

# The Colonie Historical Oracle

Quarterly Newsletter of the Historical Society of the Town of Colonie

Volume 12, No. 1

January—March 2016

## A Traffic Light—On the Northway???



Submitted by Jeff English, Troy NY

In the 1950s, as the NYS Department of Public Works was planning for construction of the new Interstate Route 87 in the Town of Colonie, the “Northway,” the New York Central Railroad was at the same time winding down operation of a section of track in the same area. Originally built as the Schenectady & Troy Railroad in the 1840s, this line had lost its last passenger service years earlier and only a small amount of local freight traffic remained when the Northway was being planned. It was therefore agreed that the railroad would abandon the middle portion of the line, including where the Northway would pass through, and only two stubs would thenceforth be operated out of Schenectady

and Green Island. This would be a significant cost saving for construction of the new highway, as no bridge would be required at that location, and the highway’s approach descending to the twin bridges would be more favorable.

At that time, however, abandonment of any railroad line was subject to regulatory review and prior approval by the Interstate Commerce Commission in Washington, DC, and the process took longer than anticipated, and so therefore it was necessary for a railroad grade crossing to be incorporated into the highway in order to not unduly delay opening of the new highway. Since the railroad presumably had

already reduced their operation, it is not clear how often, if ever, a train actually crossed the Northway.

In any event, the ICC finally approved the abandonment and the crossing was removed. The railroad issued a Bulletin Order effective 9:00 AM, January 15, 1965 officially taking the track out of service. According to the photographer's notes the signals were removed on July 12, 1965, as well as the track from the northbound lanes, while the track was removed from the southbound lanes on July 13. Photos of the track in place were taken on May 9, 1965, and photos with track removed were taken on October 10, 1965.

Any railroad grade crossing on an Interstate highway is certainly unusual, because Interstate design standards call for no such crossings being allowed. The crossing on the Northway was clearly a temporary expedient to respect federal law while the bureaucracy slowly worked its way along, hundreds of miles away. This writer is unaware of any other railroad crossings on Interstate highways, even of a temporary nature like this one.

### Welcome New Members!

The Historical Society of the Town of Colonie would like to welcome our newest members: Arlene Lyons, Rosemary Armao, Mary Alingh, Harold Chambers, Jr., Ronald Campbell, Joseph & Robin Kowalski, and George & Patricia Webb. Welcome!!

If anyone has the book "Town of Colonie: A Pictorial History", and/or the book "Wolf Road: A Century of Development" that they'd like to donate to the Society, we'd gladly accept all offers. Please contact Mark Bodnar at 459-5147. Thank you!



Please visit our Facebook Page.  
Just search:  
**Historical Society Town of Colonie**



**New York Central Railroad crossing I-87, the Adirondack Northway, in The Town of Colonie**

*All photos from the "Jeff English Collection" (photographed by Francis T. Poulin, Schenectady rail enthusiast, 1965)*



**New York Central Railroad crossing  
I-87, the Adirondack Northway,  
in The Town of Colonie  
(Not the building on the left side of the  
photo, see below...)**

*Photo from the "Jeff English Collec-  
tion" (photographed by Francis T. Poulin,  
Schenectady rail enthusiast, 1965)*



The structure in this photo is a modern image of the building in the above photo. The building was erected in 1915 as a Roman Catholic church, St. Leo's Mission, built as a summer chapel for St. Patrick's Church in Cohoes. This area was a popular summer retreat for its location near the Mohawk River and easy accessibility by train or trolley.

The church was closed in the late 1960's and remained vacant until 1974 when the property was sold and then adapted as a residence. The cross remains on the roof top by the owner.

This structure can be seen when traveling in the northbound lane of the Northway prior to crossing the Twin Bridges.



**The old Troy-Schenectady Railroad—  
now the bike path  
in The Town of Colonie**

*Photo from the "Jeff English Collec-  
tion" (photographed by Francis T. Poulin,  
Schenectady rail enthusiast, 1965)*

Yes, I would like to become a member of the Historical Society of the Town of Colonie, New York, Inc. in the classification I have checked or renew my membership as noted.

My annual dues payment in the amount of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ is enclosed.

Classification	Annual Dues	Classification	Annual Dues	Classification	Annual Dues
<input type="checkbox"/> Students and Senior Citizens . . .	\$10.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Family . . . . .	\$15.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Supporting . . . . .	\$100—\$250
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual . . . . .	12.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Business . . . . .	50.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor . . . . .	\$250.00 & Up

Please accept my additional donation of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ as a gift to the Historical Society. *The Historical Society is a not-for-profit corporation.*

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Cit/Town \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_ Home Phone # \_\_\_\_\_

Cell Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail \_\_\_\_\_

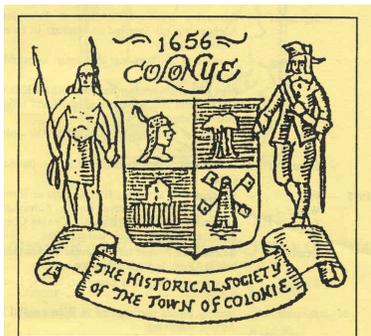
Please mail to Membership Chairperson c/o Historical Society, Memorial Town Hall, Newtonville, N. Y. 12128-0508

CHARTERED BY THE REGENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK

**THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF THE TOWN OF COLONIE**

**Kevin Franklin: Town Historian**

**Current Officers of the Society**



Historical Society      Founded 1971

MEMORIAL TOWN HALL  
NEWTONVILLE, NY 12128-0508  
518-782-2601

- President:** Mark Bodnar
- Vice Pres.:** Ed Engel
- Treasurer:** Kristie Schimpf
- Recording Sec.:** Bebe Morehead
- Corresponding Sec:** Ursula MacAffer
- Membership Chair:** Karen Senecal
- Past President:** Tony Brankman
- Trustees:** Charles Flanagan, Francina McCashion, Dr. Donald Morton, Bob Reilly, Karen Senecal, Randy Patten, Jennifer Paley, Ann Eberle, Deb Graulty, Marcia Codling, Victor Mahoney

**Senior Advisor:** Jean Olton

**Support the Society's efforts to stimulate an appreciation of the historical heritage of your community. Join Now!**

**PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**

The article for this newsletter was submitted to us a few years ago—our apology for taking so long to get it into print. It's a wonderful reminder to those who remember this railroad crossing, and something learned for those who had no idea of it. As Paul Harvey would say, "And now you know the rest of the story." (Who remembers Paul Harvey?) Thank you Jeff English for this wonderful article and the photos!

On March 13th our Membership Meeting features speaker Steve Trimm, who will present a much anticipated lecture titled, "One Soldier's Account: The Battle of the Bulge and the Conquest of Germany." The talk will feature excerpts from first hand accounts in a book written by Steve's uncle, Ray Gantter, a soldier who witnessed these historic events.

Mark your calendar! Our Annual Dinner will be held on Thursday, May 19th, at the Shaker Ridge Country Club. HSTC Members Bob Mulligan and Randy Patten will co-present a Power Point presentation titled, "David C. Lithgow: Albany Artist." More details will follow. Hope to see you there!

*Mark Bodnar, President*