

The Path of Gold

With one simple flick of a switch, seven-year-old Mary Brandt took Duanesburg's Route 7 out of darkness into the light. Her father was New York State's highway commissioner and Mary was chosen on September 18, 1936 to activate the 17-mile stretch of sodium lights. The overhead lights were installed along Route 7 from the Schenectady city line through Duanesburg, stretching to the Schoharie County line. General Electric was instrumental in developing the sodium lights that gave off an orange glow, giving the trail the title, "The Path of Gold." At the time, the 391 units made up the longest stretch of lighted highway in the world.

A big celebration was held that day. There were many activities—speeches, fireworks, baseball games and General Electric's show, "House of Magic." With approximately 10,000 people to witness the event, there was an ox roast at Pine Grove Dairy Farm followed by a dance across the street at the Congo Dance Hall. The radio station, WGY, broadcast the speeches.

The lights along Route 7 greatly improved the quality of travel, particularly at nights when the snow was blowing or it was foggy. In 1956, Schenectady County replaced the sodium lights with incandescent lighting. By the 1970's, as a money saving move, the lights were gradually removed with only a few allowed to remain at major intersections.