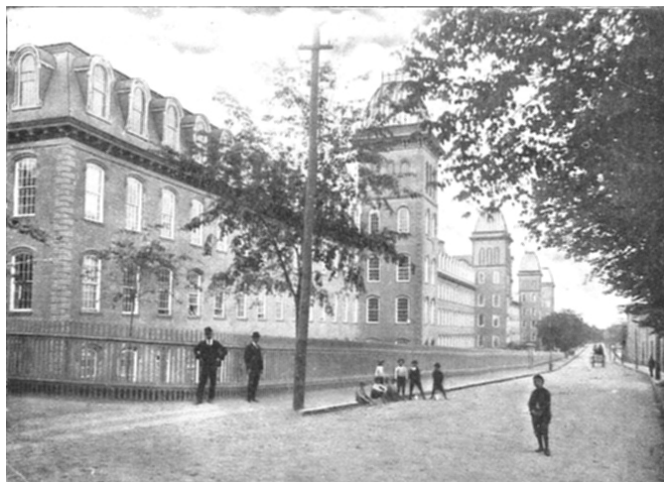


**We encourage you to take a tour of these sites and get to know our city and better appreciate its rich history.**

**As you look around, try to imagine what it would have looked and felt like during the peak of the Industrial Revolution when the streets were teeming with activity and people. Many of the buildings where the mill workers of Cohoes once lived and worked still stand as a reminder of those days.**

In 1811 the Cohoes Manufacturing Company was established and it became one of America's earliest cotton factories. The company was incorporated to manufacture cotton, woolen and linen goods, and to make bar iron, anchors, mill iron, rail rods and hoop iron.

The original Erie Canal and enlarged Erie Canal completed in 1825 and the late 1830s respectively, led to the growth of Cohoes and development of its industry. Sections of the original Erie Canal, later converted into power canals by the Cohoes Company, exploited the nearly unlimited water power of the Cohoes Falls. The Harmony Company, the most important industry in Cohoes and a leader in innovation during the American Industrial Revolution, was organized in 1836. The Harmony Mills became the largest and most technologically advanced cotton factory in the United States by the 1870s. During that time, no single mill operation in America equaled the Harmony Mills in scale or productivity.



The Harmony Company constructed four two-story brick tenements to house its employees. These were the first of many structures built in Cohoes specifically for mill employees and their families.

Brick row houses were constructed in 1846 on Olmstead and Sargent Streets to house workers from the nearby Ogden Mill. In the early 1850s, the Harmony Mills began housing employees in rows of buildings on North Mohawk, School, Cataract and Front Streets near the Cohoes Falls. In 1856, the Harmony Company purchased a 70-acre farm on Prospect Hill (known later as Harmony Hill) on which they constructed tenements and private residences for higher-level mill employees. In 1857, construction began on 22 brick buildings on Harmony Hill. In 1866, the Harmony Company began construction of 100 tenements for new workers set to arrive on completion of Harmony Mill #3 in 1868. Row housing spread up Harmony Hill to Vliet, Egbert, Willow, Garner, Hamilton, Jay, Mangam and Worth Streets, and Strong Place and Johnston Avenue.



By the 1870s, when mill expansion was essentially complete, the Harmony

Mills employed 3100 people (one out of four Cohoes residents), and owned about three-quarters of the property in Cohoes. Families were housed in over 700 tenement houses owned by the company, while unmarried workers often lived in one of five large boarding houses. The Harmony Company maintained its own police force and repair crews, and provided street paving, garbage pickup, and sanitary improvements. The company ran a group of cooperative stores, in which the cost of purchases made in the stores by workers and their families was deducted from salaries, as was rent for housing. The company also supported the construction of schools and churches of all faiths, and founded the Harmony Union Sunday School. The reliance of workers on the Harmony Company for a livelihood, housing, education, and recreation made Cohoes very much a "Company Town."

Harmony Hill was a lively place during this era. Along with the company stores, there were other

commercial enterprises that catered to mill workers, canallers, and other locals. In 1884 Willow Street was home to ten saloons, three boot and shoe stores, three grocers, three stove and tin ware stores, two meat markets, a wholesale liquor distributor, a hairdresser, locksmith, baker, druggist and a news and variety store. Other streets in the neighborhood also had a complement of shops.



The average textile mill worker was a female between the ages of 15 and 25, and many children began working in the mills at ages as young as ten to help support their families. Adult male common laborers earned 75 cents for a 12 hour work day. A skilled mule-spinner earned up to twice that amount. Women and children received considerably less; an unskilled boy received 30 cents for a workday lasting from 6 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. In the 1860s, one out of four families on Harmony Hill was headed by a single parent, usually a widowed mother. Such families supported themselves through the labor of older children in the mills, while the mother stayed home to take care of her younger children.

