Spindle City Historic Society

Volume 5 Issue 1 Spring 2002

DID YOU KNOW

....that the Van Schaick Mansion is open to the public on Thursdays and Sundays from 2:00-4:00 p.m.? Guided tours detail the mansion's role in the colonial and Revolutionary War era. The Mansion was recently purchased by the Peter Gansevoort chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution and serves as their regional headquarters.

....that the building at the corner of Remsen and Ontario Streets, Heroux's Barber Shop, was originally built as a gristmill to produce flour and feed?

....that, during 1887, Michael T. Smith, future political boss in Cohoes, contracted with the city, for \$10.55 per month, to keep the naphtha street lamps lit? See our article on "Big Mike" in this issue.

....that Mohawk and North Mohawk Streets were originally part of an Indian portage trail?

....that Peebles Island was purchsased by Cluett Peabody of Troy from Mary Peebles, last descendant of the Van Schaicks? It was used as a bleachery for cloth manufacturers in Cohoes and Waterford.

....that Clarence Darrow, the internationally famous criminal lawyer, was in Cohoes in January 1934 to give a lecture to the Cohoes Educational Forum on crime, its causes and prevention?

COHOES HALL OF FAME

On February 9, during the "Cohoes Remembers" weekend, the Cohoes Caretakers held the induction ceremony for the Cohoes Hall of Fame. Among the inductees for lifetime achievement and service to Cohoes was Horace Silliman. Many thanks to the Caretakers for recognizing Silliman's numerous contributions to Cohoes, and to Spindle City Historic Society members whose research brought Silliman's accomplishments to light. An article on Silliman's life was featured in our Summer 2001 newsletter, and can also be viewed on the society's website. Inducted into the Hall of Fame with Horace Silliman were Earl Hebert Jr., Barbara McDonald, and Mary Thouin. We congratulate them all, and thank them for their dedication to making Cohoes a better place.

HISTORIAN'S NOTEBOOK

STREET OF FIRE – SARATOGA STREET

Through the years, many fires have occurred on Saratoga Street, also part of NYS Rt. 32. Before construction of Rt. 787, this was the main route to Albany, and many mills and businesses located there. Over time, there were numerous fires in buildings along the street. Some of the structures that burned had fallen into disuse, while others were still active. A timeline of the fires of Saratoga Street: March 13, 1853 –

Cohoes/Waterford Bridge; January 10, 1865 - Troy and Cohoes Railroad Company stables; October 31, 1871 -Cohoes/Waterford Bridge; December 2, 1890 - Crandall Lumber Yard; February 26, 1906 - Friesenberg & Shaffer warehouse, 253 Saratoga St.; March 2, 1909 - Page Mfg. Company; July 23, 1910 - 155 Saratoga St.; July 29, 1910 -207 Saratoga St.; May 5, 1922 - Gilbert Paper Mill; December 29, 1933 - 194 Saratoga St.; May 2, 1944 – 165 Saratoga St.; July 23, 1945 - Crandall Lumber Yard, 363 Saratoga St.; January 3, 1948 -294 Saratoga St.; November 14, 1956 -Clark and Hopsapple, Pacific Mill, 66-72 Saratoga St.; June 27, 1973 - Cohoes Mill & Lumber; August 8, 1975 - Star

Textile; September 13, 1996 – 284 Saratoga St.; August 30, 1998 – Star Textile (Fauld & Hatch), 2 general alarms in one day at the same building; September 1, 2000 – Shelter Enterprises (old Star Textile building); September 1, 2001 – Mohawk River Mill. This list includes only the major fires. Rt. 32 continues north into Waterford, and Cohoes firefighters have gone on many occasions to assist the forces of the Peck Hose Company in battling blazes in Northside. But those are stories for another column.

