

Spindle City Historic Society

Volume 1 Issue 2

Winter 1998-99

DO YOU KNOW.....

....that Cohoes was the second city of Albany County?

....that the bronze statue in the Central Tower of Harmony Mill #3 is that of owner Thomas Garner, wealthy New York City industrialist? The statue was cast by the Ames Manufacturing Co. of Chicopee, MA from a model made by Boston sculpture, Martin Millmore.

....that the house on Sargent Street which burned last October was originally built by the Harmony Co. as a boarding house for men?

....that, in 1967, Cohoes was one of 11 cities in the U.S. to receive the All-American City Award bestowed by the National Municipal League and Look Magazine?

....that daredevil, Bobby Leach rode over the Cohoes Falls in a barrel in 1899?

....that a ghost named Patty is said to reside in the Cohoes Music Hall?

....that Cohoes' first firehouse still stands on Newcomb Street?

....that the skeleton of the Cohoes Mastodon is standing in the lobby of the NYS Museum?

....that on January 7, 1870, Mark Twain lectured in Egbert's Hall located on the corner of White and Remsen Streets?

....that our newsletter logo, in the center of this page, is a representation of a cross-section of Harmony Mill #3 and depicts a turbine and belting powered by the turbine?.

....that the Society's monthly meetings are open to the public? They are held at 7:00 PM on the last Wednesday of the month at the Cohoes Community Center. Our next meeting will be on January 27, 1999.

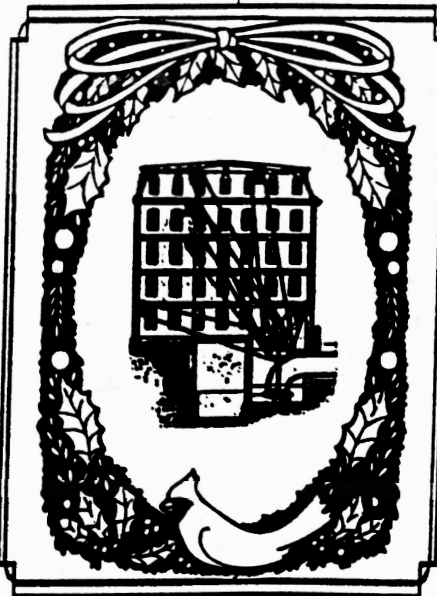
ASPIRING TO "LANDMARK" STATUS.....

The Harmony Mills Complex is only one step away from being designated as a National Historic Landmark. The Landmarks Committee of the National Park Service and the National Parks System Advisory Board unanimously approved the recommendation per Representative Michael McNulty's office. The final step is approval by Bruce Babbitt, Secretary of the Interior.

A letter to Secretary Babbitt from Congressman McNulty outlines the Complex's industrial and architectural prominence and its "classic example of the company town". The Harmony Mills Complex and the Kate Mullany House in Troy are sites identified by the National Labor Theme Study which was authored by Mr. McNulty.

An important part of our city may be receiving national recognition. Take that extra minute to look at the design of the Harmony

Mills and other historic buildings in Cohoes, note the workers' housing on Mangam, Vliet and Cataract Streets, among others and think of the early residents who contributed to Cohoes' rich past.



WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

The Spindle City Historic Society welcomes the following new members: *Paul Bourgeois, Mary DeRose, Mary Keefe, Bernard Ouimet, Paul Perreault, Agnes Phelan, Rev. Thomas Phelan, Elin Riley, Marilyn Rood, Marra's Pharmacy and New York Landmarks Conservancy.* We look forward to working with you and learning your ideas for helping to raise awareness of Cohoes' history and the necessity to preserve it.

A TRIBUTE TO THE SILLIMAN

Rob Langley, member of our Historic Society and a student at Bryant & Stratton, is re-creating the Silliman Memorial Church in miniature. He has undertaken this project as a tribute to the church, its former members and the supporters who worked hard to preserve it.

The model, which is 98% to scale, measures approximately 3' across, 5' deep and 2 1/2' at the tallest tower. Its base materials are wood and foam board and it is detailed to resemble the stone blocks and copper trim of the original building. Wooden window frames, simulated stain glass windows and wrought iron fencing will be included along with finishing touches such as sidewalks, lamp posts and trees. Mike Austin, HVCC student, is assisting Rob by doing the electrical work which will provide lighting and a sound system for the model.

