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# DUANESBURG HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## Newsletter

Volume 3, Issue 1

February 2015

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### Directors Message

As the Duanesburg Historical Society enters its 71<sup>st</sup> year, we are fortunate to have a supporting membership of 162. We meet on the third Monday at 7 PM from March to December at Bishop Scully Hall in Delanson. Our high-interest meetings give a look into local and regional history.

March 13, 2015 is the 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Town of Duanesburg. In this celebratory year check out our program schedule --- it focuses on the unique areas of our town. Additionally on September 19, 2015 the Historical Society will host a tour of significant sites in the town. Mark your calendars and find out about both the well-known and the hidden treasures of our town.

On November 12, 2014 we lost a dedicated member and director, Jack Brown. Jack was an enthusiastic contributor to our Facebook page, overseer of our website, and a writer for the newsletter. Jack had fun with the hunt for history, but was serious about its preservation. Jack's role in the success of the Historical Society will be sadly missed. This newsletter is dedicated in Jack's memory.

Len Van Buren, President; Shirley Martin, Vice-President; Howard Ohlhous, Treasurer; Directors: Cindy McKeone, Eamon Murphy, Carl Wiedemann, and Pat Van Buren

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 1 Directors Message  
Duanesburg Day  
Celebrating 250 years
- 2 A Short History of  
Duanesburg
- 3 2015 Program Schedule  
Short History continued
- 4 The James Duane Story
- 5 Membership Application  
History Books Available from DHS

### Backroads of Duanesburg a 250<sup>th</sup> Year History Tour

The Historical Society is sponsoring a driving tour of historic and significant places and buildings throughout the town - Backroads of Duanesburg - a 250<sup>th</sup> Year History Tour. The tour will take place next fall - Saturday, September 19<sup>th</sup>, 2015. It will run from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m.

The tour will include many interesting sites and homes in town that are connected with town history. There will be announcements and brochures printed for distribution before the event at various locations. Tour brochures will include a map and a time schedule of when docents will be available at specific locations to explain the significance of a particular site.

There won't be a specific starting point for the tour. People can start at any participating site which will be identified with balloons, and visit as many places as they please during the day. A docent will be available at each site at least once during the tour. Docents will explain the significance of their particular site.

More information will be available on our website ([www.duanesburghistorical.com](http://www.duanesburghistorical.com)) before the tour.

### Duanesburg Day

The annual Duanesburg Day will be held on Saturday, March 28, 2015 from 10:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. This is a free, community-wide event featuring local crafters, civic organizations, displays, demonstrations, food and fun for all ages. The Historical Society will have a display table where you can purchase local history books and memberships for friends and relatives. It takes place at the Duanesburg Middle/High School located on Route 395 in the heart of Delanson. The snow date is March 29<sup>th</sup> from 12:00-5:00 p.m.

# A Short History of Duanesburg

By Art Willis

The Town of Duanesburg, now two centuries old, has long had the reputation and recognition as a township that proved to be a powerful influence in the early days of a growing and expanding nation.

Duanesburg was settled as early as 1736-1770 by investors such as Thomas Freeman, Timothy Bagley, William Crosby, Walter Butler and Jonathan Brewster. However, by 1765, Judge James Duane owned the largest share of the town, which was named in Duane's honor. He entered into an agreement with nineteen Germans from Pennsylvania, and one from New York, to start to settle his land, a 50,000 acre holding, acquired in part from his father, Anthony Duane, and in part through purchase.

In celebrating its Bicentennial in 1965, Duanesburg paid homage to a man who was a resident of the town even before the "official" settlement of the area. Records show that Michael Righter, in 1757, purchased from James Duane lot 84, not far from the unincorporated village of Duanesburg. A note on Righter's residence is proven by a record in the journals of James Duane, who, two centuries ago, wrote: "Lodged this night at Righter's, who lives in the cave of a rock... which is no small curiosity." Righter was buried in the Duanesburg Cemetery, and the stone cemetery marker still stands.

It should be noted that before the white man moved into the hills and valleys of Duanesburg, Indians roamed the wide range of rolling hills. To this day, an occasional arrowhead or hammer stone is still discovered in the fields, linking to the present that long ago era when the Indian followed the trails and wild streams.