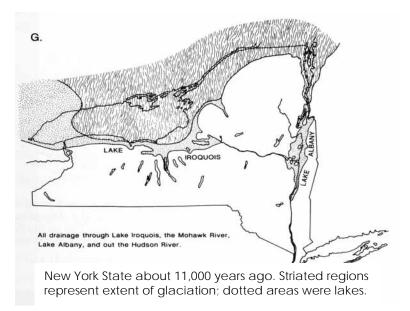
Dennis Rivage

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WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

The Spindle City Historic Society welcomes new members Robert Addis, Peggy Gifford, Steve Lackmann, Ann Marie Nolet, and Linda Palmieri

Thanks to the Cohoes Caretakers for sponsoring this issue of our newsletter



Notes on the Geological History of Peebles Island and the Cohoes Area

By Paul R. Huey

The geological history of the Cohoes area including Peebles and Van Schaick islands is very tentative, and the theories that have been proposed to explain it require continued research. Peebles and Van Schaick islands originally were part of the bed of an ancient pre-glacial river gorge carved in bedrock, which generally follows the route of the present Hudson River. This ancient gorge, averaging about 2 miles in width, was filled with ice as the Wisconsinan glaciation moved south across New York State during the Pleistocene Age beginning approximately 200,000 years ago. About 20,000 years ago the glaciers began to recede northward, leaving behind vast lakes of melted ice water and extensive deposits

of sand and gravel. Perhaps 16,000 years ago the edge of the glacier receded from its margin at the present Helderberg Escarpment (part of the escarpment is in Thacher Park) and in the Hudson Valley at Ravena, and retreated as far north as Round Lake in Saratoga County. As the melting ice water poured in great rivers off the edge of the receding glacier, many piles of gravel formed deep on the bottom of Lake Albany near the margin of the ice. The retreating glacier probably left one or more piles of gravel on the uneven surface of what later became Peebles Island.

About 15,000 years ago, the Hudson Lobe of the glacier re-advanced southward about 20 miles from Round Lake to South Bethlehem and again reached the edge of the Helderberg Plateau. Then the ice again retreated, apparently more rapidly, about 14,000 years ago leaving the irregularly stratified sand and gravel glacial deposits within depressions on the rock surface of the north side of Peebles Island. Lake Albany, with a surface elevation believed to have been at least 250 feet above present sea level, once again covered Peebles Island and gradually buried it under deposits of clay and sediments. As the glacial waters of Lake Albany slowly subsided, a river many times larger than the present Mohawk began pouring into the Hudson Valley from the west. Flowing at a level at least 80 feet higher than its present bed, this river probably swept away from the bedrock surface the clay and silt left by Lake Albany in the area north of present Cohoes and on Peebles and Van Schaick islands. Huge potholes were scoured into the bedrock, and later, about 11,000 years ago, into two of these potholes located in present Cohoes washed the body of a mastodon. The bones, discovered in 1866 (during the construction of Harmony Mill #3) resting on a bed of clay and broken rock above a layer of water-worn pebbles, were buried under a muck and peat deposit at least 50 feet thick. The bones have just recently been radiocarbon dated by the New York State Museum at $11,070 \pm 60$ years old.

As the Mohawk River gradually settled into its present channel, sea levels rose, and seawater crept into the Hudson Valley from the south. The seawater formed a tidal estuary in a new river channel in the middle of the old pre-glacial river gorge almost as far north as Peebles and Van Schaick islands. The post-glacial Mohawk River, meanwhile, formed a great waterfall at Cohoes where it descended the west rim of the ancient pre-glacial river gorge. Then the Mohawk spread across the rocky bottom of the old gorge on its way to the Hudson, cutting several channels into the bedrock. The distributary channels flowing across this surface gradually became entrenched into the soft shale bedrock and formed Peebles and Van Schaick islands. At the same time, the post-glacial Mohawk River below Cohoes Falls began to cut a channel into the soft rock to a depth of 40 feet, while Cohoes Falls itself has receded over time to its present location about 2,000 feet upstream from its original site at the rim of the ancient pre-glacial Hudson River gorge.

The Cohoes Mastodon bones are not the only Pleistocene animal remains that are said to have been found in this area. According to the late William Kirby of Cohoes, dredging in the Hudson River within a cofferdam adjacent to the Matton Shipyard on Van Schaick Island brought up a large prehistoric Pleistocene moose mandible which was sent to the State Museum. It was found about where the pier is presently located at the Shipyard. A search for this mandible in the State Museum collections, however, has instead produced only some "moose" bones recorded to have been "found in a pocket near Waterford, N.Y., Dec. 1909." The three bones, in fact, are not from a moose but are those of a large albatross, a sea bird.

