

# Colchester History Connections Newsletter

September 1, 2015, Colchester Historical Society, Box 112, Downsville, New York 13755

Volume 5, Issue 3 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

**October 1-December 31, 2015—Colchester's One-Room Schoolhouses.** This display in the Town Hall will feature photographs, documents and artifacts from Colchester's one room school houses. In the late 1800's Colchester had 30 one-room schoolhouses, more than any other town in Delaware County. Each school district was between three to five square miles, as most students walked to school. At the annual Town meeting on March 13, 1813 it was, "Resolved that the sum of seventy dollars be raised for the support of schools." Stop in and take a look back at early education in the Town of Colchester.

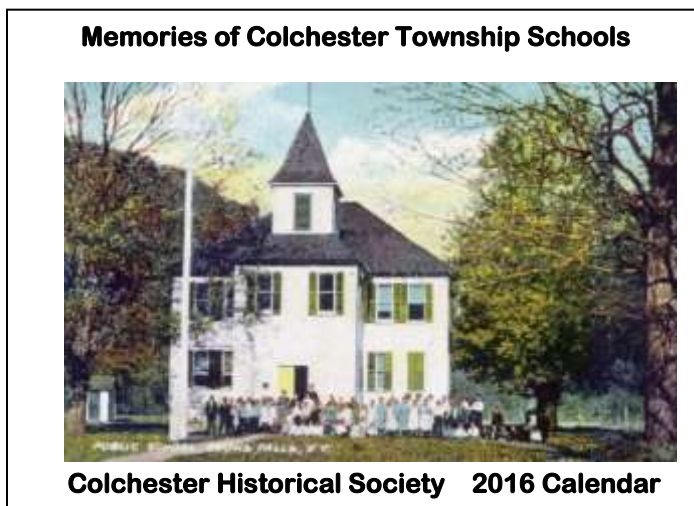


Long Flats, Joint Colchester/Hancock District No. 2-was the smallest school building in Delaware County



Trout Brook School, 1899

## 2016 Calendar



Our new 2016 calendar is on sale. This calendar has 34 pages of color and b/w photos of school buildings and student groups from the Historical Society's collection. The history of our thirty, one-room school houses is revealed through memories of students and teachers, information from District School Clerk ledgers, and New York State Education reports. A special end page shows how some of these school buildings are being used today. This will make a wonderful holiday gift! Calendars will be on sale at the Town Clerk's Office, Historical Society, Downsville Diner and Poppy. Calendars are \$20 with a special holiday price of 2 for \$35. The numbers of copies is limited, so purchase yours soon and help make this fundraiser a success.

## “Magnitude of Stone Business”

This headline appeared in the August 5, 1915 issue of the *Downsville News*, reporting the quantities of bluestone being shipped from the Wagner quarry on the mountain above Downsville and owned by Johnston & Rhodes. An average of 57 carloads of bluestone was shipped from this quarry each year from the completion of the D&N railroad in 1906 until the beginning of the Depression in 1929.



D&N Downsville Stone Dock circa 1910



Johnston & Rhodes Postcard 1910

Railroad development and the expansion of the Bluestone industry are intrinsically linked. The New York and Erie Railroad had contracted to complete a line from the Hudson River to Binghamton by December 31, 1848 or lose its charter. The wide valley in Starrucca Creek in Pennsylvania was an engineering challenge that Julius Adams had to solve. He could tunnel through the mountains, build a large wooden trestle, both of which were costly and required constant maintenance or he could build a series of multiple-arch rock bridges that could last forever. He chose the rock bridge. This bridge was built of bluestone and has 17 arches, is 1,000 feet long and 100 feet high and still in use today. After the viaduct was built, numerous quarries opened in Pennsylvania up into Delaware County.



1924 Starrucca Viaduct-Library of Congress photo



1912 Postcard -Library of Congress

The development of the rail lines from East Branch to Arkville opened the bluestone markets. The D&N built bluestone docks at Harvard, Shinhopple, Gregorytown, Downsville, Pepacton and Arena. “Bluestone helped build the railroads and the railroads help build the bluestone industry.”