Despite difficult conditions, the promise of employment led workers to Cohoes. The first of these groups were Irish immigrants who began arriving in great numbers after the potato famine of the 1840s. Irish immigrants had also worked on construction of the Erie Canal, and many stayed on in canal towns (like Cohoes) after the canal was completed. Shortly after the Civil War, French-Canadians began arriving to work in the mills. In the first few decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Harmony Company made great efforts to recruit French-Canadian workers, sending out recruitment booklets describing the mills and the amenities in the city of Cohoes. By the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Russians and

other Eastern Europeans were settling in the city and seeking employment in the mills.

The fortunes of the Harmony Mills began their decline in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. A combination of factors contributed to this, including less reliance on direct waterpower for industry, labor disputes, and competition from southern mills with lower labor costs and overhead. Following the Depression and changes in ownership, a liquidation plan for the mill properties was developed, and all of the structures and land once held by the Harmony Company were auctioned in 1937. These holdings included 700 tenement buildings, five boarding houses, six mills, and several parcels of undeveloped land.

The Harmony Mills Historic District was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1978. In 1999 the Mills were designated a National Historic Landmark. The mill district is an architecturally unified historic resource, representing a nearly complete 19<sup>th</sup> century mill complex, with industrial, residential, and commercial structures. The mill complex is recognized as a key site in American labor and industrial history, representing the rise of U.S. industrial power and innovation and with it the national organized labor movement of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

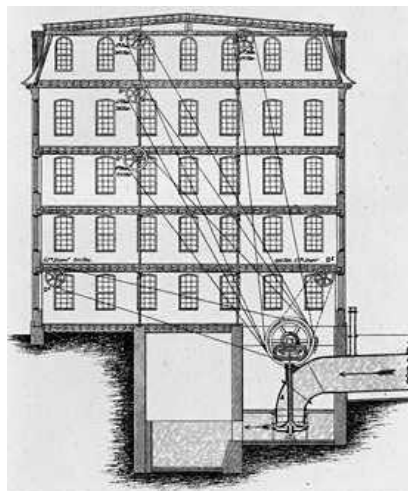


This map and guide highlights the many examples of worker housing in the city of Cohoes. Most worker housing was constructed of brick, as were the mills themselves, but wood was used when there were shortages of brick. The housing is varied architecturally and includes Italianate, Gothic revival, and Greek revival styles. Some structures have mansard roofs, echoing the rooflines of Harmony Mills #2, #3, #4 (the Jute Mill) and #5 (the Strong Mill). Some houses have spacious backyards, which were sometimes used by residents for flower or vegetable gardens. The housing incorporated quality materials and good workmanship, and many of the buildings have been in continuous use as residences since their construction.



