

Spindle City Historic Society

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HISTORIAN'S NOTEBOOK

DID YOU KNOW

"Murder most foul" in Cohoes

On Sunday evening, May 19, 1895, a six year old girl named Anna Mae Shannon disappeared from the area near her home on Main Street. She was the daughter of Martin Shannon, a bartender at Owen Donnelly's Café. She was last seen at about 7:30 p.m. near the corner of Main and Hart Streets by a woman living next door to Brown's Meat Market. Anna Mae was in the company of a strange man with whom she was conversing. Since she was a bright child who knew her name and address, it was feared that she had been kidnapped. Locktenders at Lock 9 recalled seeing two men accompanied by a girl answering to her description crossing the lock at 3 o'clock in the morning. The following description of the girl was given: six years old, dark hair, large black eyes with long lashes, a fair complexion, a small scar on the right side of her nose, a blue flannel dress with yellow trim, a light checked saque, a small strip of fur around the collar, a brown sailor hat and one ring on her left hand.

Many reports were filed, including claims that she was seen in a wagon with some gypsies driving up the Mechanicville Road. Detective Bell pursued this lead, which was found to be unsubstantiated. A reward of \$25 was offered by Anna Mae's family for her recovery and at a Common Council meeting the Mayor was authorized to offer a \$100 reward for her return. Several areas of the Erie Canal between locks 11 and 14 were drawn off but no trace of the girl was found.

On May 24, three young men discovered the body in the dyke and it was determined that she was murdered and thrown into the water. The young men who discovered the body were Frederick Clow, John Gokey and Eddie Hickey. At Reavy's undertaking rooms, a coroner's jury was impaneled, with Frank Reavy as foreman, and doctors Montmarquet, Mitchell, Marshall, Archibald and Daunais also serving. In news reports of the day, it was noted that an autopsy was performed but what was found could not be described in print, and it was obvious that the little innocent was the victim of a hellish fiend and her agony must have been terrible before she was thrown in the water. It was indeed a "murder most foul."

Never in the history of Cohoes had there been such an outpouring of sympathy, or such great numbers of mourners as were present at the funeral of little Anna Mae Shannon at St. Bernard's Church. Six little boys acted as pallbearers carrying the casket to the white hearse, and a group of over 200 children sang hymns in chorus at the service. The streets were lined with people all the way from the church to St. Mary's Cemetery in Waterford.

On May 25 at 3 in the afternoon, Officers Bell and Jameson arrested Charles Norman Davies on suspicion of the (continued on p.7)

-that pugilist John L. Sullivan, in what was probably his final public appearance, was featured at the City Theater in Cohoes on November 21, 1895?
-that on April 11, 1895 a bill was passed to appropriate \$10,000 to move bodies from the old city cemetery? This area is now the site of West End Park.
-that on June 14, 1895, a mass meeting was held in a Remsen Street church to support the closing of saloons on Sunday? Thirty two men attended the meeting, but they were far outnumbered by women. A petition signed by 1,100 people was submitted by a group of schoolchildren.
- ... that the Sousa Band performed on March 20, 1895 at the Cohoes Armory?
-that on March 1, 1895 John C. Prest of Whitinsville, Massachusetts was selected to replace David Johnston as superintendent of the Harmony Mills? Johnston had passed away in October 1894.
-that on August 12, 1895 Miss Sara Slater of 22 Walnut Street was the first professional fully trained and graduated female nurse in the city of Cohoes? She received her 2-year training at the Wilkes-Barre Training School for nurses in Wilkes-Barre, PA.
-that Green Hill was the area overlooking the Orchard?
-that Pawnee Bill's Wild West show paraded through the streets of Cohoes on June 25, 1895? Thousands of people watched the parade of performers on their way to Van Schaick Island, where the show was presented that evening.
-that the south end of what is now Amity Street was once referred to as "Indian Fields?"
-that in April 1879, a bill was passed to create a paid fire department to replace the volunteer force in Cohoes?
- ...that in June 1888, the graduating class of the Egberts Institute was on the stage of the Cohoes Opera House? Professor George C. Dixon, school principal, awarded diplomas to Lillian Mulcahy, Walter H. Wertime, Mary S. Laithe, Delia Davidson, Kitty Gaffney, Tillie Walker, Loren Seaman, Mary Madigan, Annie Campbell, Lizzie Carter, Mary Jameson, Agnes Walsh, Emma Burke, Samuel B. McLucky, Emma Lynch, Patrick Barrett, Bessie Hall, James Cobb Cooley, Eva Lennox and Emeline Smalling. It was reported that the students and their parents, relatives and friends, sweltered in the June heat during the ceremony.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

