

# Colchester History Connections Newsletter

March 2015, Colchester Historical Society, Box 112, Downsville, New York 13755  
Volume 5, Issue 1 Preserving the history of Downsville, Corbett, Shinhopple,  
Gregorytown, Horton and Cooks Falls

Website: [www.colchesterhistoricalsociety.org](http://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

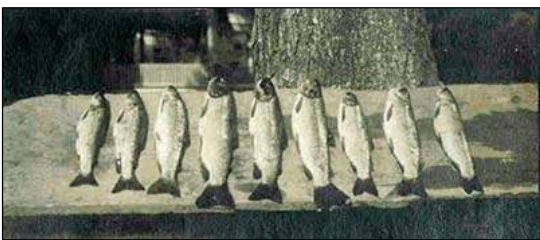
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## Displays

**March 31-May 15, 2015**—the display in Town Hall will feature **Opening Day--Fishing in Colchester.**

A variety of fishing paraphernalia from our and local collector's collections will be on display, including ice, eel, trout and shad fishing items. Colchester residents have been stewards of our local streams and rivers since the founding of the town and the fisheries were an important food source for early settlers. In 1785, Joshua Pine, submitted an affidavit that stated that 1,300 American Shad were taken in one day below Downsville and that the settlers dried and salted the shad which supplied food for the entire settlement for that year. In the late 1800's the Catskill Mountain's East Branch of the Delaware River and the Beaver Kill region gave birth to the American Fly fishing tradition. By the late 1850's native brook trout numbers were being depleted by over fishing and pollutants from our local tanneries and charcoal factories. During this time period individual sportsmen often used their private funds to stock our local rivers and brooks.

"George W. Hulbert recently secured 20,000 trout fry and placed them in Gregory and Telford Hollow brooks." Downsville News, April 25, 1918. Fishing reports were often noted in the Downsville News, "The finest catch of trout we have seen this season was brought in Wednesday by Bert Cable and Carl Campbell. The catch consisted of six trout ranging in size from nine to twenty inches and weight from one and one half to three pounds. They were taken from the Beaverkill near Cooks Falls." April 30, 1931. Stocked and native trout have always drawn tourists and sportsmen to Colchester. If you are dreaming of spring and your first cast of the season, stop in and take a look.



Beaverkill Catch



Young Fisherman



Phoebe Fishing lures

## Annual Meeting

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. The Historical Society room has been reorganized and we are preparing to start an automated catalog of the items contained in our collection. We are also working with the Town and Parks committee to install more historical interpretative signs and to prepare a Downsville Historical Walking tour brochure. These are just a few of the projects we will be working on in 2015. We are always looking for volunteers and supporters, and we would welcome you to join us to help preserve the history of Colchester. **Please send in your 2015 membership dues by the annual meeting. Your dues help us maintain our collection and meet our budget expenses.**

## Barns

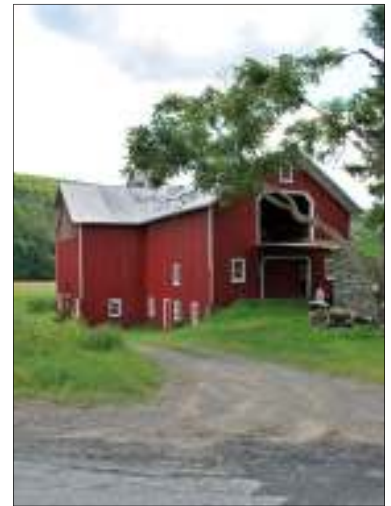
After the Revolutionary War families moved back to Colchester and began building barns to store their hay and grains. These early barns were usually English Threshing Barns that were thirty by forty feet with timber framing, vertical siding and no basements. These barns were divided into three bays, with the larger center bay having a threshing floor, another bay or mow to store grain and the smaller bay being the cereal granary, or stable. Generally these barns had a center door to allow easy access to loaded wagons. As the dairy industry developed after the Civil War barns changed and Dairy Barns or basement barns became common in Colchester. Barns were often built to take advantage of the hillsides and barn bridges were built to enter the second story of the barns. Ramps led to the second level where wagons could bring in loads of hay to be stored in the mows for winter storage of feed hay for the dairy herds. With the invention of hay racks, a pulley system that could move loose hay more efficiently, barn heights were increased to hold larger amounts of hay. The High Bridgeway or "overshot" have ramps that extend from the uphill slope into a third story of the barn. The Catskill Center for Conservation and Development's *Barns of the Catskills*, states that this type of barn is "unique to the Catskills and Delaware County in particular – found only rarely in other parts of the State."



John Bouw English style barn-Pepacton



Gregory Hollow Dairy Barn



High Bridgeway three story  
Houck Property-Gregory Hollow



Early barn Back River Road-Gregorytown



Shinhopple Barn



Dairy Barn with modern  
additions Gregory Hollow

Do you have a barn on your property? The Historical Society is working on a Colchester Barn Survey and we would like any information on your barns, date of construction, additions, and outbuildings, type of barn, builder and photographs. Please contact Town Historian, Kay Parisi-Hampel at 607-373-7303 or [hampelk@colchesterhistoricalsociety.org](mailto:hampelk@colchesterhistoricalsociety.org) or drop off this information at Colchester Town Hall, 72 Tannery Road, Downsville, New York 13755.

