Colchester History Connections Newsletter

September 1,2019 *Colchester Historical Society*, Box 112, Downsville, New York 13755
Volume 9, 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

2020 Historical Society Calendar

This year's 33-page calendar features black and white photographs of Colchester's Civic and Social Clubs

Colchester Historical Society 2020 Calendar

Colchester's Civic and Social Clubs

Celebrating 100 years of the James S Moore, Post 167 American Legion

and features a special page celebrating the 100th anniversary of the James S. Moore Post 167 American Legion and a Photo Name Key. Calendars are $15 and available at Colchester Town Hall, The Downsville Diner, and on-line through the Historical Society website. Proceeds from the calendar will be used to conserve the artifacts and documents of the Historical Society and educational programming.

Colchester Town Hall Display September 30-December, 2019 Downsville Central School--80th Anniversary of the Consolidation of Colchester One-room Schools

The Story Behind the Consolidation of Colchester's schools

In 1937 the Board of Trustees for the Downsville Union Free School were given an ultimatum by the State Education Department, *"Build or equip forthwith an adequate gymnasium for the Downsville High School or lose the $13,000 state aid received.*

Or, plan immediately for centralizing the Downsville high school by taking in 17 other adjacent districts and the erection of a Central school likely to cost a quarter of a million dollars

Failing to set on foot plans for one or the other of these alternative projects will result, as stated, in loss of the state aid now received and the removal of the trustees".

During 1937 the Downsville High School had been using Bailey's Hall as a gymnasium, this hall was over a village garage. A State inspector had visited Downsville, inspecting the school and temporary gym and ordered a condemnation of the temporary gym, calling it unsafe and not complying with the provisions of Article 26A of the Education Law. Commissioner Banker issued a formal letter to the Downsville High School Trustees, *"Please take immediate steps, therefore, to comply with the mandatory provisions of Article 26A of the Education Laws. I understand that the requirements are 120 minutes per week for every pupil over 8 years of age of physical education work."*

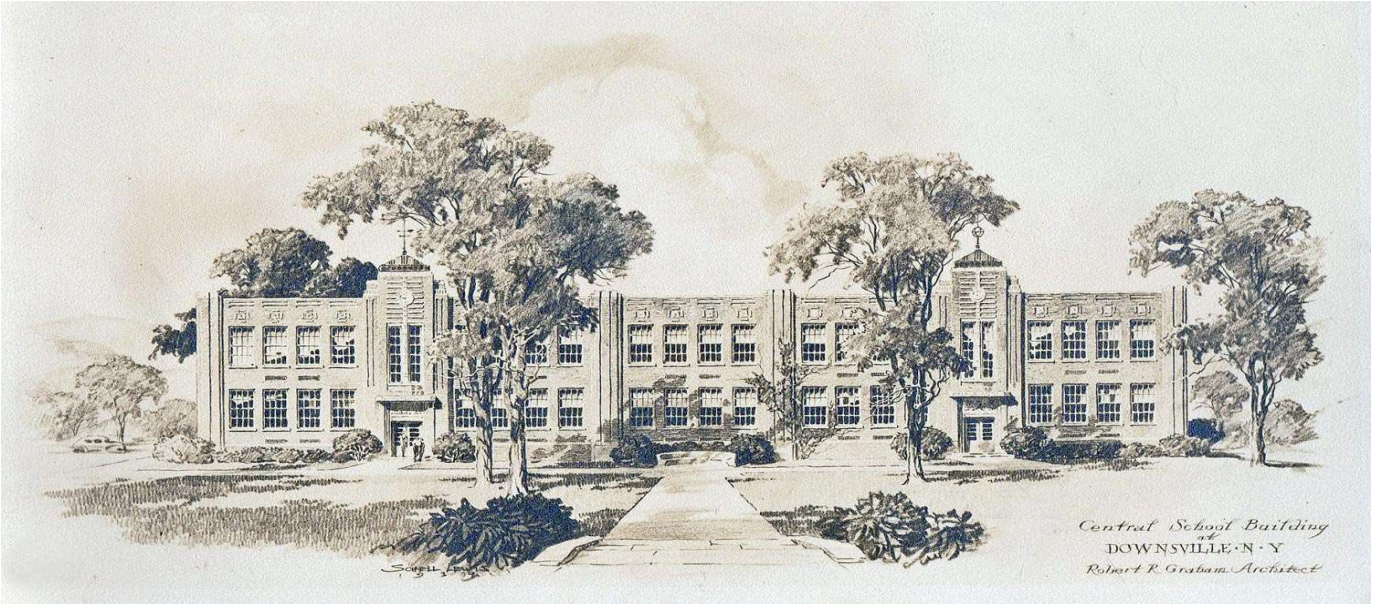
Commissioner Gilbert Banker, Trustee Harley Shaver, Principal Tingue and attorney L.S. Carpenter went to Albany to plead with the Education Department and seek a waiver for the school. The Education officials were courteous, but rejected their appeal.

