

Colchester History Connections Newsletter

September 1, 2016, Colchester Historical Society, Box 112, Downsville, New York 13755
Volume 6, Issue 3 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 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



What is New York State History Month?

November was designated as New York State History Month by the New York State Legislature in 1997 with the addition of Section 57.02 to the state's Arts and Cultural Affairs Law.

"The purpose of this month shall be to celebrate the history of New York state and recognize the contributions of the state and local historians. New York State History Month provides the opportunity for historians, museums, and cultural institutions to highlight the ways in which history is vitally important in our lives as New Yorkers, and the ways we can all work to preserve it."

The State Museum has created a New York State History Month website that features educational resources, a schedule of History Month programs at the Museum, and a "New York Minutes" page featuring a New York State history fact of the day throughout November: <http://exhibitions.nysm.nysed.gov/historymonth/index.html>

Programs

The Colchester Historical Society will host a **History Harvest and Quilt Show** on Saturday, **November 5, 2016** from 11 AM to 4 PM at the meeting room of the Colchester Town Hall, 72 Tannery Road, Downsville, NY. The **History Harvest's** purpose is to invite Colchester residents to bring in photos for scanning. We are interested in any images of the villages of Colchester, work, weather, play and family images to add to the Society's collection. Photos will be immediately returned to you and we will print a copy of the photos for you to share with family and friends. Please call Kay Parisi-Hampel, Town Historian to let us know the number of photos you plan to bring and to schedule a time so we can coordinate the day and have enough supplies on hand.

During the **History Harvest** we will be displaying some of the Society's and local resident's quilts that were created in Colchester. The display will feature several Autograph, Heirloom Pieced, Doll and Modern Pieced quilts. Admission is free and refreshments will be served.



Fitch Family, circa 1890's



Moffatt Autograph Quilt Block

D&E/D&N History Presentation

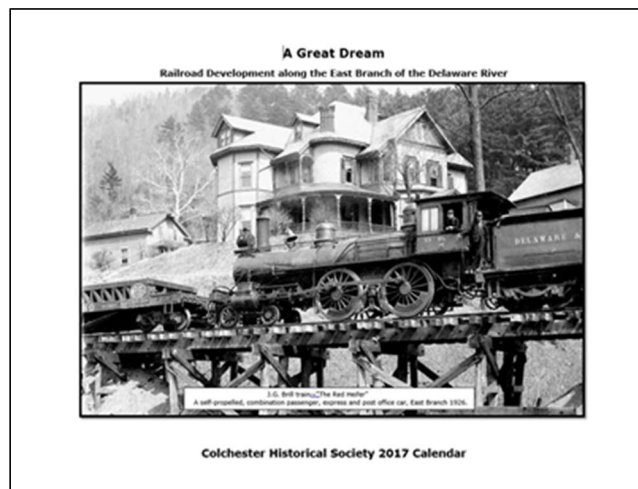
Please join us on Saturday, **November 12, 2016 at 3 PM** when John Duda will give a Powerpoint presentation on the history of the Delaware and Eastern/Northern Railway line.

The Delaware and Northern Railroad ran from East Branch to Arkville from 1905 to 1942. John's talk is illustrated with many historic images from the early years when the line was run as the Delaware & Eastern Railway and after the lines' transition to the Delaware and Northern Railroad. His program covers the tales of the financial troubles of the line and the mishaps of the railway which led to its nickname of the "Damn Nuisance". In addition to the presentation there will be a photo display.

John Duda has been a postcard dealer and collector of postcards for over 20 years. He is the secretary of the Kaaterskill Post Card Club and is the co-chair of their two postcard shows. He belongs to many area historical societies and is a trustee of the Greater Fleischmanns Museum of Memories.

The program is free and will be held in the Town of Colchester meeting room at 72 Tannery Road, Downsville, New York. Refreshments will be served. For more information, call: 607-363-7303 or email: info@colchesterhistoricalsociety.org

2017 Historical Society Calendar—A Great Dream: Railroad Development along the East Branch of the Delaware River



This twenty-page calendar contains black and white and color images of the train stations, construction of the railway line, railroad workers and events on the line from 1905 to its closing in 1942. Images are from the Historical Society's collection. The calendar also gives an overview of the history of the Railroad and a timeline of events. The calendar will be available for sale at the John Duda program on November 12, 2016. You can also purchase the calendar for \$18 or a special of two calendars for \$35 at the Colchester Town Hall, the Downsville Diner and through the Historical Society website:

<http://www.colchesterhistoricalsociety.org/Publications.htm>

Sale of this calendar goes towards the preservation of the Historical Society's collection and programming.



William Horton—Colchester's Early Tannery and Mill Owner

William Horton moved to Colchester in April of 1794 from the Westchester County town of Stephentown. Horton built the first grist mill in Delaware County in Colchester. People brought their grain to his mill in canoes from as far away as Equinunk, PA. As many as 7,000 bushels of wheat was ground at his mill in a single year. Horton owned large tracts of land in Colchester and Sullivan County, he operated saw-mills, sold provisions and was also a tanner and currier by trade. He tanned the first leather ever tanned in Colchester. He was a member of an organization of leather dealers located in New York City known as "The Swamp". This organization had complete control of the leather business in the early days of the tannery industries. Horton owned several tanneries in Colchester and Callicoon Center. The Horton fortune was built out of leather and this was possible only by the operations of *The Swamp*. The Downsville News reported that, "many of the prominent tanner in Sullivan and Delaware County died comparatively poor men. Generally, this was due to fact that they never owned the hides that came to them. The hides were consigned to them by some leather dealer who was a member of The Swamp (for no one else could buy hides) and the leather became the property of this dealer when the tanning was completed. The tanner received his pay for his services in tanning the leather for the dealer. The local tanner was a craftsman rather than a business man. He in no way figured in the profits accruing from the leather he tanned. This went to the leather dealer whose business was protected by the combination or trust. The process of tanning as followed by the local tanners touched every home in the town, directly or indirectly. Farming was merely a side line."