# The HOUSES that HARMONY BUILT

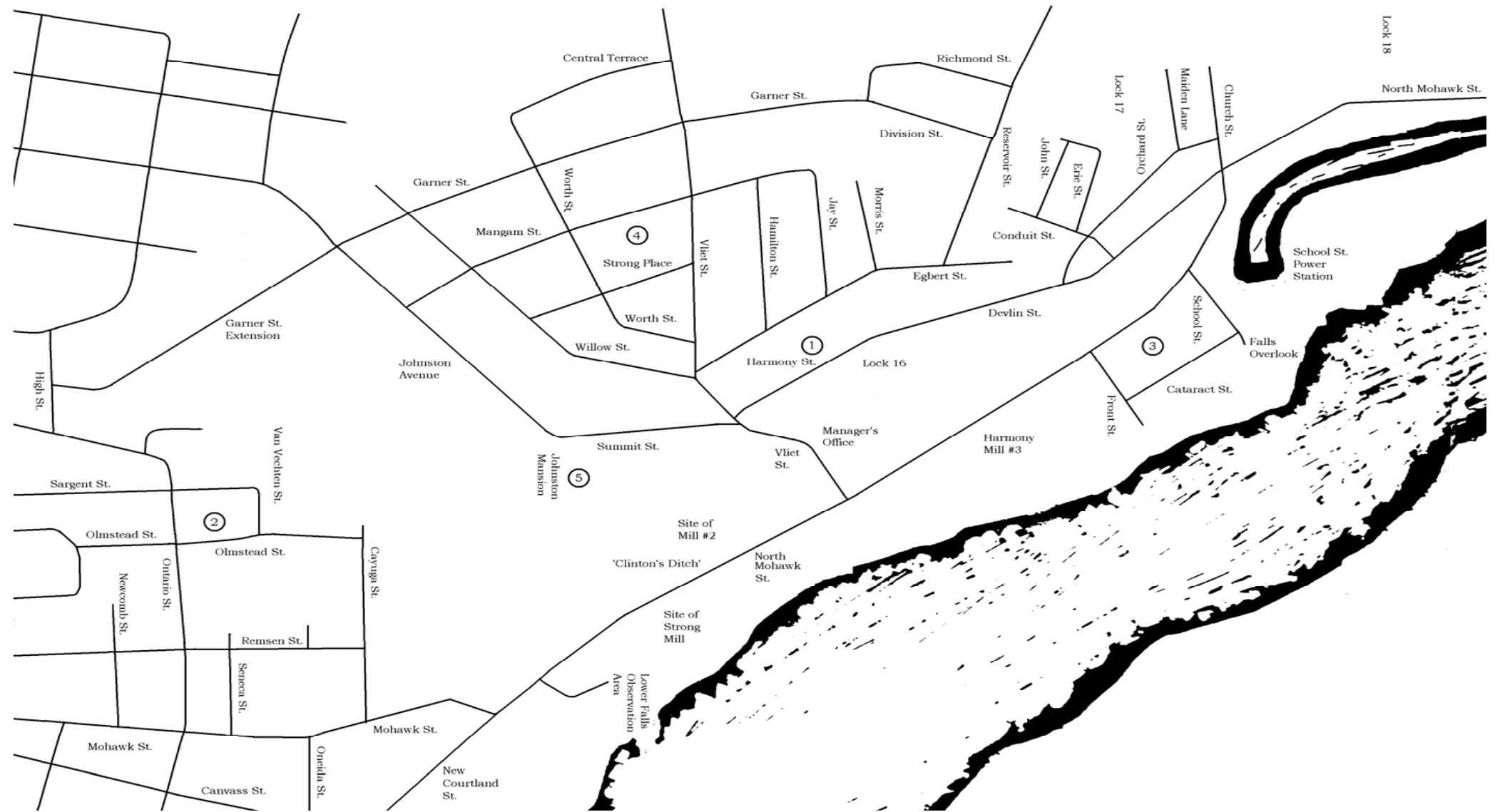
*A self-guided tour  
of  
worker housing in Cohoes*



Spindle City Historic  
Society

237-7999

[www.spindlecit.net](http://www.spindlecit.net)



## 1. Harmony Street.

Brick tenements built to house workers in the original Harmony Mill. Constructed in 1837-1839, they were the first examples of housing erected for factory operatives in Cohoes.



## 2. Olmstead and Sargent Streets.

Two blocks of brick row houses on Olmstead and Sargent Streets were built in 1846 to house workers at the Ogden Mill, just across the power canal from Olmstead St. The street was named for Charles Olmstead, Cohoes Company agent and



supervisor of power canal construction. The area typifies an industrial community that developed with canal and mill operations, a microcosm of mid-19<sup>th</sup> century industrial history. After the enlargement of the Erie Canal in the 1840s, the Cohoes Company used abandoned sections of the original Erie Canal for its power canal system to run

the mills. The Harmony Company later purchased the Ogden Mills (now an apartment complex), adding to its industrial empire in Cohoes.

## 3. North Mohawk, School, Cataract, Front Streets.

Just north of Mill #3 and south of the Cohoes Falls, in an area bordered by North Mohawk, School, Cataract and Front Streets. The Harmony Company built a neighborhood of modest two and three story brick tenements in 1853. Additional housing was constructed in 1865 for twenty families. These dwellings, still used as residences, are well-preserved examples of urban worker row houses just steps away from the mill buildings.



**4. Harmony Hill.** Vliet, Garner, Mangam, Willow, Hamilton, Egbert, Worth and Jay Streets, Strong Place and Johnston Avenue. The housing on Harmony Hill was constructed between the late 1850s and 1872. This mill worker housing was provided by the Harmony Company to the west of the mill complex on several acres of farmland purchased in 1856. The area provided housing

for mill workers at various economic levels, ranging from boarding houses for single mill workers to houses for mill managers and supervisors. Harmony Hill was virtually a



city in itself, cut off from downtown Cohoes by a steep cliff to the south and the Erie Canal and Mohawk River to the east. The streets of Harmony Hill, spread like a fan, converge on Vliet Street, with easy access for the residents to walk down the hill to work at the mills.

## 5. Longview, the David J. Johnston House.

Known as "Longview" this building was built for David John Johnston by the Harmony Company in 1866 when he became Superintendent of the mills. It is a three story Italianate mansion with a mansard roof and hooded dormers. Perched high atop Harmony Hill, it symbolically oversees the mill complex.