The Spindle City Historic Society welcomes new members Miriam Biskin, David & Carolyn Emanatian, Connie Killeen, Linda Kusaywa, Dr. James McDonald, Jason McDonald, Jeremy McDonald, Joseph McDonald, Justin McDonald, Renée McDonald, Donald Rock, and Edward Van Valkinburgh.

The Cohoes City Hall

On February 5 1894 a bill for a new city hall in Cohoes, entitled "An act to authorize the purchase of a suitable site in the city of Cohoes and to erect thereon a city hall, station house and jail and to provide means to defray the expense thereof" was introduced by M.W. Douglas. The measure provided that within 10 days after the passage of the act, the city's mayor must appoint a commission of six persons charged with the building, to be built at a cost not to exceed \$100,000. If the amount exceeded this sum, each commission member would be responsible for one-sixth of the amount in excess. On March 7, Cohoes Mayor Strong made a presentation in favor of the new city hall at a hearing before the assembly committee, and the common council endorsed the city hall bill. On April 12, the Senate passed the bill and on April 17, the governor signed it into law, assuring the city of Cohoes a city hall. On April 18, the citizens celebrated the victory. The City Hall Commission, selected by the mayor, included Mr. H. Frutching, Benjamin F. Clarke, George Campbell, Dr. J.H. Mitchell, Hugh Graham, and Murray Hubbard. Frank G. Reavy would replace Hubbard, who died before the commission's duties were completed.

On May 8 of that year, an inquiry was made for the purchase of the Schwartz (Swartz) estate on the corner of Mohawk and Ontario Streets as a site for the building. This land was earlier the Peter Harmony estate, and at that time owned by his nephews; the site contained a merry-go-round with discordant music. The city commissioners offered \$20,000 for the property but the agent requested a \$30,000 minimum, causing the commission to instead consider the Barker property on Remsen Street at a cost of \$15,000. On September 22 the Schwartz site was selected with a price of \$24,000, including the cost of condemnation proceedings.



Not the winning design selected by the City Hall Commission, but the people's choice.

The City Hall Commission decided to offer prizes for the best building design. The winning architect would receive the opportunity to draw up the plans, second place would receive \$200, third \$150, fourth \$100 and fifth \$50. The commission also agreed to issue \$30,000 worth of bonds for the building's construction. Proposed designs were submitted and the commissioners selected a Middle Century French style designed by Franklin H. Jones of Albany, to be built at a projected cost of \$65,000. On April 6, the Common Council chambers filled to overflowing with citizens opposed to the selected design; they instead favored the second prize selection, submitted by J.C..Holland and Co. of Topeka, Kansas. On April 16, the will of the people won out, and approval of the J.C. Holland and Co. design for city hall was given. A settlement of \$2,500 was made with architect Jones for his surrender of all claims to the erection of the city

hall, along with a statement exonerating his character and specifying that the change referred only to the external appearance of the plan and not a question of his honesty.

Ground was broken on August 1, and the cornerstone was laid on September 26 by Governor Levi P. Morton and mayor J.H. Mitchell. The cornerstone contained a box that included a copy of the Cohoes City Charter, a history of Cohoes, a city directory and list of Cohoes industries, corporations, and societies, a city library catalogue, a copy of the law creating the City Hall Commission, the names and membership of the Common Council and city boards including the Board of Education, Board of Water Commissioners, Board of Health, the names of U.S presidents and New York governors up to that time, a list of state and county officers, a Masonic directory, a copy of the *Cohoes Dispatch*, copies of news dailies and papers containing descriptions of buildings, and photo engravings and photographs of many city factories, churches, public buildings and businesses.