A **New York Times** article from March 31, 1856 described The Swamp as; *"The name of this locality is doubtless familiar to thousands who never crossed its precincts. Situated in the southeastern part of the City, in a low, damp position, and intersected by no thoroughfare, it seems to be regarded by some as having only a fabulous existence, or at best being pretty much a palus incognita. Yet this place is the seat of the Hide and Leather trade of New York City, a business that employs a larger capital and contributes in a much higher degree to our commercial prosperity than is generally supposed. The Swamp which now includes Ferry, Jacob and parts of adjacent streets. More than fifty years ago the Swamp was occupied by tanneries along its whole extent—when the practice was to bring the bark to the hides instead of the hides to the bark, as now. As the tanneries were demolished, the ground was filled in and spacious leather warehouses erected on their site. Among those who inaugurated this worthy enterprise, which has been largely instrumental in securing to this City almost a monopoly of the sole-leather trade."* Horton's fortune was made from tanning and dealing in sole-leather.

"Every family was dependent upon the operation of the tannery industry. The craftsmen, such as the shoemakers, harness-makers, blacksmiths, wagon-makers, etc. thrived because of it. The women and children on the farms operated the farms, while the men and older boys worked in the bark woods, peeling bark, or building roads over which the bark could be hauled out to the tannery. Many of them worked in and around the tanneries, too. The hemlock bark was peeled from the tree during the three months from May 15 to August 15. Bark doesn't peel during the other nine months of the year. It meant long hours and hard work for these hands in the heat of the summer months.

After the hemlock tree had fallen, the bark was notched every four feet with the axe and the peeling was under way when a man with a special tool called a spud separated the bark from the wood beneath it. It was piled to wait the teamsters to take it to the tanneries. Great numbers of these trees stripped of bark were left in the woods to rot. Some reached the saw-mills and were converted into lumber.

The bark was first ground in a mill something like a large coffee grinder, only much larger. From this mill it was conveyed to a leach house where it was mixed with boiling water and kept there about a week. After this time the liquor was ready to be pumped to the tan yard as needed. Hides, some weighing as much as 125 pounds, were first put in vats in the beam house and left for about a week. They were then taken out, pounded until soft and split down the middle into sides. These hides were next taken to the

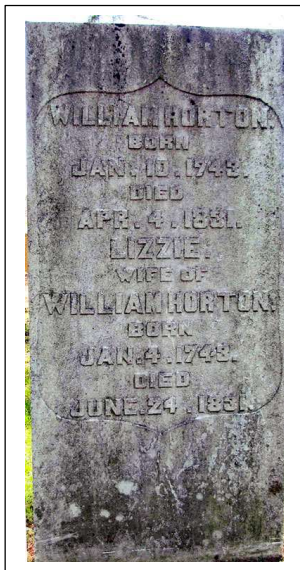
sweat pits and left for five to eight days, according to the heat. To know when hides were ready to be taken from the sweat pits, workmen rubbed a thumb over them. The odor on opening these pits was terrific and the hartshorn make the eyes smart badly. If hair could be rubbed off with the thumb the sides were ready to be milled or pounded, to remove the hair. Beam hands then went to work with their tools, which were three in number, a flesher, worker and big knife to scrape and clean from the hide any remaining hair or flesh.

The handlers took the sides next and treated them to plump the hides—to open the pores so the leather would take the tan. A weak solution was then run into the vats. Hides were thrown flat on the water by one workman. Another scattered a shovelful of tan bark over each as it sank. The bark kept the sides from getting too closely together. After three weeks the sides were turned over and the liquor made stronger. Again at the end of three weeks the hides were changed and laid down in strong liquor for three months.

This ended the tanning and the hides were put in the loft to dry. When dry they were scrubbed and threated with fish oil and hung up again for a short time. After this they were taken down again for the last time and treated with tanners' oil. They were then rolled before they were ready for market. It is said that the man whose task it was to apply the fish oil was the worst smelling hand on the job. This unenviable reputation was held even in the face of the fact that very few tanners in their working outfits smelled like a Thanksgiving dinner." *Downsville News, April 30, 1942-As It Used to Be in Downsville Years Ago*

Horton was the first elected Colchester Town Supervisor in 1793; he went on to become a member of the New York Assembly in 1798 and was one of the Associate Judges of the Court of Common Pleas, when the court was first organized in Delaware County in 1798. Horton died at the age of eighty-eight years and is buried in the Old Covered Bridge Cemetery on Back River Road in Downsville.

William Horton Gravestone



Horton descendants, 1938: John Horton Morrison, Lizzie Wheeler Gildersleeve, Agnes Horton Morrison, Elsie Wheeler Gildersleeve

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:

**September 27, 2016 at 7 PM
November 29, 2016 at 7 PM**

**October 25, 2016 at 10 AM
December 27, 2016 at 10 AM**