This Silliman project is Rob's second - the first model was constructed of cardboard and was on display at the Cohoes Visitors Center for three months. Rob's current church is larger, sturdier and more detailed than the first. In preparing for his second Silliman, Rob photographed the church at the corner of Mohawk and Ontario Streets before it was demolished: outside, inside, all angles, amounting to almost 200 pictures. Rob credits his parents, Bob and Linda Langley, for providing him with a rental apartment in which to create the model. He has had to work around his school schedule and has invested \$225.00, to date, for materials. Rob anticipates it will cost an additional \$100.00 to complete this project and hopes to be able to unveil the Silliman model by the New Year.

Our thanks to Rob Langley for his efforts in re-capturing part of Cohoes' history.

ST. AGNES CHURCH - MEETING

Approximately 30 people attended a meeting on October 13th to discuss the future of St. Agnes Church, the gymnasium and the school. The church, which had combined with St. Patrick's previously, closed this spring and merged with St. Marie's to form Holy Trinity Parish.

Father Arthur Becker, pastor of Holy Trinity conducted the meeting which he described as a "brainstorming" session. Citing St. Agnes' status as a Cohoes landmark, Father Becker stated the Albany Diocese's wish to keep it as such, avoiding the fate

A WALK THROUGH HISTORY

On Saturday, November 14, Walter Lipka, Cohoes City Historian, conducted an informal walking tour through Cohoes. From the Public Library, the group walked to Mohawk and Howard Streets which, during the Erie Canal days, was known as "Cork Hill", a reference to the conclave of Irish canal workers who lived there.

The tour followed Main Street, the route of the original Erie Canal, noting those building that may have been built along it. From Main Street, the group continued to Olmstead Street, behind the Ogden Mill, and up the incline to the enlarged canal bed and Lock 15. Crossing over to the paved towpath, the walkers went on to Bedford Street and the remnants of Lock 14 behind the bowling alley, then back down to Remsen and Newcomb Streets. On Newcomb Street is the former Campbell Hose Company (now Sofa's & Chairs) which served as one of the three predecessors to City Hall. Turning down Mohawk Street, Walter pointed out some of the beautiful old buildings - Federalist, Victorian and brownstones.

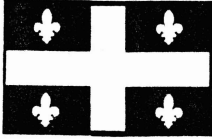
This "walkabout" is the initial step in developing a self-guided tour of Cohoes which will spotlight the city's history in regard to the Industrial Revolution, in which Cohoes played a vital role in the region.



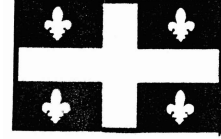
of the Silliman Memorial Church. He advised of some actions already taken by the Diocese including the developing of a promotional package on the church properties. Linda Christopher, President of the Spindle City Historic Society, provided Father Becker with the names of groups with similar concerns regarding the preservation of historic sites.

The St. Agnes Parish was created in 1878 to serve, mostly, Cohoes' Irish Catholic population. The first church was destroyed by fire, the second abandoned due to faulty construction and the third and present structure was built about 1890. The design is based on 14th Century Gothic architecture and is notable for its highly visible spire and beautiful stained glass windows. It stands as one of the reminders of Cohoes' past and the goal is to assure that it continues to serve the community while maintaining its historic presence.

The French-Canadian Influence in Cohoes



ROOTS



Anywhere you go in New York State, you can look into the local telephone directory and find the names of people of French descent. Most of them trace their families back to French Canada, Quebec mostly, rather than directly back to France. The path to the United States was from France to New France, and from New France (Quebec) to the United States. By the time these families moved to New York, they had already been living in French North America for generations. Most of their ancestors had come to the New World between 1604 and 1700. While it is true that one can meet New Yorkers with French names throughout the state, there are certain areas where they have settled in greater numbers. One of these areas is the Capital District, especially Cohoes. According to the 1980 census, one-third of Cohoes' population is of French Canadian extraction.

What prompted these people to leave Quebec? What moved them to come to Cohoes? The pattern of settlement in New France was a result of the policy adopted by the French king who decreed that settlers should settle in a contiguous pattern of farms without any intervening open areas. Farms were first granted on land fronting the river. Only when this land had been settled was a second set of lots settled, these directly in back of the first farms and fronting on a road. The house and farm buildings were built facing the river or the road. It seems that the factor deciding how long the first row of farms would be was determined more or less by the distance that could be comfortably covered by horse and wagon to get to church. Only people who were French and Catholic were permitted to settle in New France. At the center of each settlement was the church. As settlements reached further away from the church, new parishes were erected and a new church was built.

Farms in New France were one-quarter of a mile wide by a mile long. Thus your next door neighbor was within walking distance, as were your second, third and other neighbors on both sides. The results of this pattern of settlement was that it was easier for the settlers to defend themselves against attacks from either the Indians or the English and it also made it possible for them to help each other with the heavy farm work. Also, it made visiting easier, especially during the long, cold Canadian winters.

