
DUANESBURG HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter

Volume 13, Issue 2

October 2025

Directors' Message

Dear Members,

This has been a dramatic year at DHS. At a recent meeting, the Board of Directors of the Duanesburg Historical Society welcomed two new board members: Steven Schrade and Raymond "Skip" Koontz, both life-long residents of Duanesburg. It also recognized the retirement of two twenty-five-year veterans and Co-Presidents of the Board, Leonard and Pat Van Buren. The board



David Vincent

expressed its gratitude for the immense contributions the Van Burens have made through their dedication and organizational leadership. During their tenure, the Society received its full accreditation and constructed its Research and Archive Center at 450 Quaker Lane in the hamlet of Quaker Street. The Van Burens are continuing their service to the Society as volunteers.

The DHS continues to support and present stories and programs dedicated to our community's many historic people and places. Our September 13th program focused on the Village of Delanson and the D&H Railroad Co., which is featured in a following story. Our monthly public programs are always well-attended and greatly enjoyed by attendees. Be sure to follow us at DuanesburgHistorical.com and Duanesburg Historical Society on Facebook.

David Vincent - President
Shirley Martin - Vice President
Carol Plue - co Vice President
Howard Ohlhous - Treasurer
Marsha Brown - Secretary
Directors: Skip Koontz
Cindy McKeon
Steven Schrade

Program Schedule

There are two remaining membership programs scheduled this year. Historical Society programs are open to the public and are held at Bishop Scully Hall in Delanson starting at 7:00 p.m. These programs are a great way to learn more about the history of our town, the region and New York State.

Nov. 17 Jonathan Sheldon "The Fighting Quaker"
Presented by - Matt Ganster

Dec. 15 Christmas Eve Memories -Audience Participation
and Christmas Party Bring a snack to share

Communion Token Gift

The DHS has received a communion token from local resident Mr. Casey LeClair. You may be wondering, what is a communion token? They were small metal tokens given to members of Reformed and Presbyterian churches, allowing the holder to participate in "The Lord's Supper" (communion). The practice originated in Scotland in the mid-16th century and was brought to the new world by Presbyterian denominations like Duanesburg's Reformed Presbyterian Church, which was formed in Duanesburg in 1793. This practice was discontinued perhaps more than a century ago. The token depicted here was found by Casey LeClair who, with the church's permission, was "metal detecting" at the site of its 1804 church building on Duanesburg Churches Road. The church burned on December 16, 1951.

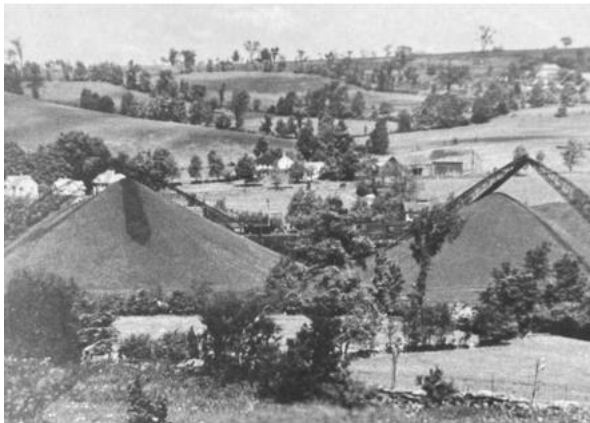
The token depicted here is probably pewter and is an oval measuring 1 inch by $\frac{3}{4}$ inch. It probably spent a century or so in the ground, hence its obvious tarnish. Side A reads REF.D PRESB.N CHURCH. Side B reads DUANESBURGH NY. This is a rare and significant historical item. Thank you, Casey LeClair! We hope to mount it and have it on display at the DHS building.



Communion Token

Celebration of the D&H Railroad in Duanesburg

The theme of this year's open house at the Research and Archive Center September 13th was a commemoration of the Delaware and Hudson Railroad and the contributions it made to the town over the years it was in operation. The Village of Delanson owes its existence to the railroad which constructed a depot, a roundhouse to service locomotives, and a coal plant which was among the largest in New York State.



Coal Piles in Delanson

The opening ceremony was held at the Delanson Memorial Park where a new historic roadside marker was unveiled.



