk's Office at 72 Tannery Road, the Downsville Diner, Main Street, Downsville, NY or order online through the Historical Society website. Proceeds from calendar sales will be used to purchase preservation materials for the Society's collection materials.

Colchester's Agricultural Heritage

The 1870 New York State Agricultural Census listed 370 dairy farms in Colchester, farming slowly declined through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The construction of the Pepacton Reservoir eliminated all of the farms in Pepacton's Pleasant Valley. The move from agriculture to factory-based industries during and after World War II impacted the Town's dairy industries. Herd buy-out programs also reduced the local dairy farms and today there are only two operating dairy farms in Colchester, along with a few small livestock operations.



Shaw Farm-Gregory Hollow Road, Downsville



Mattson Harmonie Farm, Route 30, Downsville

Agricultural Heritage

Supporting a farm with just a dairy was very difficult. Milk prices fluctuated and commercial creameries often set prices so low that farmers needed to look for additional sources of income to avoid financial ruin. Many farmers added to their dairy operations by adding cash crops of timber, and operating or leasing Blue Stone quarries. These products were rafted down the East Branch of the Delaware River in the spring. After 1906 when the D & E built the railway between East Branch and Arkville, trains took over the shipping of timber and bluestone. Cutting four-foot wood for the local acid factories in Corbett, Shinhopple, Horton and Cooks Falls also added cash to support local farms. Farmers also raised grains, cauliflower, hay, hops and tobacco to supplement their dairy operations. Between 1850 and 1883 four cigar factories operated in Downsville. Most farmers also tapped their sugar maples and made maple products for home use and for sale to town and city markets. The Town of Colchester also included a tannery, five grist mills, 25 sawmills, a shoe peg and clothes pin factories and a shingle mill.

150th Anniversary of the Justin and Louisa Merrill Homestead-Horton, New York

Merrill's Farm was carved from the wilderness at the headwaters of Horton Brook (the Fuller Brook) beginning on March 3, 1868. My great grandfather Justin Merrill and his wife Louisa and family bought two lots from the Overing tract for the virgin timber.

My grandfather John P. Merrill (born 7-1-1864) who was four at the time grew up there and in 1903, eleven years before Justin's death raised the barn. The farm house had been built in 1891. We have the nail hammer used in building the house hanging on the wall at the homestead. The old gent was chastised by his neighbors for "building in the swamp," but he had running spring water in his kitchen; they all had to carry in their water.

My father John G. Merrill was born on the farm in 1915. He combined the original property with two other small neighboring properties and farmed there his entire life, passing in 1999 at 83.

In 1987 the homestead was left to my five siblings and me. We continued to operate and caretake the property until 2016 when we (the remaining three) bequeathed it to our children and nieces and nephews. There are 10 shareholders presently with 17 children and 2 expected. Those children will be the 6th generation on Merrill's Farm. We hope some will be farmers. **Arthur Merrill**

Downsville Fairs

From the late 1800's Downsville held summer Fairs. Fairgrounds were built on the large fields where the Downsville Central School and Firemen's Fields are now located. The Fairs were held in late August and September featured livestock displays, draft horse and oxen pulls, horse, ox and bicycle races, baseball games, evening concerts by the Downsville Concert Band, sideshows, local and minstrel traveling plays, Maypole Dances, Hot Air Balloon rides, Merry-go-rounds, children's bicycle parades and other entertainment for children.

From 1903-05 instead of a fair, Downsville had August Coaching Days, which lasted three days with prizes being offered for the best decorated "rigs" (wagons, carriages, and bicycles), baseball games played for a purse and also exhibitions of livestock.

In September of 1906 the Downsville News reported on a very unpopular promotion of a Downsville Fair called the "Fake Fair"; operated by W.H. Austin of Walton. Austin advertised this Downsville Fair throughout Delaware County and made arrangements with the D & E Railroad to run special trains from all towns along their line to bring people to his Fair. No Downsville groups were included in Austin's fair program and residents opposed this and also because the fair seems to promote a variety of gambling events and specifically seen as chance to have Austin's friend's Ed and Billy Risley enter and show off their racehorses.

Fair at Downsville

SEPTEMBER 18, 19, 20, 21.

The Downsville Fair will open on the above date and the public may be assured of an excellent exhibition. Special new and grand attractions of every description will be in attendance, such as

BALLOON ASCENSIONS, BALL GAMES, FLORAL PARADE, JAPANESE TROUPE, BAND CONCERT, Horse Racing, Etc.

The Greatest Troup of Trained Seals ever seen in this part of the country.

A TROUPE OF TRAINED BEARS.

Trained Dogs and Trained Ponies will also be on exhibition.

High Dive, Trotting and Running Races every day.