This pattern of settlement, however, worked havoc with inheritance. When a son married, a father would either establish his son on land close to him or would give part of his farm to his son. With time, the repeated divisions of the ancestral farm became too small to support a family. At the same time, land which could have been used for settlement was unavailable. This land, the Abitibi area among others, was finally opened in the late 1800's and the beginning of the 1900's. So, the French of Quebec looked south and found a land where factories were being built, where jobs were plentiful, and mill owners were looking for hands to run their machines. With jobs available in New York and New England, French Canadians decided that it was better to migrate south than to stay on their small farms and starve to death. One of these cities where mills were being built was Cohoes, something we will discuss in our next article.

Bernard Ouimet

RAILROADS

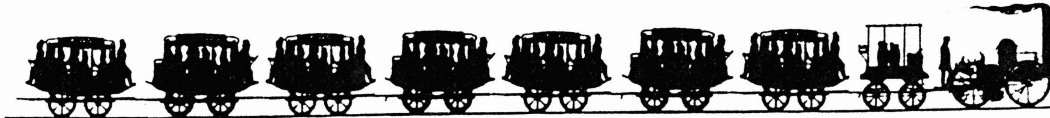
The Delaware & Hudson and The New York Central

The railroads were major employers in the area, a hub of transportation because of our waterways, canal systems and railroads. Early on, the D&H and New York Central railroad networks reached the New England states, New York City, Quebec and the western part of the country.

The D&H Railway is the oldest continuously operated transportation company in the United States. It was founded in 1823 as the D&H Canal Company to haul coal from Pennsylvania to the Hudson River and northeastern cities. The first steam locomotive in operation in the country, the "Stourbridge Lion" was purchased by the D&H in 1829. Although the D&H has undergone a number of re-organizations, it has maintained an unbroken corporate identity; it was acquired by the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1991.

Locally, the D&H passenger station on Canvass Street was built in 1883 and currently houses OTB. The D&H freight house on Saratoga Street (now Cohoes Mill End) was recently listed on the National Register of Historic Places. President-elect Abraham Lincoln passed through Cohoes on February 19, 1861 to his inauguration in Washington, D.C. and the D&H conveyed President Grant's Funeral train through the city on August 4, 1885.

Happy 175th Anniversary to the Delaware & Hudson Railway



The New York Central Railroad was formed in the mid-1800's through the consolidation of a number of short lines across New York State. The Troy/Schenectady Railroad, built by the City of Troy in 1842 and sold in 1850 to the Hudson River Railroad was one of them. The New York Central/Hudson River engine was the first to break 100 mph, hitting 112.5 mph on May 10, 1883 near Batavia. In 1968, the Pennsylvania and New York Central Railroads merged to become the PennCentral.

The construction of these railroads had a positive affect on Cohoesiers as the nationwide commercial depression of 1840-1842 had forced many of the local manufacturing companies to suspend operations. Working on the railroads and the enlargement of the Erie Canal saved the village of Cohoes from utter stagnation. Soon, the railroads competed with the canals and steamboats for the movement of passengers and freight. They eventually overcame the opposition from these other transportation interests and immigrant workers extended the rails from city to city to city.



THE HOLIDAY SEASON IN COHOES - 50 YEARS AGO

At 7:05PM on December 3, 1948, the holiday season in Cohoes was officially opened by Mayor Rudolph Roulier who threw the master switch to light the downtown business district. The district was advertised as "Santa Claus Lane with the most beautiful Christmas decorations in the area". A successful season was anticipated by twenty-one stores. They were open every Friday until 9:00PM offering a wide variety of goods for the shoppers: men's and women's apparel, jewelry, cameras, toys, stationery, cards, confections, music, furniture, appliances, curtains, hardware and much more.

For your holiday gift giving, sales offered boys' corduroy pants for \$3.95, combat boots for \$4.95 and men's winter union suits for \$1.95, all at Cohoes Army & Navy. Butler's had all wool sweaters for \$2.98 and Timpane's Jewelers was selling a seven diamond engagement ring for \$250. VanAlstynes' Christmas candy was \$.39/lb. while LaMarches had 5 lbs. of Christmas candy for \$3.89. National Furniture's sales included a 3 pc. parlor suite for \$189.00, a floor model radio for \$20.00 and an innerspring studio lounge for \$42.50 OR you could treat yourself to a new 1948 Plymouth coupe for \$1,895 from Watervliet auto dealer, John W. Gillan.