The New Historic Marker in Delanson



Duanesburg Elementary Prepares to Sing

The D&H Still Rumbles Through in Duanesburg

Sung by Elementary School 4th graders

Verse #1

Come sit down, tell us stories of your town.
You're the ones who lived here way before we were around
What's long ago to us to you may seem like yesterday,
We love to hear your stories, we love to hear you say:

Verse #2

At the Quaker Street Depot a long, long time ago
The D & H would load their train from that mound of coal
The tracks grew and the village too: it never stayed the same.
Eight letters of the D & H became Del-an-son's name!

Verse #3

Long ago Duanesburg children went to one room schools.
Eight grades in a crowded room – they had real strict rules.
At recess they played lots of games: jump rope, sticks in the ground,
Red rover, jax, then hide 'n seek, till everyone was found!

Verse #4,

Long ago Duanesburg kids who wanted some loose change
Would bring back bottles, gather berries, or pick up coal by the trains.,
With money in their pockets off to town they'd go –
For penny candy nickel cones, or a 9 cent picture show!

Chorus

The D and H still rumbles through Duanesburg.
Hear that whistle blow from Mariaville.
The rails still run by Quaker Street, then down Delanson way.
You can see that mound of coal from every hill: Every hill!
In your minds eye you can see it still: See it still!
In your minds eye you can see it still.

Believe It or Not

Historic newspapers contain items related to people and events in Duaneburg. All true and accurate? Not always. You'll have to judge. Here are a couple of examples for your consideration.

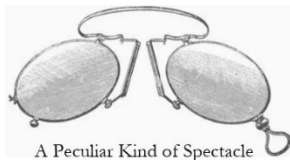
A Cure For Sore Eyes - 1868

Duaneburg: A week or two ago two strangers, riding in a buggy, stopped at a certain house in the Town of Duaneburg and inquired of the homeowner, a farmer, if Mr. _____ lived near there.

The farmer, answered that no person of that name lived in the vicinity. The strangers said that they had been given misinformation and casually mentioned that one of them was a registered oculist who had an infirmary in Albany. They had been sent to examine the eyes of this person which were in a diseased condition. At this information the farmer became interested as it happened coincidentally that both himself and his wife were suffering from sore eyes.

Pursuing the conversation for a while, the farmer asked the doctor to examine his eyes. He was informed that he could be cured by a certain treatment, which consisted in the use of a peculiar kind of spectacle which was available only through the doctor.

The doctor agreed to cure the sore eyes of the farmer and his wife for \$50. As it was necessary to use the spectacles spoken of, a \$40 deposit was paid for a pair the doctor happened to have with him, with the understanding that when the cure was effected they could be returned and the money refunded on application to the agent of an express company at Albany, who would redeem them to the doctor.



The direction for the use of the spectacles was that the farmer and his wife must look through them at the flame of a kerosene lamp for one hour once a day. After receiving the deposit for the spectacles, the two strangers departed.

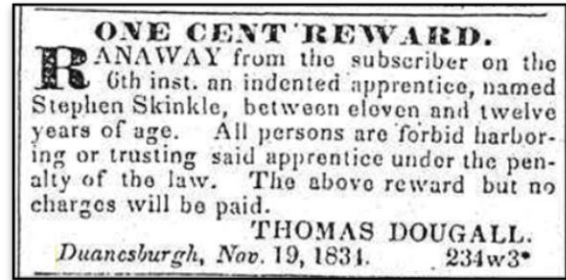
The victims proceeded to act according to instructions and really did look through the glasses at the flame till their poor eyes were almost totally blind. Their suspicions were aroused that all was not right, and the farmer went to Albany to see if he could find the eye doctor.

While looking around the city he discovered the doctor's companion at Stanwix Hall. The companion then promised that he would leave immediately to find the doctor and bring him to the farmer's house. Since neither has returned up to present date, it is very certain that they are not coming back.

The victim returned home a poorer and madder, if not wiser man, then when he employed the "celebrated eye doctor" who had an infirmary in Albany.

The Runaway Apprentice - 1831

This unusual advertisement was published in a Schenectady paper way back in 1831. There is probably an interesting story behind it.



This advertisement raises some questions. Who was Thomas Dougall? How did Stephen Skinkle happen to become his indentured apprentice? What was the motivation for going to the trouble and expense of taking out an ad offering a one cent reward?

The census records show that Thomas Dougall (1802—1885) was a farmer in Duaneburg. He is buried in the Van Vechten Cemetery in Amsterdam. He and his wife Margaret raised five children in Duaneburg. Their eldest child, John Dougall, was born in 1831, the same year Stephen Skinkle ran away – at the age of 11!