"They told us," said Mr. Banker, "That the Downsville high school trustees must provide a different gym; that the present one is unsafe and inadequate and the department's instructions must be complied with or Downsville will lose its high school and $13,000 a year state aid. District No. 21 has an assessed valuation of $335,000. With this as an assessment base it would not be feasible for Downsville to build a central school, but a way out is for Downsville to centralize 18 districts, giving a centralized district an assessable base of 2,000,000, which would warrant a handsome central school, and involve of course the organization of a bus system for the collection and distribution of the pupils of the 18 districts, similar to the bus system used by the Hancock Central School."

L.S. Carpenter, of Downsville, counsel to the Board of Trustees, when asked about the mandatory features of the law as set forth by Commissioner Banker and the inevitability of a new gymnasium said:

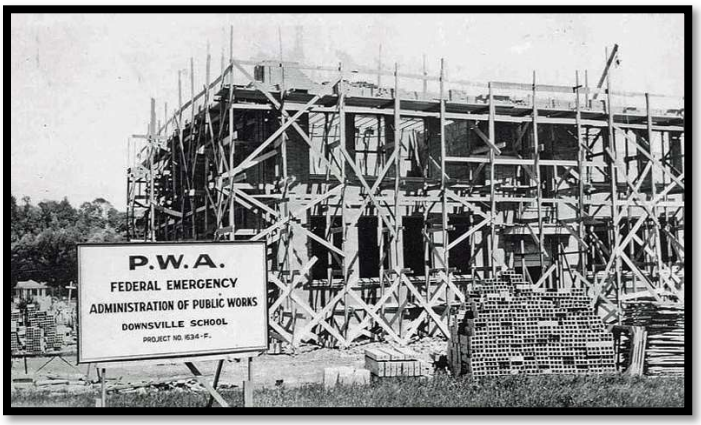
"The trustees are confronted by a very serious problem. The Albany people say that physical education must be provided, else Downsville would lose its high school and become automatically a district school. Nothing is likely to be done in a great hurry. There is a good deal of sentiment in the Downsville area for a Centralized School. At Albany the people there say they would aid in every possible way, if a central school is undertaken. With reference to the building of such a central school only to have it submerged if the Board of Water Supply dam is located below Downsville rather than above, all that can be said hundreds of families when the dam now is that with the influx of work begins, the present school facilities in Downsville would be utterly inadequate. If the dam submerges Downsville after a central school is built, the city of New York will have to pay for it along with other expenditures." *Downsville Must Centralize or Build at Once, Charles T. White,* **Catskill Mt. News, January 29, 1937**

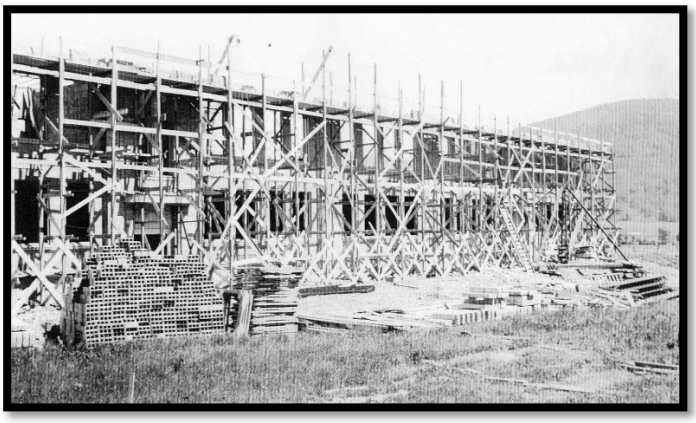
The Board of Trustees began discussions on the possibility of creating a centralized school which involved consolidation of the 17 surrounding one-room school districts. Each of the Districts had to bring the plan to their residents and pass a proposition to allow the Board of Education of Central School District No. 1 of the Town of Colchester, Hamden, Hancock, Walton and Andes to provide education facilities for all pupils in a combined grade and high school building and to provide transportation for the of the pupils. This created the approximately 125 square miles to form the Central School District No. 1.



Original architect drawing of Downsville Central School

The Downsville Central School in Downsville, was constructed with the aid of federal Public Works Administration (PWA) funds. The PWA provided a $108,245 grant for the project, New York State provided $83,700 and the rest was bonded by the School District, the total cost was $232,607. Construction occurred between Nov. 1938 and Nov. 1939.