The town's founder, James Duane, became the first Mayor of New York City under the newly ratified U.S. Constitution. He was a member of both the first and second Continental Congresses, serving more days than any other member from New York. Yet, in spite of the demands made upon him by his national and state activities, Duane maintained his close ties with Duanesburg. In 1793, at his own expense, he erected Christ Episcopal Church, now known as the oldest unaltered Episcopal Church in the state. On his death, Duane was buried beneath the now historic edifice.

Early in Duanesburg's history, General William North, an aide-de-camp to Baron Von Steuben in the American Revolution, came to the area to make his home. In 1787, he married Mary Duane, the oldest daughter of the town's founder. In 1788, he established himself on a one thousand acre farm which was a gift from his father-in-law. North built the now historic North Mansion sometime in the early 1790s.

North was an important figure in Schenectady County and the state. When the first recorded meeting of the Schenectady County Board of Supervisors was held on Oct. 3, 1809, General North was the presiding officer. His sphere of influence extended far beyond the township. In Albany, he served in the State Assembly, and in 1795 and 1796 he was Speaker of the Assembly. North, incidentally, was the only Speaker from Schenectady until the late Oswald D. Heck. In 1798, North was appointed to the United States Senate.



General William North

North was a member of the board of the Western Inland Lock and Navigation Company; he was one of the first Erie Canal commissioners. He was appointed one of a three-member commission to lay out a road from Albany to Cherry Valley, and to supervise its construction, which involved building a bridge across the Schoharie creek. This, then, led to the purchase of part of the Ten Eyck patent on the east side of the creek and the founding of the Village of Esperance. North was a member of the first board of directors of the Mohawk Bank, the first bank in Schenectady county. North, too, upon his death, was buried in a crypt beneath Christ Episcopal Church in Duanesburg.

Another name prominent in the early days of the township was that of Featherstonhaugh. George William Featherstonhaugh, an early resident of the town, founded the Mohawk-Hudson Railroad.

Twenty-five years after Duanesburg's founding, the Religious Society of Friends began to play an important part in the history of the area. A branch of the Society was formed in the town in 1790. The present Quaker Meeting House in Quaker Street was built in 1807, for the most part from timber cut from the farms of members. Quaker Street was so named because Quakers settled along its street.

Still another church with an historic role in Duanesburg history is the Reformed Presbyterian Church, organized in 1795. It is said to be the oldest congregation in the denomination. The church building, constructed in 1837, was destroyed by fire in 1951. A new edifice was dedicated in 1953. Much younger in years, of course, is the First Christian Church of Quaker Street, which marked its centennial in 1959.

## 2015 PROGRAM SCHEDULE

Programs are held at the Bishop Scully Hall -Our Lady of Fatima Church- Delanson at 7:00 PM the 3<sup>rd</sup> Monday of the month. No meetings are held in January or February.

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March 16	Duanesburg Postcards Eamon Murphy
April 20	Early History of Duanesburg David Vincent
May 18	Timber Framing Kim Balfour
June 15	Christ Episcopal Church Barton MacDougall
July 20	Annual Picnic at Shafer Park
August 17	Reformed Presbyterian Church Norm Collins
September 21	Memories of Duanesburg William DeForest
October 19	Delansons Changing Scenery Lenny Van Buren
November 16	Quaker Street Remembered Dennis Wolfe
December 21	Silas Marsh House History & Annual Christmas Party Lorrie Runnels

## Contribute to the DHS by Recycling

The Duanesburg Redemption Center, 10105 Western Turnpike, Delanson, NY 12053 will accept your returnable cans and bottles. They will donate the proceeds to the Duanesburg Historical Society at your request. This is another way to support efforts to recognize and preserve local history for future generations. The redemption center is open Monday through Saturday from 9:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m.

## Short History - continued

Schenectady County's second incorporated village lies within the township. The story of Delanson is one of a settlement, growing into a thriving business community, and then sliding back to its more humble beginnings. However, in late years, new industries have helped to maintain the historic fame of the village. It was, of course, in 1863, that the Albany and Susquehanna Railroad was built through the area. A year later, the railroad was sold to the Delaware and Hudson Railroad. Its coal yards, established in Delanson, became known as the "biggest coal storage yards" in the world. Yet, in 1936, with their demolition, the end of an era had come, marking what is called "the end of Delanson's biggest business enterprise."