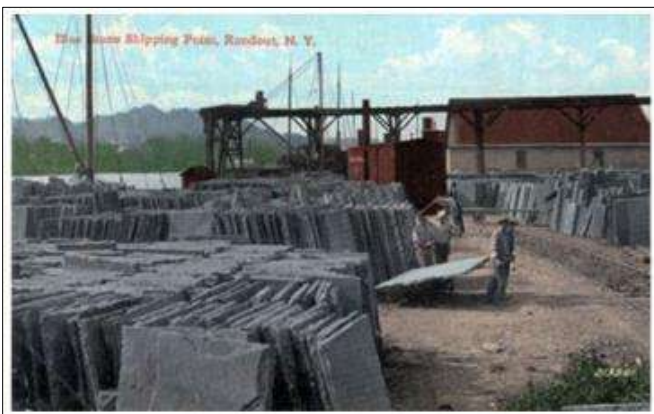


Gregorytown Quarry early 1900's



Ingram family teamsters drawing bluestone to Shinhopple

Bluestone is a type of sandstone unique to the Catskills. Large stone formations lying just beneath the surface, where the layers can be lifted and cut to size. "A metamorphic sandstone of the Appalachian Plateau, formed in the Devonian Age, the Upper Devonian Stone is green and lilac, while the Middle Devonian Stone is dark gray and blue." **Bluestone History-Johnston and Rhodes** Quarrymen had to contend with tough dangerous conditions of weather extremes, isolated locations, dust, bruises and rattlesnakes. Albany was the first city to lay down bluestone sidewalks. Bluestone was also used on the Albany capital building. William M. Tweed (Boss Tweed) forged a partnership with the New York and Pennsylvania Bluestone Company and made huge profits by arranging for the company to supply bluestone for New York City's sidewalks. Many of New York City sidewalks laid in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century came from our local quarries, as well as the stonework on City Hall. By 1850, bluestone was being shipped by river sloop to Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Charleston, San Francisco, Milwaukee, St. Louis and even, Havana, Cuba. Miners still quarry bluestone using the same manual, labor-intensive methods employed for hundreds of years. The growing bluestone industry is important to construction and architecture nationwide. New York's industry is valued between \$40 and \$100 million annually and it employs more than 700 full and part-time employees. Most bluestone is quarried within a 90-mile radius of Colchester Township.



Hudson Barge shipping point-Johnston & Rhodes shipped two barges full of bluestone each week during the 1920's.



Downsville quarry workers 1900's

One of the oldest and most successful Bluestone firms in the Colchester area was formed by John Rhodes with the backing of the wealthy lumberman, J.W. Hall. When Hall died he formed a partnership with Thomas Johnston from Horton. The Johnston and Rhodes Bluestone Co. has been quarrying, fabricating and distributing bluestone since 1900. This is still a family company and was first incorporated by Thomas Johnston in 1909. When Thomas Johnston died his sons moved the headquarters from Horton to East Branch, adding a sawmill operation to their business. A second family run Bluestone Company in Colchester is Sonny and Sons Stone Co., LLC which was formed in 1988 and operates their company in the hamlet of Colchester.

### **Walton Home Tour—September 26, 2015**

Nine homes will be on the tour this year; homes from the early 1900's to the 1980's will be shown. The tour includes a cottage that looks like a church, a one-room school house listed on the National Historic Register, a wonderful example of a farmhouse, and a barn converted to a home and art gallery. Tickets can be purchased at the Walton Historical Society, Eells House, 9 Townsend Street, Walton, New York 13856, on Saturdays between 10 AM to 2 PM or by mailing a check to that address. Tickets are \$12 and \$10 for members purchased in advance and \$15 on the day of the tour. Tour books and bracelets will be given out at the Eells House at 9:30 AM and the tour starts at 10 AM. A reception will follow the closing of the tour at 3 PM at the Congregational Church, which is the last building on the tour.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Best Dam 5K/10 Run/Walk/Paddle—October 3, 2015**

The race starts at 9 AM at the Corbett Community Hall. Registration opens two hours before the race at the Downsville Legion Hall. Proceeds directly benefit the community. In 2013 funds were used for signage throughout Downsville to increase awareness of available hiking trails and scenic areas. The 2014 funds were used to purchase an ice-skating rink and ice skates for free use for the public during the winter months. Visit <http://bestdam5k.com> for more details.



### **Maple Leaf Festival—October 10, 2015**

The annual Lion's Club Maple Leaf Festival will be in the Downsville Fire Hall and on the streets of Downsville. A Market Day is also being held at Pepacton Park lot on Route 206/30 from 9 AM to 2 PM along with the 2015 Streetscape Art Benefit to celebrate the Eagle Carvings Project. Come to see live chainsaw carvings of an eagle by seven time National Chain Saw Carver Champion, Mark Tyoe, from 10 AM to 3 PM. Chances to win an eagle carving are on sale at Town of Colchester website: <http://townofcolchesterny.com/calendar/> Festivities will end with a Block Party with live music at Pepacton Park lot from 3 PM to 10 PM. The Historical Society will be selling eagle shaped cookies to benefit the Society and the Streetscape Art project for 2016, come visit our table!



**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:**

**September 29--7 P.M.    October 27--10 A.M.    November 24--10 A.M.    December 29--10 A.M.**