The J. Leonard Lackmann House

By Steve Lackmann



The J. Leonard Lackmann House, located at 26 Imperial Avenue, was constructed during the years 1896-1897 on a relatively new Imperial Avenue. One of the reasons this building lot was chosen was the beautiful view of the city and the surrounding hills above Troy. At that time, there were no trees to block the view and the lot sloped downward to the New York Central Railroad tracks. From stories my father told me, my great grandmother was glad that the house was on the western side of the tracks so the coal smoke from the locomotives wouldn't be blowing toward the house! Below the railroad was the Erie Canal where my great grandparents could watch the canal boats by what is now Bedford Street. A favorite story of my father's was that my grandfather learned to swim there! My great grandfather would tie a rope on him and into the canal he went. I really can't imagine that since the canal was most likely very polluted. I'll bet he kept his mouth shut!

My great grandfather came to America as an infant from Barmen, a small town in northwestern Germany near the Dutch border in the early 1850s. After living for approximately 25 years on both Lancaster and Congress Streets, my great grandfather had accumulated enough money from his locksmithing and gunsmithing business to build a house that would meet the needs of a growing family and have some land so he could raise his chickens. The house was built in the Queen Anne style so prevalent in the period. A turret was built on the northwest corner and later on a large stained glass window was installed on the middle landing of the front stairway. It was a single family dwelling with a large front stairway and a large wraparound porch at the rear to take advantage of the views.

During the early 1920s my grandfather continued to live in the house after he married my grandmother. He

wanted to move to a house of his own, but my great grandfather was getting older and wanted his company. So, it was decided to build an addition on the back of the second floor to serve as a kitchen and dining room. An inside stairway was blocked off for additional storage and a new stairway was built at the rear. My father always told me that the decision to build was difficult, since it cost as much for the addition as it would have for a new single family house. The side porch was enclosed for more living space. The front porch was also enclosed. This arrangement has lasted to the present.

My grandfather stayed active in the family business up until the Depression. My father would tell me stories of how he would go to open the shop on Remsen Street by 7 a.m. and close for dinner at 6 p.m. He would walk home, eat, and go back to the store to do the Kodak film developing and printing that his customers had dropped off during the day. In spite of his 6-day workweek, he would still find time to work on the house, painting, masonry work, carpentry, or tending to the chickens. He passed away in 1933 and my grandfather took possession of the house. He continued with the business until his death in 1940. At that time my grandmother sold the business and continued to live in the house alone until my father returned from the Army in 1945. He lived here until his death in 1982. My family and my mother still live here.

I can only hope my children want to keep the house in the family. Maintenance is an ongoing chore and expense...but it's a "labor of love". No one outside the family has ever lived here! In fact, we are always discovering new things in the attic. We recently discovered "flocked" wallpaper rolls that must have been left over after the dining room was papered. I also discovered some of my grandfather's old darkroom equipment that I continue to use to this day.

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Other Cohoes houses have stories to tell.

SCHS member Bob Addis has recently purchased and is working on restoring one of the older houses in Cohoes, at 55 Western Avenue. It is a brick 2-story farmhouse built around 1800 in the Dutch Colonial style. He believes this site was on one of the Fonda or Lansing farms during Colonial times, and that former residents of the house included Dow T. Fonda (d. 1842) and his wife Matilda (d. 1849). Bob would appreciate any information on the history of the house, early maps of the area, help with researching deeds at the county courthouse, or other suggestions of sources for further research. He can be reached at 237-1165 or at raddis@capital.net.



Off the Top...

The Spindle City Historic Society (SCHS) is off to another busy and

exciting year. Our new 'second Saturday of the month' picture collection sessions and presentations have been met with a wonderful reception. Encourage your friends and neighbors to share their photos with us so that we can preserve them for future generations. Also, let them know about the current programs and presentations we are sponsoring. That's what the SCHS is all about.

Our web site

(www.timesunion.com/communities/spindlecity) has been getting a number of 'hits' and is generating interest in both SCHS and Cohoes. If you have not seen it yet, check it out and let us know what you think. People have also been using it to request general and specific information.

Some of these requests are for information we do not have at our fingertips, but we are hoping some of you do. We just added a new feature to this newsletter titled "Wanted," listing information that people are requesting. You can find it on page 8 of this newsletter. This new section will help make the newsletter and SCHS more interactive. Please assist us by calling 518-237-7999 and leaving a message, by contacting our web site, or by writing us at Spindle City Historic Society, 58 Remsen Street, Cohoes, NY 12047.

