

Colchester History Connections Newsletter

April 2, 2014 Colchester Historical Society, Box 112, Downsville, New York 13755
Volume 4, Issue 1 Preserving the history of Downsville, Corbett, Shinhopple,
Gregorytown, Horton and Cooks Falls

Website: www.colchesterhistoricalsociety.org

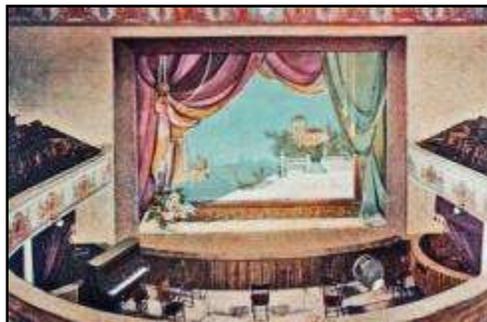
Historical Society Room, 72 Tannery Road, Downsville is open the third Saturday
of each month 11 A.M.-3 P.M. and by appointment, please call
Kay Parisi-Hampel, Town Historian at 607-363-7303

Displays and Programs

The **April-May display** in the Town Hall will feature photographs, artifacts and other fascinating information on the Downsville Opera House. The Opera House was built in 1906 by C.E. Hulbert and Dr. E. A. Holmes on the lot now occupied by the Downsville Fire Station. The Opera House housed four apartments, the Downsville Telephone Company, The First National Bank of Downsville, the Opera House Pharmacy, an American Legion Hall, a dance floor/basketball court, as well as the 452 person capacity theatre. The Opera House theatre burned January 22, 1949. The Opera House had been a hub of business and social life in the Town; extra D & E trains were run when plays, school graduations and other special events were held at the Opera House. Stop in the Town Hall to learn more about the history of the Downsville Opera House.



Opera House & Bandstand



Opera House Theatre interior



January 22, 1949 fire

In **June-July** the display in the Town Hall will feature photographs and information on the construction of the **Pepacton Reservoir and the lost town of Pepacton**. An illustrated talk by Diane Galusha on the construction of the Pepacton Reservoir and its impact on displaced communities and the region around will be delivered **Saturday, July 26 at 10:30 a.m. at the Colchester Town Hall, Downsville.**

Diane Galusha, author of *Liquid Assets, A History of New York City's Water System*, will be the guest of the Colchester Historical Society. She will explain the City's 20th-century search for reliable sources of water, the damming of the East Branch of the Delaware River to create the largest reservoir in the City's supply, and the repercussions to 1,000 people in four communities who were forced to leave their homes, farms, and businesses.

Special focus will be given to the lost hamlet of Pepacton in the Town of Colchester, and to the construction boom town that was Downsville, where the dam was built and where the NYC Board of Water Supply had offices during the 1940s and '50s. People are invited to bring photographs and memories of reservoir towns to share. We would also like to invite anyone who worked on the construction of the reservoir to share their work experience during the construction of the Pepacton.



Pepacton village early 1900's



Pepacton Hotel



Pepacton Creamery Workers 1910

Agloe Update

In our December 2012 *Colchester History Connections* newsletter article: *Agloe—the Paper Town That Became Real* we reported on the information requests from a reporter writing an article on “paper towns” and copyright traps. Our Colchester town that wasn’t a town but became a real town is in the news again. A blog post by Frank Jacobs of Strange Maps: <http://bigthink.com/strange-maps/643-agloe-the-paper-town-stronger-than-fiction> talked about how Google maps were still listing Agloe. This blog post led to Google removing Agloe from its maps. (John Green, author of the book *Paper Towns*, which uses Agloe as one of the settings in his fiction book, talked about Agloe in his TEDxtalk in 2012: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1mUDwOsRZVO>) This then led to a *National Public Radio* story by Robert Krulwich: <http://www.npr.org/blogs/krulwich/2014/03/18/290236647/an-imaginary-town-becomes-real-then-not-true-story?ft=1&f=1001> which continued the report of Agloe’s removal from the Google maps. The story was then picked up by the *London Telegraph* reporter David Millward, who contacted Town Historian Kay Parisi-Hampel and other Delaware County officials to get the facts on Agloe:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerican/usa/10712728/Putting-Agloe-on-the-map-the-tale-of-a-town-that-never-was.html> After Millward’s article was published the BBC World Business Report called from London and asked for an interview with Kay Parisi-Hampel for their March 22, 2014 radio show:

http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/podcasts/worldservice/business/business_20140322-0016a.mp3 In the meantime, Sam Roberts, a New York Times reporter was researching Agloe and contacted Roscoe’s Town Historian, Joyce Conroy, Gabrielle Pierce, Delaware County Historian, Kay Parisi-Hampel Colchester Historian, as well as other local sources to write his article: *In Search of Agloe, N.Y., a Town on the Border of Fiction and Reality*, which appeared in the March 28, 2014 N.Y./Region section of the New York Times.