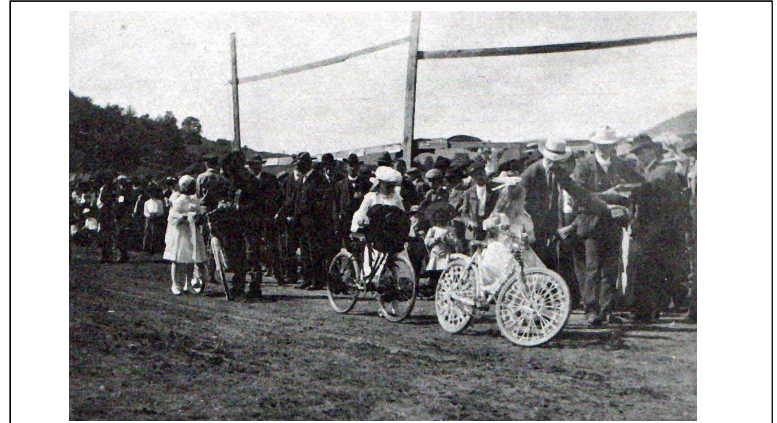
Many First-Class Shows will be on the grounds and all things necessary to make an affair of this kind a grand success.

Apply to W. H. AUSTIN, Walton, for privileges.

The following is the time schedule and rates of fare for the round trip, trains going to and starting from end of track near Downsville.

South Bound	A M	A M	P M	North Bound	A M	P M	P M
Arkville.....	7.50	10.00	5.40	End of track near Downsville....	7.30	1.30	6.40
Margarotville.....	7.55	10.05	5.45	Pepacton.....	8.00	2.00	6.05
Dunraven.....	8.03	10.13	5.51	Shavertown.....	8.20	2.20	6.22
Arena.....	8.18	10.28	6.00	Union Grove.....	8.32	2.30	6.32
Union Grove.....	8.32	10.40	6.12	Arena.....	8.44	2.50	6.47
Shavertown.....	8.42	10.50	6.22	Dunraven.....	8.52	3.00	6.57
Pepacton.....	8.57	11.10	6.42	Margarotville.....	9.00	3.15	7.05
End of track near Downsville.....	9.25	11.45	7.15	Arkville.....	9.10	3.25	7.10
Pepacton to end of track near Downsville and return							25c
Shavertown							50c
Union Grove							70c
Arena							95c
Dunraven							\$1.00
Margarotville							\$1.00
Arkville							\$1.00

TICKETS GOOD RETURNING UNTIL SEPTEMBER 22.



Downsville Fair Parade, 1906



Woodmen Gravestone Markers

Why are some of the gravestones in our local cemeteries shaped like trees? Most of these "tree-stump" markers became popular between 1880 and 1920, when large mausoleums and obelisks monuments fell out of favor. The tree-stump gravestones were part of a movement to turn the focus of death back to life, and were associated with secret societies, like the Redmen and Masons. The stones are considered as a form of folk art and emphasized nature. These stones were often decorated with flowers, books, plants, animals, firearms, and fraternal order symbols. *The Woodmen of the World* group served as a life-insurance company and fraternal societies collected dues from their members which paid for the insurance, monuments and provided a source of income for family members after the death of that member.



Gravestone of Edward Hitt, shown on the left, was a member of the Pepacton Redmen Society. This gravestone is located in Downsville's Paige Cemetery.

At each meeting of the Pepacton Redmen members paid twenty-five cents dues. This money was used to provide for the funeral expenses of members and gravestone markers. The group met over the Hulbert Store or Redmen Hall.

What is it?

The Colchester Historical Society recently received this donation:



Guess what this Victorian tool is and what it was used for and have a chance to win the Historical Society's 2019 calendar. Mail or email your answers to info@colchesterhistoricalsociety.org and a name will be selected from the correct answers at the November 30th Historical Society meeting. Entries should include your mailing address so we can deliver the calendar.



New York Minute in History Podcast

The New York State Museum, WAMC/Northeast Public Radio and Archivist Media have launched a new podcast, "A New York Minute in History," which explores the story of New York State and the unique tales of New Yorkers. The podcast is hosted by New York State Historian Devin Lander and Don Wildman, host of Mysteries at the Museum on Travel Channel. It is produced by WAMC's Associate News Director Jim Levulis.

"The project ties New York's historical events, people, and places to larger statewide, national and international historical events and eras," Lander said. "We'll explore New York's role in important historical events as well as topics still grabbing headlines today in a way that's accessible to everyone."

You can subscribe to the podcast on iTunes, Google Play and SoundCloud.

<https://wamcpodcasts.org/a-new-york-minute-in-history/>

For other glimpses into the past life in Colchester, please join our monthly meetings.

Meetings are generally held the last Tuesday of the month at the Colchester Town Hall, 72 Tannery Road, Downsville, New York 13755

2018 Historical Society Meetings:

September 25, 2018 at 7 PM October 30, 2018 at 10 AM
November 27, 2018 at 7 PM December 18, 2018 at 10 AM