Now that SCHS is in residence at the Cohoes Visitor's Center, we have received numerous donations that we will share with the Cohoes community. If you have ideas or things to share, please contact us as our members strengthen the society. Have you been to the Visitor's Center lately or attended a performance in that wonderful 1874 gem, the Cohoes Music Hall? Hours of the Visitor's Center are 11 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Contact the Cohoes Music Hall ticket line on 518-434-1703 for the latest program information.

Our regular meetings are the last Wednesday of the month at 7 p.m. in the Cohoes Visitor's Center. Many of our meetings include a short program by a guest speaker. See the last page of this newsletter for details. The Annual Presentation is April 21 and will provide insight into the history of the Van Schaick Mansion. Mark your calendar.

Thank you for being a supportive member of the SCHS.

Hope to see you soon,

Paul D. Dunleavy President

Collecting Memories

On the second Saturday of each month since

January, the society has been collecting photos and other memorabilia for future publications and for its archives. We thank all who have shared their priceless memories with us, and look forward to more of these events.



Tor Shekerjian captures an image.

Collecting photos and the stories they have to tell.



Walter Cherniak, Edna Frank, Ann Marie Nadeau, Paul Bourgeois, Donna Riley, Monica Bourgeois.

A Virtual Tour

The second Saturday in January also featured a Virtual Tour of the Old Erie Canal in Cohoes, which included postcard views of the expanded Erie Canal built in the 1840s, and images of the canal locks as they appear today. Cohoes once contained ten of these limestone locks, and most still can be found. Some of these sites are the focus of the historical society's lock cleanup efforts, and all will be part of an "actual tour" planned for more pleasant weather.

Monthly Meeting Programs

January and February programs provided insight into the city's rich immigrant heritage, and encouraged people to research their own ancestry. **Bernie Ouimet** discussed the French-Canadian immigrant experience, when many fled rural Quebec for opportunity working in the mills of Cohoes. **Terri LaMarche** presented practical methods and valuable resources for starting genealogical research and tracing family histories.

President Abraham Lincoln in Cohoes!

Did you know President Lincoln visited Cohoes? Well, he did. According to the February 20th 1861 edition of the New York *Herald*, the President was on his way to New York City with Mrs. Lincoln and son Robert and paid a mandatory political visit to the Capitol in Albany.

According to the *Herald*, Lincoln left Albany, relieved to be on his way. Upon leaving their overnight accommodations in the Delavan House, the reporter for the *Herald* stated that:

"Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln left Albany with feelings of gratitude for their safe deliverance, and with resolutions never to return thither again."

After leaving Albany, the presidential train headed north to Green Island. After greeting the assembled crowd there, the train again headed north to Cohoes. The *Herald* reporter stated:

"..And then passed slowly through Cohoes, where the employees, male and female, of the extensive factories, were drawn up in solid phalanxes up on each side of the track. Mr. Lincoln showed himself to the people, was greeted with tremendous cheers, and remained upon the platform to admire the magnificent Cohoes Falls, which, swollen by the recent floods, tumbled over the precipices in varying sheets of foam."

The train then went over the Cohoes – Waterford railroad bridge and into Northside. At Waterford Junction (near the present day site of the General Electric silicones plant), an additional car was added and the train went south through the village of Waterford, over Peebles Island, and back through Green Island into the Troy Union Station.

Once in Troy, the welcoming scene was described as:

"At Troy the first stoppage was made. The immense Union depot was crowded and surrounded with people and the cheers were deafening. Probably eight thousand persons were present; and as quite half this number were ladies, the scene was as beautiful as it was imposing. Here the Presidential party changed to the special train of the Hudson River road. A banner with the inscription 'LINCOLN AND HAMLIN! HONESTY AND ECONOMY!' was displayed, and was greeted with hearty cheers."

The President responded with:

"MR. MAYOR AND CITIZENS OF TROY -- I thank you very kindly for this great reception. Since I left my home it has not been my fortune to meet an assemblage more numerous and more orderly than this. I am the more gratified at this mark of your regard since you assure me it is tendered, not to the individual, but to the high office you

have called me to fill. I have neither strength nor time to make any extended remarks, and I can only repeat to you my sincere thanks for the kind reception you have thought proper to extend to me."

