

Colchester History Connections Newsletter

March 1, 2016, Colchester Historical Society, Box 112, Downsville, New York 13755

Volume 6, Issue 1 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 March 1-May 15, 2016—Downsville Concert Band. This display in Town Hall will feature photographs, documents and artifacts from the Downsville Military, Cornet and Concert Bands. The first Military Band was organized before the Civil War and was followed by the cornet band and three other community bands from 1865 to 1882. The Downsville Concert Band was organized in April 1884 and continued for over fifty years. The band was a popular social organization that purchased instruments, sheet music and uniforms for all its members. New members were given free instrument instruction by the older members and this insured the continuation of the band.



1916 Downsville Concert Band Postcard--in front of Walton Library

The Concert Band played and marched in 50 consecutive Downsville Memorial Day parades. Free summer concerts were given each year in Downsville and in 1911 the residents of the Town raised by subscription, monies to build a pagoda style Band Stand for the Concert Band's use. This Band Stand stood next to the newly built Downsville Opera House.

Band performances were very popular and their flattering press releases and reputation led to invitations to play throughout Delaware, and Sullivan Counties, as well as, Pennsylvania. The Concert Band did charge performance fees for concerts outside of Downsville and these fees were used for the purchase of instruments, uniforms, music and transportation of the band members to their different events. Stop in at Town Hall and learn more about Downsville Concert Band History.



Band Stand and Opera House 1911



Drum Major 1919

Gravestone Cleaning Workshop

Mark your calendars for our **May 14, 2016** workshop with Marianne Greenfield, owner of Gravestone Cleaning Service and trustee of the Woodland Cemetery Board. A brief talk about the types of gravestone materials, procedures for cleaning the stones and historical practices of local cemeteries will be presented before going to Downsville's Paige Cemetery for a demonstration and hands-on practice of proper gravestone techniques. We will be using a biological, biodegradable, non-toxic cleaning solution D-2, which is safe on all masonry gravestones and monuments and recommended by the National Parks service. The Historical Society will also have a quantity of D-2 cleaning solution for sale for people who are interested in cleaning their family gravestones. **The fee for the workshop is \$25**, which will include tools and supplies needed for the hands-on practice. Workshop space is limited; please call Town Historian, Kay Parisi-Hampel at 607-363-7303 or email hampelk@colchesterhistoricalsociety.org to make a reservation and for further information.



Robert Hill Gravestone 1796-Covered Bridge Cemetery



Marianne taking photographs before cleaning gravestones

Annual Meeting March 29, 2016

Please join us at our **Annual Meeting, Tuesday, March 29, 2016, 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 planning our activities for 2016. 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 2016 membership dues (Individuals \$15, Seniors & Students \$10) by the annual meeting. Your dues help us maintain our collection and meet our budget expenses.**

Colchester Volunteer Fire Department History

1890 Downsville Business District Fire leads to Formation of the Department on March 4, 1896.

On May 18, 1890 a large portion of Downsville's Upper Main Street was destroyed. The fire started in the wing of the M.B. Champlin house with the wind quickly spreading the fire into the William Hitt Variety store and on to two C.E. Hulbert apartment houses, his two barns, ice house and finally the W.E. Holmes Tannery barn. All of these properties were totally destroyed in less than two hours. The **Downsville News** reported that, "all the water used had to be conveyed by hand from numerous local wells and the nearby Holmes Mill Pond and then it was almost impossible to apply it with telling effect." Many of the early fires that occurred in Colchester spread quickly due to the "balloon framing" techniques used prior to World War II. Light framing created voids that ran continuously from the basement or cellar to the attic without any fire stopping in the vertical void spaces (in contrast to platform framing, which has inherent fire stopping), fire could rapidly spread through the wall spaces. Fire could also travel quickly following the utilities such as electric wiring and plumbing.

After the 1890 disaster the Downsville Hose Company No. 1 was organized. The Downsville Hose Company filed formal organization and regulations papers with the County Clerk on March 4, 1896. The original Commissioners who formed the Fire Hose Company were F.W. Hartman, E.W. Lindsley and George Holmes. In the first set of rules drawn in 1896 it stated that the Downsville Hose Company "shall consist of one or more hose and one or more hook and ladder companies." In March of 1898 the T.K. Walker Hook and Ladder Company No. 2 was formed to aid the work of the Hose Company. These two companies merged in 1917 to form the Downsville Fire District and purchased their

first fire hall, the former Henry A. Williams Store lot (currently the Downsville Hardware building) for \$1,500. The fire fighting apparatus consisted of hand and horse drawn equipment. The first gasoline powered Chevrolet fire truck, was purchased in 1926 and on June 11, 1946 the company purchased another Chevrolet, its first pumper for \$1,800.



Early Downsville Hose Company members with hand pulled pumper.