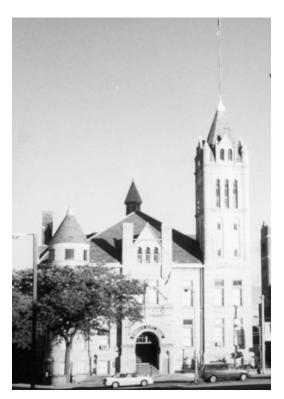
The building's dedication took place on September 25, 1895, with ceremonies held in the City Theater. The main address at the dedication was given by Dr. H.B.Silliman, an outstanding community leader. In his speech, he offered the citizens the following wise counsel: 1) cultivate a spirit of patriotism toward your city; 2) make sacrifices for it; 3) have courage to support the good and antagonize the bad; 4) subordinate in city affairs a party spirit and affiliation; 5) do not support the fortunes of reigning leaders; 6) insist upon enforcement of the law; 7) obtaining money from the public money, without an equivalent, is stealing and everyone assisting is a party of the crime; 8) watch out for leaving debts to posterity. These were wise words then and remain so today. The ceremonies, presided over by Charles F. Doyle, chairman of the Citizens Committee, included a grand parade of about 1,800 participants. There was also a presentation of an American flag for the building by the women of Cohoes, who at that time still did not have the vote but were active in civic development. The flag was purchased from John

Campbell, Bookseller Stationer and Fancy Goods on the Adams Block. This flag later became part of the collections of the Cohoes Historical and Cultural Society.

The Cohoes City Hall, a fine example of Norman Gothic architecture, has a Gothic tower in the southwest corner, a turret in the northwest corner and several miniature turrets over the peaked roof. The large blocks of Indiana limestone projected strength and power, and the enduring nature of civic institutions. This was the first building built in Cohoes with public funds. The building construction itself cost \$70,260, and with the site the total cost came to \$94,960. The taxpayers' money was guarded to the penny, resulting in a balance of \$5.05 after the last stone was set. Since the building came in within budget, there was also no additional cost to the City Hall Commission members. The men responsible for the building foresaw the future uses of the building and provided for them adequately. The spacious basement lent itself to housing several offices along with a capacious heating system and storage space. The first floor housed the office of the Mayor, Comptroller, Treasurer, Assessor, Police Department, police court, jail and City Clerk's offices. The second floor housed legal offices, including the Corporation Counsel, civil court space, Common Council chamber, Recreation Department, Vital Statistics, women's jail and others. The third floor was mostly unused but provided much additional space, along with space in the attic areas. Some 115 years after its construction, the building is as sound and functional today as it was on that memorable day of dedication. It remains a distinctive and impressive landmark, a credit to its planners and to the persistence and civic engagement of Cohoes citizens.

The Continuing History of City Hall

- During a 1954 renovation of the Common Council chambers in City Hall, a large painting of an unidentified municipal official was uncovered when a balcony was removed. Also found was an 1885 hand-written resolution adopted by a special meeting of the Common Council to mark the death of James Lamb, a member. This finding was considered a mystery as the city hall was not yet built until ten years after the death of alderman Lamb. At that time the offices were located in the Larkin Hall building at the southwest corner of Mohawk and Oneida Streets.
- The original City Seal was purchased in 1869 when Cohoes was incorporated, and in 1955, after 86 years of use, it was deemed in need of replacement. The seal is affixed on all city documents, bonds, wedding licenses, birth certificates and all papers processed through the City Clerk's office
- In December 1966, the City Hall received a \$9,590 face-lift of the exterior, including the renovation of the entire entrance area, during the tenure of Mayor James E. McDonald. A long low wall was built, with trees and shrubbery plantings and lampposts added near the front entrance stairway.
- In March of 1989, during the administration of Ronald Canestrari, clerks at City Hall began a program of dressing alike after winning a clerical unit uniform allowance in 1985 in contract negotiations with the city. They were the first CSEA unit in the state to do so. On Monday a white shirt or
 - blouse with blue slacks or skirt was worn; Tuesday was pink and gray; Wednesday was paisley; Thursday was gray stripes and Friday was black or basic blue. \$225 was allotted to each worker with a once a month "free day" to wear whatever was desired.
- A new plaque commemorating the 100th year of the City Hall was unveiled and dedicated on June 21, 1995 during the 125th anniversary year of the city.
- In July of 2001 the city was awarded over \$60,000 in state funding to organize the city's records, which were located in numerous storage spaces all around the building. The records system was overhauled under the direction of City Planner John Scavo. It was determined that many documents, some dating from the 1880s, were not necessary to retain and over 70% of those in storage were destroyed. The remainder were organized chronologically, reboxed and stored in a central location in the City Hall basement for easier access.
- In November 2005, during the administration of John McDonald, new energy-efficient inserts for windows in City Hall were installed by Window-Therm of Hoosick Falls. \$50,000 was invested in insulated blinds and interior windows, which preserve the exterior appearance of the building but provide additional insulation. In August 2007 a \$160,000 repair project was conducted including window painting, roof repair, flag pole restoration and chimney repair.



