

Colchester History Connections Newsletter

December, 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

December-March 16, 2015--The display in the Town Hal will feature **Vintage Holiday Post and Greeting Cards**. These cards from the Historical Society collection were collected by Clifford McDonald, Howard Gregory, Otis Vernold, Edith and Fay Fuller from their years of exchanging and collecting cards. The official name for postcard collecting is deltiology and is one of the largest collectibles areas. Postcards are popular because of their colorful illustrations and their wide range of subjects; holiday cards being just a portion of the subjects collected by these local collectors. These cards date from the 1890's through 1950. Also included in this display are several examples of Christmas postcards and greeting cards sent home by local service men and women during World War I and II.



New History Newsletter--Author and East Meredith resident, Chris Altman is launching a new History newsletter: **From the Ground Up**. This newsletter will cover history in several different counties around the area. The idea is to unite and expose smaller historical societies. It is totally free and you can get his newsletter by contacting Kay Parisi-Hampel at hampelk@colchesterhistoricalsociety.org

Historical Society Membership--We hope that you will consider joining our Society. You will be an important part of an organization that is moving ahead in the preservation of our local history. We have an extensive collection of local family histories, artifacts and a major collection of Colchester postcards and photographs. As a benefit of your membership, you will have access to our collection for your personal research. We invite you to help us in carrying out the various projects that we are involved with. Please attend one of our monthly meetings; we need a variety of talents to carry out our projects. Please print out the [Application Form](#) and mail it to the address listed along with your check or money order. If you would like to give a gift membership, please add their information to the form along with your information. Membership cards will be mailed to the address that you indicate on our Application Form. Membership Categories are: Individual Membership - \$15.00 Senior-(over 55) \$10.00 Student-\$10.00. Please return your dues by our Annual Meeting on March 31, 2015.

Thank you to all our current members for your wonderful support during 2014. This year we were able to add a computer, and printer/scanner that allow us to catalog our collection, print and scan Colchester's photographs and documents to add to our collection. We were also able to purchase a large swing panel easel which allowed us to have an attractive display for our Pepacton Reservoir construction program by Diane Galusha and to bring that display out to the Fire Hall during the Lion's Maple Leaf Festival. We produced our second annual Colchester 2015 Calendar which was a very successful fundraiser for the Society. We partnered with the Best Dam 5K Race group to design and add another interpretative sign for the Downs Point Trail and we will continue to work with Dr. Katie Mattson and Sarah Hood and the Town to develop and mark the trail up to the Downs Grave site which overlooks Downsville and then to add an extension trail over to Paige Cemetery. This year the Society has had visitors from all over the United States and we have been fortunate to receive donations of family documents, artifacts and photographs for our collection. Monthly workdays at the Historical Society help us to continue to catalog and preserve the many donations we receive and we would welcome any volunteers that would like to help preserve our local history. Please join us at our Annual Meeting, Tuesday, March 31, 2015, at 7 P.M. in the basement level of the Colchester Town Hall, 72 Tannery Road, Downsville; we will be holding election of officers and Board members and planning our activities for 2015.

Pepacton Reservoir Research--On October 24th , Town Historian Kay Parisi-Hampel joined Diane Galusha and several members of the Andes Historical Society at the East Delaware Intake Chamber Building of the Board of Water Supply. Diane Galusha had arranged for the historians to view and scan BWS property records compiled during the construction of the Pepacton Reservoir. The day was spent scanning property photographs, which included houses, barns and outbuildings. The files also contained detailed property surveys and property census materials, including complete histories of the court claims and settlement payments by the City of New York. These materials on the village of Pepacton, which was in the Township of Colchester, will be added to our collection. Additional visits are being planned in order to complete the scanning of the files.

Examples of photographs found in the Pepacton Board of Water Supply files that show the houses and outbuildings of the properties taken during the construction of the Pepacton Reservoir:



Hood farmhouse & shop-Pepacton



Hood barn



Hood Playhouse and Icehouse



Hood picnic grounds along East Branch of Delaware River

This 428 acre property was located two miles east above Downsville. The BWS started their investigation on July 7, 1932 and the claim was settled on February 4, 1948. The farm was originally owned by William D. and Anna Hood and by the time the claim was settled the farm was sold to their daughter and son-in-law Myra and Howard Miller, Anna continued to live on the farm with her daughter. The house was sold and the building was moved to Mink Brook in Downsville in 1948.

Ice Harvesting in Colchester—From 1800 to 1920, nearly every community of any size in the northeastern United States that was near fresh water harvested ice, usually during January and February, when temperatures were coldest. Because the season was short, work was hard and dangerous; once the harvest was begun it rarely shut down until the entire “crop” was in the icehouse. Men worked 10-hour days and 7-day weeks, many men worked piece work and sawyers were paid about nine cents per block. The blocks were usually 12 to 15 inches square and weighed about 80 to 100 pounds.

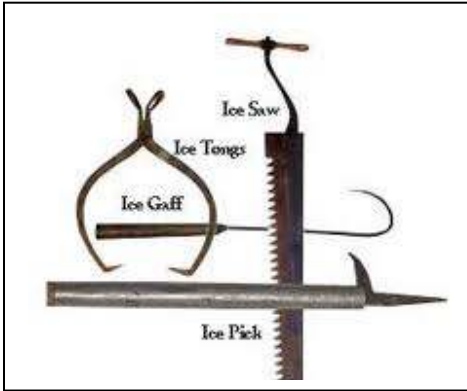


Photos donated by Dr. Joyce Conroe, ice harvesting in Horton area mid to late 1890's.