Real or not, Agloe has certainly generated a lot of interest in Colchester and we think we’ll keep it on our maps—just for fun!



Downsville Socialist Party



The Dattel family donated an interesting piece of Downsville’s political history; a January 1914 Downsville Socialist Party Charter and a 1916 group photo from the New York State Socialist Party Convention. Charter members from Downsville were: H.W. and Mrs. Carrie A. Doyle, Lewis Hawley, Fred G. Babcock, Ellis Smith, Frank Radeker, George Lane and Judson E. Brush. In the early part of the 20th century, the socialist movement had support from many different groups including trade unions, social reformers, populist farmers and immigrant communities. The party’s early platforms supported women’s suffrage, the eight hour workday, equalization of wealth, and a strong opposition to American involvement in World War I. At the first commencement exercises of the Downsville Union School on June 22, 1910, graduating senior Warren L. Pollock read an *Essay on Socialism*. We think the Downsville Socialist Party was in existence until around 1917 when many of the state’s Socialist parties splintered over how to respond to World War I and later on whether to support the establishment of the Communist Party after the Russian Revolution in 1917.

Coping with World War 1 Food Shortages

With America's entry into World War in 1917, President Woodrow Wilson requested that Herbert Hoover take charge of the wartime Food Administration. Hoover never instituted food rationing, but did introduce a range of voluntary efforts that proved highly effective. Hoover as Food Administrator encouraged American mothers as a patriotic act to hold to "meatless Mondays" and "wheatless Wednesdays" to conserve food supplies. This recipe was from Mrs. Alzina Knox, "this receipt was very popular because we couldn't get white sugar and not much flour."

War Cake 1918—First World War

2 cups hot water

2 cups brown sugar

1 ½ cups raisins

2 tablespoons Crisco

Boil these ingredients for five minutes and let them get cold before adding the following:

1 teaspoon baking soda

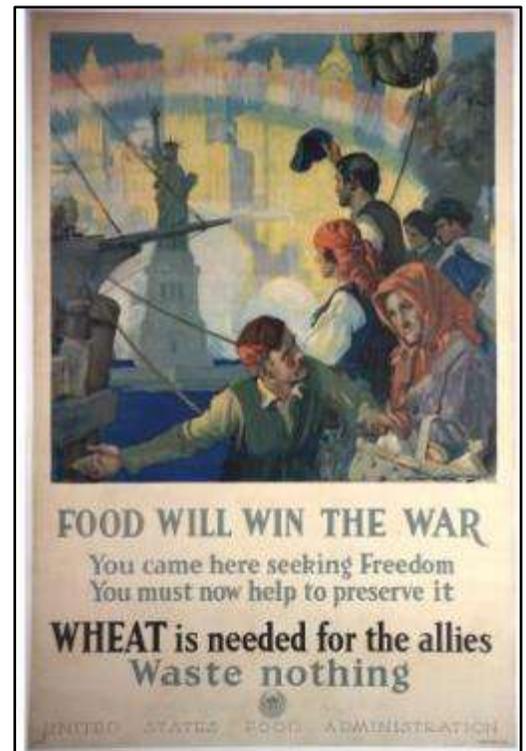
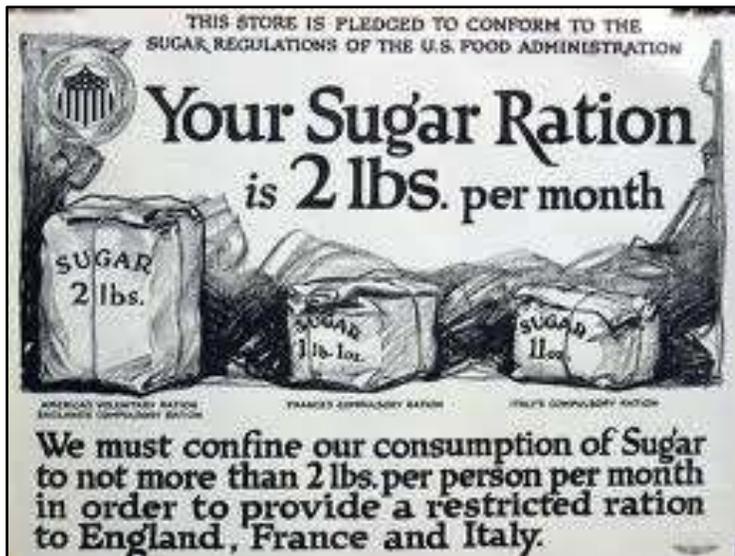
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

½ teaspoon ground cloves

½ teaspoon ground nutmeg

Just enough flour to make a stiff batter.

Bake at 350 or 375 degrees until done.



Who Murdered Pompey Raynor?

