

Colchester History Connections Newsletter

September, 2014 Colchester Historical Society, Box 112, Downsville, New York 13755

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

Website: www.colchesterhistoricalsociety.org

Historical Society Room, 72 Tannery Road, Downsville is open the third Saturday
of each month 11 A.M.-3 P.M. and by appointment, please call
Kay Parisi-Hampel, Town Historian at 607-363-7303

Displays and Programs

September–November 15, 2014, the display in the Town Hall will feature the **Travels of "Miss Elizabeth,"** an antique doll display. "Miss Elizabeth" is a doll that descended historically from the logging history in Colchester.

John D. Wood I, grandfather of Edith Clark Wood Boyd, was a timberman and rafter from Shinhopple and Downsville who in 1860 rafted logs down the East Branch of the Delaware River to Philadelphia. After selling his timbers, he purchased a porcelain doll for his young daughter and tucked the doll in his knapsack for safe keeping during his two week walk back to Shinhopple. When John Wood II married Tillie Gunn, they inherited the doll and gave it to their daughter Edith who was born in Shavertown on December 29, 1874. Edith named the doll "Miss Elizabeth" and made a beautiful wardrobe of dresses and accessories for the doll. She also made a miniature pieced quilt and lace trimmed pillowcases. The doll was passed down to Edith's daughter Marion Boyd Dalrymple of Downsville and then to Marion's daughter, Sonia Dalrymple Schork of Sierra Vista, Arizona. In June of 2014, Sonia Schork felt it was time for "Miss Elizabeth" to be returned to her original home and donated the doll to the Colchester Historical Society along with other family papers and artifacts. Please stop in to visit "Miss Elizabeth" through November 15th.



"Miss Elizabeth"



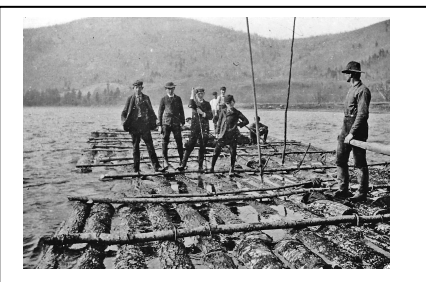
Accessories



Red Dress with Ecreu Lace

Reservoir Lost Towns, Sunday, Sept. 14, 2014 at 1 p.m. at the Middletown Historical Society, HSM Hall 778 Cemetery Road, Margaretville, **"60 Years Gone: Remembering Arena,"** a slide show presented by author Diane Galusha on the communities lost to the Pepacton Reservoir. \$4

New Fort Delaware Museum Display Proposed



Town Historian, Kay Parisi-Hampel and the Colchester Historical Society have contributed to a proposal for a new interpretative **"Colonial River Rafting"** display at Sullivan County's Fort Delaware Museum in Narrowsburg, New York for the spring of 2015. The Society worked with a group of graduate students working on their Museum Curator certifications to develop an exhibit that will use text panels, artifacts and hands-on activities to convey the spirit and adventure of timber rafting. A Historical Photograph Wall will feature some of the rafting pictures from the Colchester Historical Society collection as well as the story of the earliest river rafters Daniel Skinner and Josiah Parks who floated the first raft of ships mast timbers on the East Branch of the Delaware River in 1764. This exhibit will be used to enhance their **"Student Days"** program and will target children, parents, student groups and history enthusiasts. The Grand Opening is tentatively set for Memorial Day 2015.

Legend Seekers Descend on Colchester by Lillian Browne

Colchester is back on the map as a tourist destination. A 2013 mainstream media re-release of a 2008 young adult novel penned by John Green titled "Paper Towns," has drawn vacationing families and fanciful teenagers to the rural, upstate-New York town in search of a mythical location.

Long-known for outdoor recreational activities such as hunting, hiking, snowmobiling and fishing; Colchester can now add "legend-seeker destination" to its list of attractions.

Throng of explorers have embraced the tale that posits the fabled town of Agloe in Colchester on the Delaware-Sullivan County border. Legend-seekers are undeterred by the disclosure of the status of the fictitious town.