A surveyor by the name of James Frost had an important role in the township's history. Frost made many surveys for the Duanes; he was the surveyor for the Albany and Susquehanna Railroad; it was he who projected and completed the plans for a plank road from Albany to Fort Hunter. It was he who drafted one of the earlier maps of Schenectady County, and surveyed the new line between Canada and New York State. One of the chains used by Frost in his work as a surveyor belongs to the Town of Duanesburg Historical Society.

Other honors, too, belong to the historic past of the Town of Duanesburg. There was Colonel Jacob de Forest, a colonel in the 81st Regiment of the New York Volunteers in 1862. There was John Titus, appointed a county judge in 1833. There was Luly Patterson, who was the founder of Pattersonville. There were Henry Tripp, earliest photographer to take pictures of Schenectady, and his brother Charles, who went to Canada to drill the first oil well in that country. There was Benjamin Cummings, said to have invented the first circular saw for which he was granted a patent in 1814.

Although Duanesburg remains a characteristically rural area, the town has become a bedroom community for the tri-city area of Schenectady, Albany and Troy, as reflected in Duanesburg's 20th century development and the completion of Interstate 88.

The Town's present layout remains much the same as it was throughout the 19th century: large farmsteads with hamlets and villages at major thoroughfares. Of the once eight historic byways, four communities remain intact with significant historic concentrations of properties: the Village of Delanson, the larger hamlets of Quaker Street and Mariaville and the small hamlet of Eaton's Corners. These areas contain important and broad ranges of architectural styles, including pre-Federal, Federal, Greek Revival, Italianate, Queen Anne/Eastlake and Colonial Revival. The town contains over six hundred forty structures identified as historic by New York State, fifty-five cemeteries and fifteen natural sites of interest.

# The James Duane Story

James was a natural born American son of an Anglo-Irish colonial settler. His father, Anthony Duane (1679 – 1747), was a Protestant Irishman from County Galway in Ireland and first came to New York as an officer of the Royal Navy in 1698. Like others of colonial background, Anthony considered himself merely settling from one part of the British Empire to another as a free subject. Consequently, he maintained strong allegiance to the crown throughout his life, values which he later passed onto to his son.

When Anthony Duane died in 1747, the young James became the ward of the prominent American aristocrat Robert Livingston, who was known as the 3rd Lord of the Manor. He completed his early education at Livingston Manor, then read law in the offices of James Alexander. He was admitted to the bar in 1754. Then on October 21, 1759, James married Mary Livingston, the eldest daughter of his former guardian Robert. He was Clerk of the Chancery Court of New York in 1762, provincial Attorney General in 1767 and Indian commissioner for the Province of New York in 1774.



James Duane

Duane was a member of the *Committee of Sixty* that began the revolution in New York. He was made a delegate to the Continental Congress in 1774, and was continuously re-appointed through 1784. Duane, like many other Americans, had inherited their forefathers' patriotism to the British crown as well as their instinctive jealousy for their own rights as Englishmen. Consequently, James wrestled with his ancient allegiance to the British Empire and his desire to maintain and protect his ideals of English liberty and American self-government from what was perceived as encroachments upon their rights by an increasingly centralized imperial state. Thus, in the early Congress, he was one of the many who were most disposed to reconciliation with Britain. He supported the Galloway Plan of Union, and opposed the Declaration of Independence. However, as the British government sent the largest combined navy and army force yet seen in

history in a bid to destroy the rebellion, Duane quickly saw the futility of any further concord with the British government and advocated independence.



Mary Livingston Duane

Nonetheless, because of his vacillation in contrast to more ardent independence-minded delegates, as well as his noted familial loyalty to New York, it was considered a better use of his talents working on the frontier against British agitation amongst the Indian tribes. Thus, in 1775 he represented Congress as an Indian commissioner at Albany, New York. However, his local constituency later returned him to the new state constitutional convention from 1776-1777. Due to his excellent legal and political philosophical background, he served on the committee that drafted New York's constitution. Subsequently he was elected as a delegate by the State of New York to the Continental Congress. In 1778 he signed the Articles of Confederation in Philadelphia. He remained active as a political leader throughout the war, and returned home to Gramercy Park in 1783.