Off the Top...



Walking through an antique shop the other day, an illustration on the cover of a booklet caught the

corner of my eye. The cover was a Victorian colored black ink engraving. The booklet was "Who Killed Cock Robin?" You remember the poem. It begins:

"Who killed Cock Robin?" "I," said the Sparrow,
"With my bow and arrow, I killed Cock Robin."
"Who saw him die?" "I," said the Fly,
"With my little eye, I saw him die."
"Who caught his blood?" "I," said the Fish,
"With my little dish, I caught his blood."
"Who'll make the shroud?" "I," said the Beetle,
"With my thread and needle, I'll make the shroud."
"Who'll dig his grave?" "I," said the Owl,
"With my pick and shovel, I'll dig his grave."
"Who'll be the parson?" "I," said the Rook,
"With my little book, I'll be the parson."

The booklet and the illustrations were neat. As I flipped through, I noticed a small, folded piece of paper. The note, written in ink, read, "This book was given to me when I was seven by my half sister just before she died." Between the poem and that line in the note, I choked up. The note went on to say who the owner wanted the booklet to be given to on distribution of her estate. It was just a simple, small booklet, with an inconsequential piece of paper, but it told such a story. A story that is now lost to that family and that moment in history.

As you gather this holiday season, share your stories. Actually, don't just limit sharing your stories to the holidays. As one generation changes to another in Cohoes, a lot of information is lost. If you don't know who would care about Cohoes' stories, we do. Who are we? Spindle City Historic Society... write us a letter or send us an e-mail (to info@spindlecity.net). We'll help preserve the memories and share them however possible.

All the best for the holidays,

Paul D. Dunleavy

President

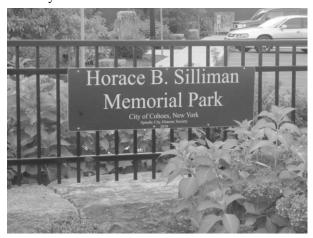
Silliman Park Rededication



On September 23, SCHS and the city of Cohoes rededicated Silliman Park, and new signs for the park were unveiled. The signs, donated by SCHS and mounted on the fencing at the park's corners at Ontario and Mohawk and Ontario and Seneca Streets, read:

"Horace B. Sillman

Memorial Park, City of Cohoes, New York, Spindle City Historic Society, 2010." Mayor John McDonald, who spoke at the rededication ceremony, issued a proclamation declaring Friday, September 24 "Horace B. Silliman Day" in the city of Cohoes. A reception in the Cohoes Visitors Center and a slideshow presentation on the life and legacy of Horace B. Silliman followed the rededication ceremony.



The park, originally dedicated in 2004, honors Horace B. Silliman (1825-1910), a prominent

philanthropist and community leader in Cohoes.

Many thanks to Mayor McDonald and Ken Radliff of the city's Department of Public Works, and to Randy Koniowka, who assisted SCHS in producing the new signs.



History of the Circus in America

The little theater in the Cohoes Visitors Center briefly became the Big Top on the evening of October 20, as Tom



Allison presented "The Greatest Show on Earth – Circus Life in America." Tom recounted the history of the circus in America through the 19th and 20th centuries, and presented the fascinating cast of performers, investors and impresarios (some with Capital District connections) who developed innovations in circus acts and staging that made the American version of the circus unique. He also described daily lives of circus workers, both those on stage and behind the scenes, and the incredibly detailed logistics involved in transporting a traveling circus from one town to another.