But was it a fictitious town? Agloe, a small community with suspect origins, existed on various maps. However, Colchester Historian Kay Parisi-Hampel has been unable to find evidence that the town existed anywhere but on paper.

She explained that cartographers, or map-makers, would often insert a "copyright trap" or "map trap" on their maps in an attempt to prevent piracy or duplication of their products. That is, perhaps, what General Drafting Company map maker Otto G. Lindberg may have done, when he created the first known map that depicted Agloe. Lindberg, and assistant Ernest Alpers, may have concocted the imaginary town of Agloe by borrowing Lindberg's three initials "O", 'G' and 'L', as well as Alpers, 'E' and 'A', according to Parisi-Hampel.

In the event of a copyright lawsuit, the pair could demonstrate piracy, because the town was a "trap" and never actually existed. As map-making tools and the laws governing copyright infringement evolved, Agloe carried on its quiet non-existence alongside the famed Beaver Kill river.

The Beaver Kill, world renowned for its trout fishing, played a part in the story of Agloe. Through Parisi-Hampel's research, she was able to obtain a record of a real property transfer recorded for property located in the town of Colchester from Frank Nead (and others) to Agloe Lodge Farms Inc. The deed transfer was reported in the Stamford Mirror-Recorder on July 3, 1930. Nead's grandson, Olin Nead, who still lives in Downsville, told Parisi-Hampel that he thought he remembered seeing, amongst his mother's papers, a property transfer where the fishing rights along the Beaver Kill were sold to Agloe Lodge Farms.

The Beaver Kill itself is the subject of mysterious local lore — that of the two-headed trout. That legend tells of a two-headed trout that swims in Junction Pool, where the Beaver Kill converges with the Willowemoc River in Roscoe, just over the Sullivan County border. The Beaver Kill runs adjacent to the former Agloe Lodge, which remains standing today.

In fact, an unincorporated village did exist at the location. That was the town of Springbrook, according to Parisi-Hampel and local resident Darlene Beers. Beers also lives in an adjacent property to the fictitious town, and the former real town. Her father, she said, grew up in the area and often remarked about his childhood in Springbrook.

Local residents and business owners enjoy the notoriety associated with the legends of the town of Agloe and the two-headed trout. The stories add an air of mystery to the area and have spurred a tourist industry of legend seekers and those who enjoy a good fish-tale.

Signs marking the fictitious town have been erected by an individual who wishes to remain anonymous, along state Route 206, near the *real* hamlet of Roscoe.



Country Doctor

This brass sign was donated in August by Jerry Brittain and his wife Evelyn. Jerry is the grandson of Dr. Robert Brittain and fondly remembers visiting his grandfather in Downsville. This sign hung on the porch of Dr. Brittain's home on upper Main Street in Downsville, where Dr. Brittain practiced medicine for 51 years.



Dr. Robert Brittain was born in Damascus, Pennsylvania on March 17, 1867, the son of Rev. Theron and Henrietta Appley Brittain. When Robert was two, his father moved the family to take over the ministry of the Presbyterian Church in Cochection and then to another charge in Ridgebury in Orange County. Dr. Brittain attended the College of Physicians of Columbia College and then Albany Medical College where he graduated on March 19, 1890. Immediately after his graduation Dr. Brittain assisted other physicians in the Albany City hospital during a severe Cholera epidemic where he gained his practical experience. He returned to his home in Ridgebury where he then had to deal with a measles epidemic. In 1894 he moved to Shavertown and had a general practice for two years before moving to Downsville. He married Elanora Terry of Hamden in 1895 and they had four sons, Robert, Knox, Evans and Ned and one daughter Mollie Brittain Aber. After Elanora's death in 1943, Dr. Brittain married Mary Cochrane of Hancock, New York.