Skinkle is described as an indentured apprentice. According to one source, "Indentured apprentices were young individuals contracted to serve as apprentices in various trades. They were expected to work diligently and behave well, with specific rules regarding their conduct and behavior. The apprentice received training, room, and board in exchange for obedience to the master. The apprenticeship system was a common practice in colonial America."

A search of records for Stephen Skinkle in either Duaneburg or Schenectady County was unsuccessful. However, someone with that name died in Poughkeepsie in 1910. Perhaps the same person, or perhaps not.

The Esperance Covered Bridge 1812-1930

In 1792 the New York State Legislature authorized the construction of a bridge crossing Schoharie Creek from the Town of Duanesburgh to Esperance in Schoharie County. Back then bridge crossings were typically simple trestle and beam construction, close to the water and easily lost during flooding or ice jams. This was the fate of the first two bridges crossing Schoharie Creek.



The Esperance Covered Bridge

After the first two bridges were washed away the third attempt was a radically different design by Theodore Burr. It consisted of three double lane spans, each about 100 feet long, supported by three systems of laminated arches with reinforcing braces beneath the deck anchored into substantial stone abutments and piers that kept it high enough to avoid the fate of its predecessors.



In 1930, the year that the covered bridge was demolished, the Albany County Post published two stories about the history of the bridge. Some excerpts:

The Covered Bridge

“Progress has touched the Cherry Valley Turnpike in several ways within a few years, but the most noticeable mark is the new bridge at Esperance and the passing of the old wooden bridge. The rumble of the loose flooring in that covered bridge is no more. You pass now over smooth concrete and early this week only the skeleton of the old bridge remained.”

“The history of a wooden bridge that once clattered to horses’ heels is as colorfully rustic as the old bridge itself. It is the history of the Esperance bridge.”

“For 187 years wheels ground its wooden planks, keeping pace with the wheels of time mightier and more merciless. They have turned a century and crushed under their weight the bridge’s usefulness.”

“The first bridge across the Schoharie river was erected in 1793, and carried off in a freshet in 1798. Then a temporary bridge was built in 1799 until the wooden covered was completed. The wooden bridge, the second covered bridge erected in New York state, was commenced in 1809 and completed in 1812.”

“It is said that in 1846 tolls amounting to \$1,000 per month were collected from more than 700 teams crossing the bridge a day.”



The Old Interior Bridge, Esperance, N. Y

“Tolls ceased in 1887 when the bridge was purchased jointly by the towns of Esperance and Duanesburg and made a free bridge. The event of the passing of tolls was celebrated with a brass band and ceremonies.”

“Progress has touched the turnpike in several ways within a few years, but the most noticeable mark is the new bridge at Esperance and the passing of the wooden bridge.”

“Many would have liked to retain the old bridge as a link to the past, the time of tollgates and plank roads and covered bridges. It was a relic of simpler times, of slower pace, of oxen and horses. There was a romance about the old bridge with many initials carved upon it. Bridges play important parts in our lives. The Esperance bridge was something to be proud of when it was done. It is regrettable that it has passed.”

Christ Church Restoration

The restoration of Christ Episcopal Church in Duaneburg is underway. This project was necessary to stabilize the structure, replace rotted wood and mitigate the effects of moisture and temperature fluctuations. The church which was built between 1789 and 1793 by James Duane is the oldest unaltered Episcopal church in New York State.



Renovation Underway - October 16, 2025

Contributions can be sent to the Restoration Project of Christ Church Episcopal, Duaneburg can be sent to Christ Church, PO Box 92, Duaneburg, NY 12056 and labeled Restoration Fund.

Thank You Lenny and Pat

Lenny and Pat Van Buren announced their “retirement” as members of the board of directors of the Duaneburg Historical Society.



Pat and Len Van Buren

Thanks for many years of service on the board of directors and your leadership roles in the Duaneburg Historical Society.

Give A Gift of Membership

Share your interest in local history with a gift membership in the Duaneburg Historical Society. Each recipient will receive a full year of membership benefits. Your gift membership purchase helps keep local history alive by supporting the work of the DHS. Make your gift today!

Membership Application and Renewal

When you become a member, you are supporting the preservation of history – through our collections, exhibits, educational programs and more. 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 that you will consider joining.

Dues \$10.00 Adults \$1.00 students

From July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2026

Lifetime Membership - \$150.00

Name(s) _____

Telephone # _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Email _____

(optional – not shared)

Make checks payable to: Duaneburg Historical Society
PO Box 421
Duaneburg, New York 12056