Duane served in the New York state Senate from 1783 to 1790. He became the Mayor of New York by appointment in 1784, serving until 1789. He was a delegate to the New York convention that ratified the Federal Constitution.

On September 25, 1789, President Washington named him the first judge of the United States District Court for the District of New York. He was immediately confirmed by the United States Senate, and received his commission the following day.

Duane served on the Federal bench until March 17, 1794, when his health forced him to resign. Throughout his life, he had worked to establish his own estate, inherited from his father, and centered at Duanesburg. He had started erecting a home there for himself, but did not live to see it completed. He died at Schenectady and is buried at Christ Episcopal Church in Duanesburg.

# Membership Application

The heart of the DHS is our members and their support and interest in the history of the Town of Duaneburg

## MEMBERSHIP

Choose the membership that is right for you and enjoy the benefits of supporting your Historical Society. If you are not a current member we hope you will consider joining.

Membership Fees: \$5.00 Adults \$1.00 Students

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone # \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address \_\_\_\_\_  
(optional – not shared)

Membership level \_\_\_\_\_ Adults  
\_\_\_\_\_ Students

New Membership \_\_\_\_\_ Renewed Membership \_\_\_\_\_

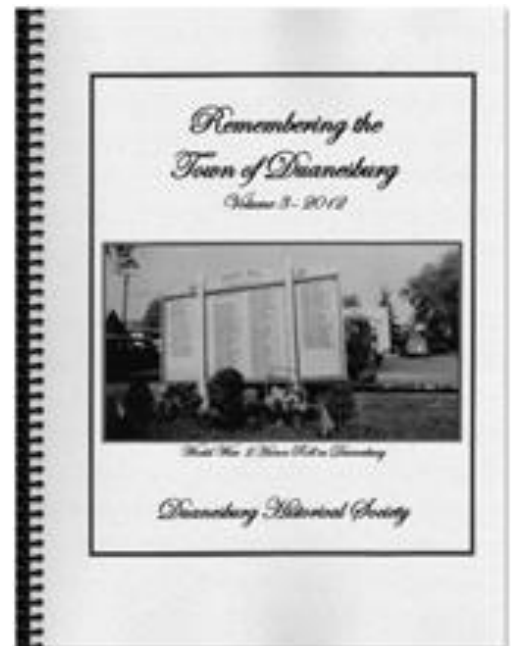
Make Checks payable to: Duaneburg Historical Society  
PO Box 421  
Duaneburg, NY 12056  
Attn: Membership

Visit us at [www.duanesburghistorical.com](http://www.duanesburghistorical.com) and join us on Facebook, search Duaneburg Historical

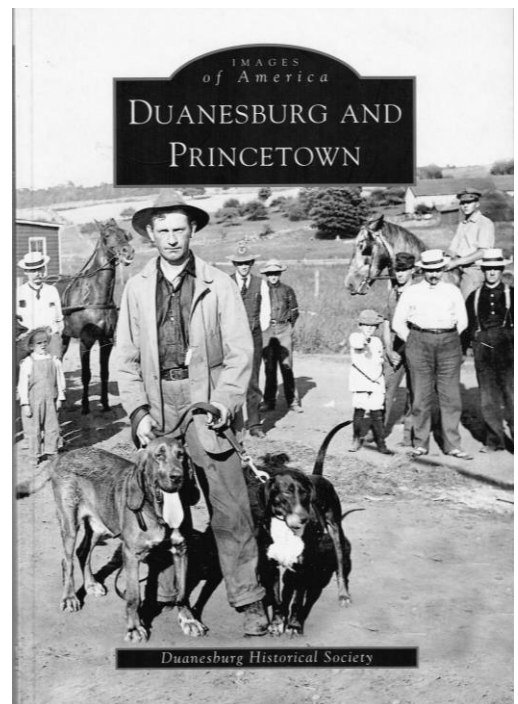
Membership runs from June to June. Please use the above form to join or to renew your membership.

If you are not sure if you have renewed or have questions as to your current status, call Betty Vunk at 895-2118.

# Local History Books



There are three volumes in this series which preserve the oral and written history of our community. Volume 1 is out of print, but volumes 2 & 3 may be purchased through the DHS website, at DHS meetings, and at the town hall.



Published in 2005 as part of the Images of America series, this collection of photographs is available through the DHS website, at our meetings, and at the town hall.