After additional remarks, the presidential train left for the final leg of the trip to New York City. However, it's nice to know that at least one President visited Cohoes and viewed the Falls.

Steve Lackmann

Lincoln Revisits Cohoes!

After an absence of more than 140 years, Abraham Lincoln once again paid a visit to Cohoes. Phil Jessen, a regionally noted Lincoln presenter, made an appearance at the Cohoes Music Hall on February 9 of this year. The audience delighted in tales of Lincoln's youth and accounts of experiences in his early career, related with Lincoln's characteristic wit and flair for storytelling. An enjoyable time was had by all, including Mr. Lincoln, whose previous outing to the theatre had less than salutary effect.



Lincoln makes a point while recounting a story.



Linda Christopher chats with Lincoln in the Visitor's Center

Photo credits – This issue: Tom Donnelly, Walter Cherniak, Steve Lackmann. Winter issue: Walter Cherniak, Ralph Pascale, Tor Shekerjian

BIG MIKE

Mike T. Smith was born in Waterford in 1862. At 6'4" and weighing in easily at 300 pounds, Mike, nicknamed "Limerick," was the consummate politician in his trademark 10-gallon cream colored hat. Starting out as supervisor/legislator in Albany County, ca. 1890, he later represented the 1st Ward of Cohoes for 10 years despite his inability to read or write. He operated a "poor man's club" on Willow Street for many years and then the well known Smith's Restaurant on Remsen Street.

Legend has it that Albany's infamous Dan O'Connell got his formative instruction from Smith. Early in his career, O'Connell took a trolley to Cohoes, got off at City Hall and walked up the hill to Smith's Willow Street saloon. He was impressed by the bartender politician in his hat and red underwear. Legend also says that Smith never kowtowed to O'Connell. Instead they co-existed on the basis of territorial respect.

Smith provided the same social support network for Cohoesiers as the old-time mill owners, but cloaked in the trappings of unionism and impoverished circumstances of the day. He didn't have it easy mobilizing control over the city until the years of the Depression when he could exercise his paternalistic role. A powerful political force locally, his loyalty to the Democratic Party eventually led him to being known nationwide. At a Philadelphia convention, Smith and Cohoes Mayor Rudolph Roulier rode through the principal streets of the city in the "Cohoes Bandwagon". Equipped with dining room, refreshment bar, observation platform and roof garden, it attracted more attention than any other event of the convention. In addition to his participation in the Democratic national sessions, he was a close associate of Democratic governors and other well-known politicians in state and national government. He was an avid supporter of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry Truman and Alfred E. Smith. In fact, when FDR's presidential train was passing through Cohoes, FDR ordered it stopped so that he could shake hands with "Big Mike".

Although the restaurant was the unofficial Democratic headquarters for Smith, most of the party's business was conducted from his home on Hamilton Street. It was considered an architectural monstrosity, as Smith was prone to add rooms to the house to accommodate whatever he acquired that wouldn't fit.

In 1944, Smith was indicted, the charges being accessory to false election registrations and conspiring to manipulate Cohoes real estate assessment. Apparently he was able to avoid any consequences of the probe into his dealings. Smith's political control persisted until after World War II. Deciding that enough was enough, a coalition of citizens from all parties ended the legacy of Big Mike.

Smith died on December 30, 1949, the oldest member of the New York State Democratic Committee.



THE COHOES ICE RINK

In 1982, Anne Kiely's fifth grade class at St. Michael's School produced a newsletter for the Cohoes Heritage Festival. Students chose from a list of 25 Cohoes related topics, interviewed the appropriate people, and wrote articles for the newsletter on these subjects. Some of the topics have appeared in our newsletter, so we selected one that has not – the Cohoes Ice Rink on Ship Street.

WARM MEMORIES OF AN ICE RINK

By Lori Szozda

For more than 80 years, the crisp cold days of winter were punctuated with the sounds of area residents as they zipped across the frozen waters of Carlson's Ice Rink. The Cohoes Ice Rink was established in 1892 by Thomas Wallace, who also owned the "Cohoes Republican," an early Cohoes newspaper.