“Sometime in January, usually, when the ice had reached the desirable thickness (ideally 14-16 inches – thick enough to support a team), snow had to be cleared from the area to be harvested. If the snow was light and dry, a clearing scraper was used. This consisted of boards assembled in such a way as to provide a flat bottom and an angled back that slanted away from the bottom. It was usually about eight feet wide and was pulled by a horse; “the operator stood on the tail board of the scraper so as to gather just enough snow so that it did not spill over the top of the plank.” Heavier, wetter snow was removed by means of a scoop scraper which was only three feet wide and which was then followed by the clearing scraper. The snow was sometimes dumped on the edges of the ice field but since the weight of the piles occasionally broke the ice, it was safer to take the snow some distance away.

The next job was to mark the ice field. To create a base line men drove two stakes into auger holes about 200 feet apart at the edge of the field to be cut. They placed a long plank fitted with sights in line with the stakes and ran a hand plow close to its edge, cutting a groove one-half inch deep. When this line was completed, they scribed the first cross line in the same manner. These first grooves at right angles to each other served as guides for the ice marker, which had a row of teeth and a swing guide. The teeth were placed in the previously scribed groove and pulled along its entire length, deepening the groove to two inches. The swing guide was then placed in the groove, thus gauging the distance for the next groove, and the process was repeated until the entire field was marked out like a checkerboard.

Once the field was marked, it had to be plowed (or grooved) and this job was done by a horse-drawn ice plow. Each tooth of the plow was set to cut one-quarter inch deeper than the one in front of it; consequently, one trip with an eight-tooth plow would deepen a groove by two inches. Multiple trips by two plows could deepen the grooves to seven inches, sufficiently deep for 12-inch ice (the most common cut for retail trade). The cakes could then be split off with a breaking bar and, if done correctly, would break evenly, leaving no lips on the cakes.” Jean and Bud Seymour, Sodus Bay Historical Society

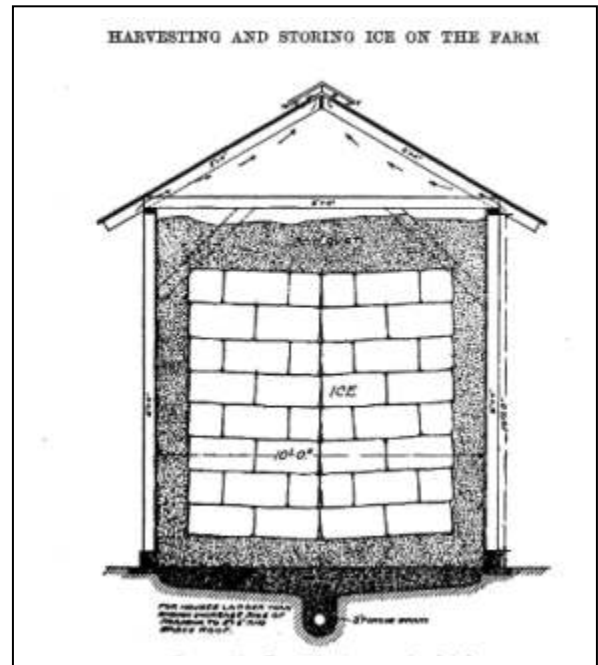


The **Downsville News** reported on April 18, 1921 about the commercial use of ice at the Cooks Falls Dye Works, "Who would think that an ice crop could be gathered now when the ice is out of rivers and robins and blue birds are in evidence everywhere in this section. The new superintendent of the Cooks Falls Dye Works made the announcement Monday that in order to make a new kind of dye, a thousand pounds of ice would be needed daily. G.I. Treyz immediately set his men in motion and they are cutting twelve inch ice on Russell Pond, which is being bustled to the dye works near the mouth of Russell Brook, two miles from Cooks Falls."

Ice houses were common sights in Colchester, ice blocks cut and packed in sawdust or straw could remain frozen a full year. Dairy farmers used ice to keep their butter, cheese and milk fresh for market. Chipped ice was used in drinks and to make ice cream. Wooden home iceboxes came into common use in the early 1900's and these were typically made of wood, lined with tin or zinc and insulated with sawdust. Some iceboxes had rear doors that could be built into the wall of a house and then could be loaded from the outside. Icebox water pans had to be emptied daily. After 1907 when the railroads built large creameries and icehouses along the D&N line, thousands of pounds of butter and cheese were shipped to the New York City markets in refrigerated train cars.



Harold Reynolds Barn in Pepacton with icehouse on the left.



The 1921 U.S. Agriculture Department bulletin 1078, *Harvesting and Storing Ice on the Farm*, gave detailed plans for building ice houses and the economies of storing ice. This report gave the guideline of, "half a ton of ice per cow is sufficient to cool the cream and hold it a low temperature for delivery 2 or 3 times a week. Investigations have indicated that counting the full value of the men's time, the average cost of cutting ice is about 3 cents for a cake 22 inches square and 14 inches thick, or about 27 cents a ton."

For other glimpses into Colchester's past 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. The final meeting for 2014 is December 23, 2014--10 A.M.

Meeting Dates 2015

- Annual Meeting March 31--7 P.M.**
- April 28--10 A.M. May 26--7 P.M. June 30--10 A.M.**
- July 28--7 P.M. August 25--10 A.M. September 29--7 P.M.**
- October 27--10 A.M. November 24--10 A.M. December 29--10 A.M**