Dr. Brittain was a local legend and used all his talents and creativity to treat his patients. His drug-scented office where bottles of remedies, many of them antidotes he created himself, reached the ceiling along with other equipment he used to compound his medicines. He was known for his charity work and never turned a patient away, and like many rural doctors he was often paid in goods rather than money. He often had over \$1,000 of charity calls a year. House calls within the village of Downsville were \$.50 and rural ones up to a five-mile limit were \$1.50. A baby home delivery was \$5.00. Dr. Brittain was often seen traveling to house calls on horseback or with his horse drawn sleigh during the winter months. Dr. Brittain appreciated new technologies and was one of the first owners of an automobile in Downsville.

As a surgeon, Dr. Brittain was one of the first in this area to operate for appendicitis. *The Downsville News* reported a story that Dr. Brittain told of performing one appendectomy using a privy door as his operating table. He used bent spoons for retractors and gauze and silk for bandages, which he pulled from the patient's sewing table drawer. "Out of the ordinary—that's my gait," he often remarked.

Dr. Brittain is responsible for many of the early Town of Colchester health regulations and always promoted the health and safety practices for his patients. One such effort was reported in ***Middletown Daily Times and Press*** on **October 2, 1915**:

"Downsville Wages War Upon Rodents- Dr. Brittain Leads Crusade Against Germ Carriers and Sets Date For General Killing."

October 6th has been decided upon as rat killing day in Downsville. The main reason for a special day is so that all may combine to exterminate as many rats as possible and give the property owners a chance to shut up their hens, cats and dogs and keep them from being harmed. Dr. Robert Brittain, son of the Rev. Theron Brittain, has issued the following instructions. The best results can be had with rat paste, either

Common Sense or Hobson, spread on buttered bread, crackers, or mixed with meal or flour, and put in the cellar, garret, coop or barn. Try the poison October 6th and report results in dead rats."

Commenting editorially on the Downsville crusade the **Walton Reporter** said

"The novelty of the crusade started in Downsville by Dr. Brittain for the extermination of the rats, has occasioned some facetious comments from newspapers. Anyone who has been pestered by rats will welcome any plan that would relieve the situation. Anyway, rats are mighty big nuisances and about as desirable in a cellar or elsewhere as snakes, and if Downsville leads a movement that show the way to be rid of them, many householders will rise and give her thanks."

Dr. Brittain was a well respected physician and resident of Downsville. He was a charter member of the James S. Moore Post 167 of the American Legion, and one of the founders of the Downsville Fire Department. He was also the Downsville school physician and village health officer. Dr. Brittain maintained memberships in the AMA, Delaware County Medical Society and was regarded as the "Dean of County Medics."

The Downsville News called him , "a colorful figure on the East Branch valley scene with his battered old hat, sheepskin coat and worn leather medicine case." Dr. Robert Brittain exemplifies the challenges of early medical practices and how he carried out his practice with dedication, ingenuity and self-sacrificing service to his community.



CHS Purchases New Equipment

The society has purchased a new computer, scanner/printer and software for cataloging and scanning photographs and documents. If you have old family photographs or documents from Colchester, that you would like to keep but are willing to share with the community, we can quickly scan and return them to you. Please call Town Historian, Kay Parisi-Hampel to schedule a time, 607-363-7303.

New 2015 CHS Calendar

The 2015 Calendar is available for \$15.00. This year's calendar design was created by questions that were asked last year about Colchester's unique stories such as the design of the Phoebe fishing lure, Colchester's stone cairns, the Cooks Falls Lodge, Agloe, the Wo-He-Lo Experiment, Corbett's Roebling Suspension Bridge and other interesting history subjects about the Township. Copies are available at Colchester Town Hall, Poppy's, Downsville Diner and directly from the Society.

October is New York State Archives Month and November is New York State History Month Society Meeting Dates 2014

Sept. 30 at 7 P.M. Oct. 28 at 10 A.M. Nov. 25 at 7 P.M. Dec. 23 at 10 A.M.

**Meetings are held in the Historical Society Room, basement level of the Colchester Town Hall, 72 Tannery Road
Downsville, New York 13755.**

Website: www.colchesterhistoricalsociety.org