The Ice Skating Rink was purchased by Mr. Iver Carlson in 1910. His family shared with other Cohoesiers the fun of skating in the winter. In 1924, Mr. Carlson built a swimming pool. This became the Cohoes Ice Rink and Swimming Pool although practically everyone called it "Carlson's".

In 1950, Mr. E. Iver Carlson purchased the business from his father. During the winters of the 1950s, as soon as school would get out, kids grabbed their skates and headed for Carlson's. They would dash home for dinner and return in the evening. Weekends would find whole families enjoying winter and ice-skating. If you didn't have your own skates, you could rent a pair. Tubulars were characteristic of Carlson's.

In the early 1970s the ice skating rink was closed due to a series of mild winters. By 1975, the swimming pool was also closed.

Today the fireplace which once warmed the chilly toes of skaters adds to the warmth of the restaurant, the Sassy Swede, owned by Linda Plowman, granddaughter of Iver Carlson.

Three generations of Carlsons have provided entertainment and hospitality for the people of Cohoes. Although the ice was cold, the warmth of happy memories of everyone who skated at Carlson's lives on.

Note: The Troy *Record* reported that RPI played its first hockey game at the Cohoes Ice Rink on January 25, 1902 against Williams College. In February 2002, an event celebrating the hundredth anniversary of RPI hockey was held in Cohoes.

Spindle City Historic Society Membership Application

President - Paul Dunleavy First Vice President - Linda C. Christopher Second Vice President - Daniele Cherniak Secretary - Helena Keilen Treasurer - June Cherniak ___Individual Membership \$10.00 ___Institutional Membership \$25.00 ___Contributing Membership ___Senior Citizen Membership \$ 5.00 \$35.00 ___Sustaining Membership ___Student Membership \$ 5.00 \$50.00 ___Family Membership \$15.00 We have great plans in our new home in the RiverSpark Visitor's Center! Please help if you can with an additional donation to support our upcoming programs: ___ \$5.00 ___ \$10.00 ___ other NAME ADDRESS _____ STATE___ZIP CODE__ CITY TELEPHONE E-mail

Mail completed form with membership fee, payable to Spindle City Historic Society, to: June Cherniak, Treasurer, 415 Vliet Boulevard, Cohoes, NY 12047

UPCOMING EVENTS

Collecting Memories - The historical society is continuing to collect photos and other memorabilia for future publications and its archives on the second Saturday of the month in April, May, and June. Photos will be reproduced on site and will be returned immediately unless their owners wish to donate them to the society. These events will be held from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. on **April 13**, **May 11**, and **June 8** in the RiverSpark Visitor's Center at Cohoes Music Hall.

Wednesday, March 27 – Annual membership meeting of the Spindle City Historic Society, followed by Kerry Delaney of the Albany County Historical Association presenting a "Survey of Local Architectural Styles", 7 p.m., RiverSpark Visitor's Center.

Saturday, **April 13** – A Gathering of Local Historical Societies to share ideas and information, 11 a.m. - 1 p.m., RiverSpark Visitor's Center.

Sunday, April 21 – "The Van Schaick Mansion: 1735 to the 21st Century" Presentations by Peggy Gifford, Daughters of the American Revolution, General Peter Gansevoort Chapter, and John Bonafide, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation. 2 p.m., RiverSpark Visitor's Center.

Saturday, May 11 - Show of antique and collectible pens, 11 a.m. - 1 p.m., Visitor's Center.

Saturday, June 8 - Harmony Mills Historic District Walkabout, guided tours. 1 - 4 p.m.

The Spindle City Historic Society announces its 1st Art Exhibit celebrating the historic architecture and historic places of Cohoes. City residents will be invited to submit original artwork featuring subjects such as historic buildings or their architectural details, bridges, streetscapes, the rivers, or the Falls. Works of art may include but are not limited to photographs (B&W or color), drawings, paintings, or sculpture. Details will follow soon. We plan to allow several months to collect submissions; artwork will be exhibited this September in the Visitor's Center.

WANTED

- Photos or information about Cohoes Mayor Daniel J. Cosgro (1922-1930)
- Information on Gilbert and/or John Stalker/ Stoliker prior to 1850
- Information about the Cohoes Airport
- Photos or information about M. Adelaide Dickey (La Petite Adelaide) 1884-1960
- Information about the Charles LaCombe Family

Spindle City Historic Society
P.O. Box 375
Cohoes, New York 12047