As for groceries, the newly opened Empire Market (now Spindle City Market) advertised Freihofer's baked goods: 4 cream puffs \$.39, blueberry pie \$.59, raisin bread \$.25 and maple walnut layer cake \$.39. Chuck steak was \$.55/lb, corned beef \$.20/lb and lamb chops \$.59/lb. Eggs sold for \$.49/doz and butter \$.67/lb.

The Cohoes and Empire movie theaters generally offered two feature films, a cartoon and newsreel per showing. In December 1948, "Beyond Glory" (*Alan Ladd & Donna Reed*), "Rachel and the Stranger" (*Loretta Young and Robert Mitchum*), "The Loves of Carmen" (*Rita Hayworth & Glen Ford*) and "River Lady" (*Yvonne DeCarlo*) were shown.

Fifty years ago, the mainstay of your home entertainment was radio. Local stations were WGY, WOKO, WROW, & WTRY. They broadcasted *Blondie*, *Duffy's Tavern*, *District Attorney* & *The Big Story* in the evening. Daytime programs included *Morning Devotions*, *Arthur Godfrey*, *Fred Waring*, *Dr. Christian*, *Harvest of Stars*, *Helen Trent*, *Ma Perkins* and *Guiding Light*. If you owned one of the few television sets, 10" black & white screens, WRGB was the only channel on the air. Programming started at 4:00PM with *Howdy Doody*, a puppet show and signed off at 10:00PM with *Newsreel*.

Reading your local newspaper, the following headlines appeared 50 years ago: MATERIAL LACK DELAYS SERVICE FROM NEW TANK....the tank on the hill can't be put into service until March, BIRTHS IN COHOES OUTNUMBER DEATHS, COHOES TO PAY LOWER COUNTY & STATE TAX, GUESTS AT PARTY FOR YOUNGSTERS SET NEW RECORD....1600 youngsters show up for annual Cohoes Police Association Christmas Party, CHRISTMAS SHOPPERS HAVE AN ADDED HOLIDAY TREAT IN BARBERSHOP SONGS....hour long barbershop quartet concert given in front of the Empire Theater, and P.T.A. TO TAKE FURTHER ACTION ON RESOLUTION CONDEMNING COMICS....School #1 P.T.A. put clamps on comics glorifying sex and crime. You may also have learned that Cohoes High opened its 1948 season with two wins led by *Mike Dynko*, "*Duck*" *LaValley* and "*Skip*" *McDonald* and the Cohoes Mastodons were atop the NYS Professional Basketball League. Fireman distributed 70 dolls, "renovated" by eight city women's groups, to the neediest children and *Mrs. Kay Cavosie* led the St. Agnes bowling league. The historic Harmony Hotel burned and flood warnings were broadcast as the Hudson and Mohawk were reaching flood stage - the Reavy bridge was closed as a precautionary measure. Additionally, NEWS OF THE SCHOOLS was submitted by local school children. The reporters were: *Jean Twiss* - Cohoes High School, *James Cucchi* - Junior High School, *Joan Kopczka* - School #4, *Barbara Halacey* - School #5, *Sara Cuva* and *Jean Cardegna* - School #8 and *Milton Woraski* and *John Stoberski* - Van Schaick School. For the parochial schools, *Mary Neeson* - Keveny Academy, *Patricia Turcotte* - Sacred Heart, *Marilyn Campbell* and *Sheila Ryan* - St. Agnes, *Jeanne Boulerville* - St. Joseph's, *Arcade Boivin* - St. Marie's, *Joseph Kosek* - St. Michael's, and *Shirley Craner* - St. Patrick's.

So, do you remember the holidays in Cohoes in 1948? If not, perhaps this reminiscence will give you an idea of what it was like.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS TO YOU FROM THE SPINDLE CITY HISTORIC SOCIETY

Spindle City Historic Society

OFFICERS & TRUSTEES

Linda C. Christopher, President

Lillian Clermont/Craig Bock, Secretary

Jayne Counterman

June Cherniak, Treasurer

Walter Lipka

Daniele Cherniak, First Vice President

Janice Tracey

Dennis Rivage, Second Vice President

Harry Woods, Sr.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

<input type="checkbox"/> Individual Membership	\$10.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Institutional Membership	\$25.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Senior Citizen Membership	\$ 5.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Contributing Membership	\$35.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Student Membership	\$ 5.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining Membership	\$50.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Family Membership	\$15.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Tax-Deductible Donation	_____

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY, STATE, ZIP CODE _____

TELEPHONE _____

Mail completed form with membership fee, payable to Spindle City Historic Society, to:

June Cherniak, Treasurer, 415 Vliet Boulevard, Cohoes, NY 12047

Spindle City Historic Society

P.O. Box 375

Cohoes, New York 12047