1914 Downsville Fire Department Members

Front Row left to right: Frank Radeker, John Couse, Gus Liddle, Albert Laraway, Bert Dougherty

Second Row: Francis Stuart Ernest Folkerson, Floyd Walrath, Pete Miller, Charles A. Warren, Harvey Craft, Vigil Beatty, Leon Wright

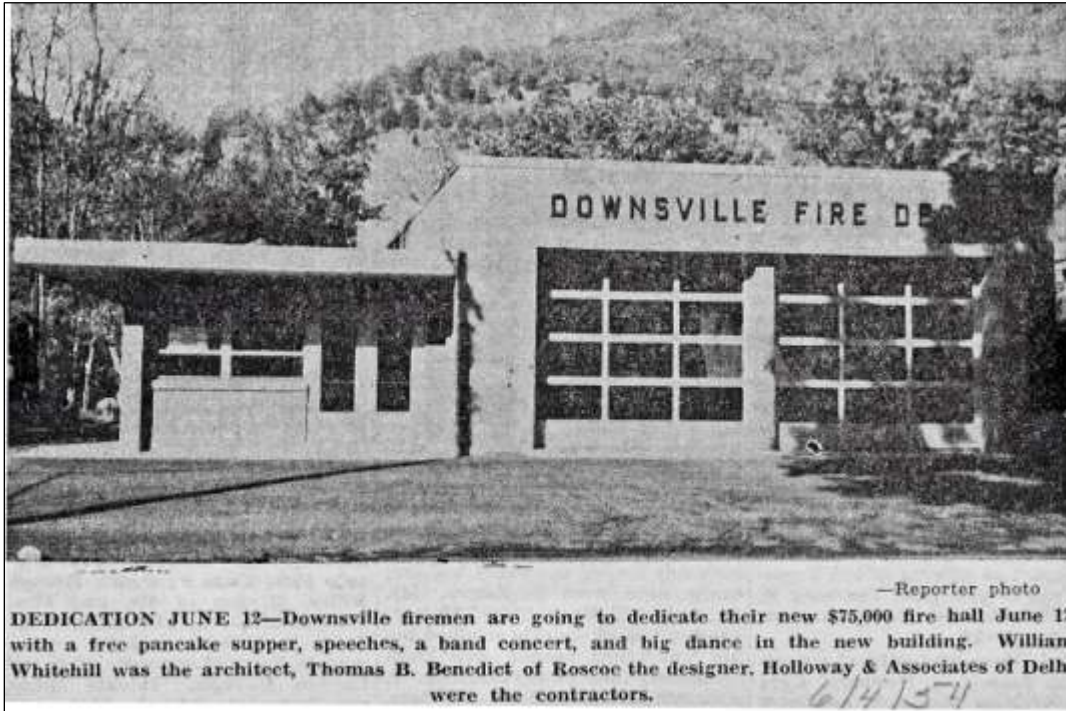
Third Row: Asa Neff, Robert Brittain Jr, Joe Miller

Fourth Row: Robert Brittain Sr., Hardy Lindsley, Howard Williams, Beardsley Conklin, Roy Hardie, Forrest Miller, Fred Odwell, Harley Bogart, Harvey Hawley, John Shields



Memorial Day Parade 1946 - First Gasoline 1926 Chevrolet Fire truck with Red Men group, first pumper on right.

The Fire Department operated from their first building for the next thirty-seven years until the age of the building and a controversy over the installation of indoor plumbing prompted the commissioners to approve the construction of a new building. The new fire hall was built on the old Downsville Opera House lot. In 1953 a bond issue for \$60,000 was approved and the final building construction cost was \$75,000.



Walton Reporter June 4, 1954

In 1954 Cooks Falls-Horton residents petitioned to join the Downsville Fire District and organized a new fire company. A bond was issued in 1955 and construction of the firehouse was completed in 1956. The women's Auxiliary was formed in February of 1956 to assist that fire company.

In July of 1966 Downsville Emergency Squad was organized with Wallace Wynkoop as the captain, the other crew members were Robert Knorr, Edward Hale and Robert Karl. The first ambulance purchased by the Department was a green Cadillac. Before that purchase, the undertaker, Ray Place was the ambulance driver, using his hearse as an ambulance.

The Downsville Firemen's Ladies Auxiliary was organized in 1969 with purpose of helping the Fire Department at fires, emergencies, parades and fundraising. The Auxiliary also raises funds for local school scholarships, sponsors the Downsville Girl Scouts and the Firemen's Home on the Hudson.

The Firemen's first Field Day on the Butcher Brother's property was held in 1907 and netted close to \$700. Firemen's Field Days continued to be very popular events and drew large crowds from surrounding communities, especially for their dazzling fireworks displays. These Field Days provided the company with funds to buy fire fighting, EMS, and safety equipment and also provided additional fire training for the department. The Fire Department eventually purchased the Liddle property and dedicated their new 18 acre Volunteer Fireman's Park on August 21, 1976.

Our dedicated volunteer Firemen have fought many fires since their formation one hundred and twenty years ago and continue to provide extremely valuable service to their community, as well as, becoming an important social group.

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

2016 Historical Society Meetings:

Annual Meeting March 29, 2016 at 7 PM
April 26, 2016 at 10 AM May 31, 2016 at 7 PM
June 28, 2016 at 10 AM July 26, 2016 at 7 PM
August 30, 2015 at 10 AM September 27, 2016 at 7 PM
October 25, 2016 at 10 AM November 29, 2016 at 7 PM
December 27, 2016 at 10 AM