About two miles out of the village of Downsville near the present Richard Houck farm, lived a widower, Pompey Raynor, a Lenni-Lenape Indian and his family of two sons, Calvin and James and two daughters Phoebe and Emeline. He made a successful living on the farm by raising apples, hay, oats and buckwheat and the sale of cattle and sheep. No banks were operating in Downsville at that time so Mr. Raynor kept the proceeds from his sales hidden in his cabin and the discovery of the this fact led to his demise.

Many retellings of the mystery of Pompey Raynor's death appear in the Colchester Historical Society's collection. One of the first accounts was written by Miss Edna G. Hulbert who was born in Downsville in 1881 and retold the story that her grandfather Alston W. Hulbert related to her. Her story tells how her grandfather purchased cattle from Pompey Raynor, "On one occasion my grandfather Hulbert and a neighbor visited Pompey's farm, purchased some cattle and sheep, for them and started for home, driving the stock through the fields and woods as there was no wagon road. The sight of strangers frightened the animals and in spite of all efforts they (stock) escaped running wildly toward home. My grandfather returned to the house to ask Pompey's help in recapturing the stock. Pushing the door open he was surprised to see the old Indian standing by a crude table, the top of which was covered with gold and silver coin and a number of large copper pennies. He hastily endeavored to conceal the money scooping it into a cloth sack. This was probably the savings from many years, gained from the sale of his produce and stock. About a year later during the autumn of 1860 several hunters were crossing his (Raynor's) farm and seeing no smoke from the chimney

and no signs of anyone about they went into the house to investigate. Upon opening the door they were horrified to see on the floor the old Indian lying dead. His head had been battered by a heavy blood stained club that lay nearby. He had been dead three or four days. It was thought that someone who knew he had money had murdered him for his treasure as no trace of any money could be found. The murderer was never found; who did it is still a mystery."

Another telling of the story was found by Bill Adams (owner of the Adams Antiquarian Bookstore in Hobart, NY), this version was unsigned and handwritten on old tablet paper and tucked inside a copy of Jay Gould's *History of Delaware County*. "Near Downsville lived an old man who had lost his wife and lived alone on a farm. He had children but they did not live at home. This man was supposed to have quite a little money.

One morning he was found dead on the floor of his kitchen, he had just come in from milking and had strained his milk. At first it was thought that he had a shock ...but later bruises were found on his head and neck that showed he had been struck dead with a stick or club. A roll of home-spun cloth was taken from the house."

"Several people were suspected of the murder supposing to done it for his money. A certain family of boys living up the river was suspected but nothing proved against them. But suspicion hung over them and even the children were afraid of them in years after....20 or 30 years after the murder a son of Mr. Rainer made a dying confession that he was the murderer of his father. He had gone home the evening his father was killed. He went home over the hill and after dark so no one saw him. He said he and his father had a few words about something and in a passion he struck his father. He saw to his horror that he had killed him instantly. He took the roll of cloth with him and went back that night through the woods. So the family upon to whom the suspicion so long rested was entirely innocent." Which son allegedly murdered the father is not revealed in this version of the story.

In a 1948 letter from Doris Schultz Stamm to Town Historian, Margaret Turnbull, who had asked her to write her memories of living in Downsville. Stamm wrote that before her marriage she had worked for a local doctor," I didn't mention that Egbert White murdered Raynor. He admitted it on his death bed. He was a real Indian. Egbert White is Lela White's uncle and as she comes to Downsville so I left that out of the write up (Walton Reporter). I also forgot to say Mrs. John Jersey is Emaline Raynor. She was brought back from the Poor House and buried in Downsville."

A later version was written by Esther Hoy in *Colchester People and Places Remembered*, this follows closely to the version told by Edna Hulbert but also gives the year of Pompey Raynor's death as 1850 and that the "stones had been removed from around the fireplace, giving an appearance of a hurried search... for his hidden treasure." Pompey Raynor was buried in an unmarked grave on his farm property.

So we have two different versions of death bed confessions and other suspicions of who might have committed the murder, but no hard evidence, so we will probably never know for sure who murdered Pompey Raynor.

Annual Meeting

The annual meeting was held March 25 and the following officers were elected for 2014: Arthur Merrill, President, Kay Parisi-Hampel, Vice-President, Linda Mills, Secretary and Joyce Steflik, Treasurer. The By-laws were reviewed and project planning for 2014 was discussed. Membership fees for 2014 are due, \$15 for individuals, and \$10 for seniors over 55 and \$10 for students, \$200 for life-time membership. These dues help us to preserve the history of Colchester.

Meeting Dates 2014

April 29 at 10 A.M.

May 27 at 7 P.M.

July 29 at 7 P.M.

September 30 at 7 P.M.

November 25 at 7 P.M.

June 24 at 10 A.M.

August 26 at 10 A.M.

October 28 at 10 A.M.

December 23 at 10 A.M.

Meetings are held in the Historical Society Room, basement level of the Colchester Town Hall, 72 Tannery Road, Downsville, New York 13755.

Website: www.colchesterhistoricalsociety.org