## Downsville Newspaper History

Amos E. Peck started his publishing career in Greene County with the *Jefferson Weekly*. In 1874 he sold his interest in that paper to his partner A.W. Clark and accepted an offer by Warren Williams to finance a weekly newspaper in Downsville. The ***Downsville News*** began publication in January of 1875 and quickly became a main newspaper for the East Branch Valley. The Peck family lived on the Williams farm and had their printing press in a small outbuilding on that property. As the business expanded they moved their press to the village and the business was continued by Amos until his death in 1920. Amos's sons, George and Edward continued publication of the paper highlighting local happenings and adding their "Downsville Jottings" column which gave satirical comments on the local news and humorous poetry under the heading of "a fellow at the Saturday night stove session." The Peck brothers were also known for their musical talents. Edward was a tuba player and had been invited to tour with the Sousa band and George was a baritone horn player, as well as a composer and arranger. Both brothers were members of the Downsville Concert Band and they were known for their daily hour practice sessions at the printing shop where other local musicians would drop by to join their sessions. George and Edward were members of the Downsville Concert Band when they played at the 1900 Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo. The brothers continued publication of the *Downsville News* until May of 1946 when they closed the publication due to age and mechanical difficulties. The brothers did continue their small printing business until Edward's death in 1947.

Downsville was without a newspaper until the *Hancock Herald* began publication of the ***Downsville Herald***, a four page weekly, but this too ceased publication in 1949. The *Herald* did publish a two page Downsville Happenings section until 1950 when publication costs and personnel problems were cited as reasons for the elimination of that part of the *Herald*.

In July of 1950, Mr. and Mrs. Roger Scofield began publication of the ***Downsville Progress***, a weekly paper that they wrote and had printed in the Hancock Herald shop and they continued this paper until 1953 when they purchased the *St. Johnsville Enterprise* and this ended weekly newspapers in Downsville.



Amos Peck, Downsville News editor



Downsville's weekly newspapers

Stop by the Historical Society room to view some copies of these newspapers for a look into daily life in Downsville and the surrounding areas. The New York State Library also has microfilm of the *Downsville News*, *Downsville Herald* and the *Downsville Progress*.

## Slavery in New York State

New York Historical Society's records show that "As many as 20 percent of colonial New Yorkers were enslaved Africans. First Dutch and then English merchants built the city's local economy largely around supplying ships for the trade in slaves and in what slaves produced - sugar, tobacco, indigo, coffee, chocolate, and ultimately, cotton. New York ship captains and merchants bought and sold slaves along the coast of Africa and in the taverns of their own city. Almost every businessman in 18th-century New York had a stake, at one time or another, in the traffic in human beings. In the urban landscape, there were no plantations. Slaves slept in the cellars and attics of town houses or above farmhouse kitchens in the countryside. They did virtually all of the work of many households - bringing in the firewood, the water, and the food; cleaning the house and the clothing; removing the wastes. They were vital to the work of early craftsmen and manufacturers, and many became skilled artisans themselves. And they performed almost all the heavy labor of building New York's infrastructure."

### Colchester Slave Owners

Several early Colchester settlers came to this area with their slaves. Alexander Cole, a wealthy farmer from the Kingston area, settled at the mouth of what is now Coles Clove. Cole was a Colchester Town Supervisor from 1831-32. His slaves worked on his farm and also in his grist mill. The following were recorded from transcripts in our Town Clerk's files by town attorney and historian Edward E. Conlon:

- A Negro boy named Tom belonging to Alexander Cole was three years old the fourth of March 1813.
- Born of a black slave belonging to Alexander Cole, a male child named Benjamin, born the second day of January 1813. Recorded this second day of July 1813.
- Born to a black slave belonging to Alexander Cole, a female child named Gin, the 20<sup>th</sup> day of January 1815. Recorded January 13, 1816.
- Born of a black slave belonging to Alexander Cole a female child named Harriet, the 20<sup>th</sup> day of December, 1816. Recorded the 28<sup>th</sup> of February 1818.

Also recorded was a birth for a male child of a black slave belonging to John Hitt, born on the 28<sup>th</sup> day of September 1810. Recorded November 19, 1810.

Conlon also reported that a slave cemetery was located at the foot of Cat Hollow with thirty-one of the thirty-three graves in this cemetery marked only with ordinary field stones, the remaining two traditional gravestones marked only with the name Cole.

Another founding settler that owned slaves was Abel Downs. Cato Dewitt (Dewight) and his wife took care of Abel Downs' daughter Sarah who had been paralyzed at a young age during a riding accident. After they were freed they stayed in the employ of the Downs family and cared for Sarah until her death. Cato drove a carriage with a team of white horses that carried Sarah around Downsville. The Dewitts lived in the Edel house behind the School House Inn. Sarah Downs, a prominent member and financial patron of the Downsville Presbyterian Church, made arrangements so that the Dewitts could be buried in the Abel Downs lot in church's Paige Cemetery.

New York State passed a law in 1799 for the gradual abolition of slavery; children born to slave mothers were free but were required to work for their mother's owner as indentured servants into their late twenties. New York State abolished slavery on July 4, 1827.

**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.**

#### 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.**