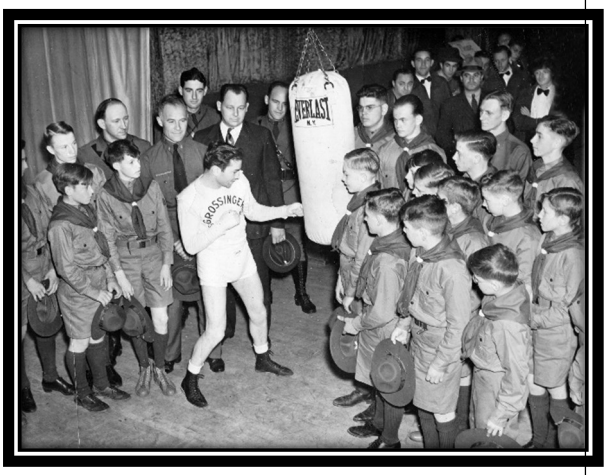


In November of 1939, the Downsville Central School was opened with 292 elementary and 197 secondary students enrolled.

Completed construction in 1939.

Early Downsville Boy Scout Troop Fieldtrip to Grossinger Resort

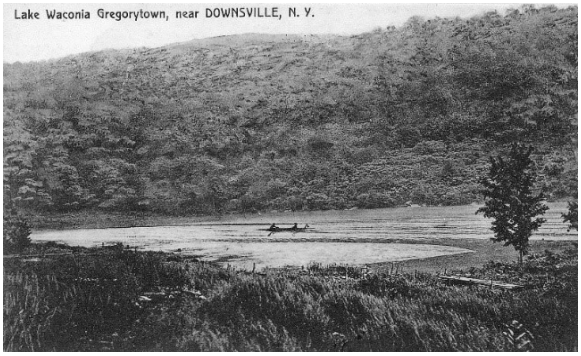
On May 22, 1938, the Downsville Boy Scouts took a fieldtrip to Grossinger Resort to watch welterweight champ Barney Ross train for his upcoming fight against featherweight champ Henry Armstrong at Madison Square Garden on May 26, 1938.



1st Row, l to r: ?, Robert Fuller, ?, Robert Yevich, Allan Champlin, David Paniola, Stanley Shields, Robert Champlin, Ray Place, Gerald Place.
2nd Row l to r: Richard McCarthy, John Holmes, Richard Fuller, Bill Smith, Albert Townsend Jr.,, James Felix Stepp, Robert Howard, ?, ?, Charles Stevens.
3rd Row, l to r: Sixth person from l: Oakley Shaw, Thor Klindt, Trooper Forest Knapp.

Barney Ross was born Barnet David Rasofsky in New York City in 1909, his father, a Talmudic scholar, moved the family in 1911 and opened a small grocery in the Maxwell Street ghetto section of Chicago. Barney was following in his father's footsteps and was studying to become a rabbi. When Ross was 14 his father was murdered in a hold-up at the grocery; his mother suffering a nervous breakdown was institutionalized and his younger siblings were all placed in an orphanage. Ross and his older brother dropped out of school, determined to reunite their family. Living on the Chicago streets Barney became a street fighter and errand boy for Al Capone. Backed by Capone, Ross became an amateur boxer, winning a Golden Glove championship in 1929 and began his professional career by winning a 10-round decision over Tony Canzoneri earning both the world lightweight and junior welterweight titles on June 23, 1933. Boxing made it possible for him to buy a house, care of his mother and bring all his siblings out of the orphanage. Ross's final professional fight was the 1938 bout against Henry Armstrong which he lost in a 15-round decision.

Ross joined the U.S. Marines in 1942 and was awarded the Silver Star for his actions during the Battle of Guadalcanal. The wounds he suffered during that battle lead to an addiction to morphine given to him during his medical treatments. The story of this addiction was told in the 1957 motion picture *Monkey on My Back*. He went through rehabilitation and became an advocate of a Jewish state. Ross is known as one of the best boxers of the 1930's and was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 1990.



Early postcard view of Lake Waconia, Gregorytown on Fuller Hill and 2019

Tune in on September 28, 2019 at 10 AM to WJFF 90.5 FM Radio Chatskill program where Cooks Falls resident, Barbara Nimri Aziz will interview Colchester Town Historian, Kay Parisi-Hampel about Colchester's cemeteries and their historical value. It will stream Via the WJFF app and will also be podcast. Radio Chatskill is a live, local conversations focused on arts, history and current news.

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
2019 Historical Society Meetings:
September 24 at 7 PM
October 29 at 10 AM November 26 at 7 PM
December 17 at 10 AM