SCHS Annual Raffle



The winner of the SCHS annual raffle was Robert Van Valkinburgh. This year's raffle item was a wooden plate featuring a hand-painted and etched mammoth in a natural

landscape, created by Native American artist Earl Dionne. The raffle drawing was held at the annual Christmas tree lighting in Cohoes on the Saturday after Thanksgiving.

Thanks to SCHS raffle coordinator Lorraine Okeson, and to all who participated in the raffle. Look for upcoming announcements of the 2011 raffle item.

Holiday Gift Ideas from SCHS

The Holiday season is fast approaching, and SCHS has several items that would make great gifts. Our two pictorial histories of Cohoes, Cohoes and Cohoes Revisited, are still available for purchase. We also have note cards designed by local artists, and Cohoes-themed t-shirts and sweatshirts. In accompaniment to the current exhibit "Trade Cards of Cohoes" SCHS is also offering enlarged, full-color reproductions of the trade cards on display. Available framed or unframed, these brightlycolored decorative cards recall memories of the city's businesses past. Information about ordering books can be found at the SCHS website (www.spindlecity.net), and these and other items can be ordered by calling 518-237-5618 or by emailing us at cherniak@nycap.rr.com. A membership in SCHS also makes a great gift, and includes four quarterly issues of this newsletter. See page 7 of this issue for a membership form.

Website Survey

SCHS is working on improving and expanding its website, and we are seeking input from you, our loyal members and readers, on what you would like to see on the website. The site can be found at www.spindlecity.net . Some SCHS members have been sent a website survey, but if you were not on the e-mail list and would like to receive a copy of the survey, please send your e-mail address to Tor Shekerjian (tshekerjian@proed.org).

In Memoriam

Thomas J. Donnelly, a trustee of the Spindle City Historic Society since 2005, passed away in October 2010. He was a newspaper reporter in the Chicago area for over two decades, and briefly taught English and writing. After moving to Cohoes in 1987, he worked at Timpane's jewelry store. Tom was a regular volunteer at the SCHS table at the Cohoes farmers' market, and represented SCHS at the Peebles Island open house, Island Fall Festival and other community events. He participated in and photographed numerous other SCHS programs and activities. Tom was also a member of the E.T. Ruane post, AARP and the Humane Society, and had recently applied his journalistic experience in a monthly newsletter for residents of McDonald Towers. The Spindle City Historic Society extends sincere condolences to Tom's family and friends.

Trees, Trees, Trees

Memories of growing up in Cohoes by Dee (Chard) Mathisen-Blair

When I was a kid, it seemed as if wherever we found a place to just hang out on a nice day, there was always a big beautiful tree. Up on Conduit Hill in my yard, I remember this great big tree. We would play for hours and hours under that tree.

When I got a little older I could go up to Sunset Park on Reservoir Street. There was a huge chestnut tree in the park where we would all gather to sit and talk and plan the adventure we were going to have that day. We would all go on long hikes to a place we were not supposed to go, but back then it just seemed so harmless, and it really was.

Some of the best summer days were spent going to the Gully and to the swift Ditch up to the "Ice Box" back near the Cohoes Falls. We would crawl through the tunnel and over the old wooden bridge. What great times we had as kids in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

But somehow we always went back to that great big chestnut tree in Sunset Park. We would laugh and talk about all we did that hot summer day. These were the days when kids could just be kids, and life was so worry-free and simply great. No, we didn't have much. But what we had was freedom and imagination, and what do you need that's better than that? I wouldn't change a thing from the days back then.

Cohoes was a wonderland, the best place in the world to grow up. Well, at least we thought so anyway. And that's all that mattered to us.

From the SCHS Collection



A recent addition to the SCHS collection is a red, white and blue hand-sewn quilt, made by Margaret Daley Corr in 1915. It was donated to the Spindle City Historic Society this September by Margaret Corr's nephew Warren Broderick.

Margaret Daley Corr was born in Cohoes on March 16, 1868 to Jeremiah Augustine Daley and Mary Ann Gaul Daley, both from Ireland. She married Joseph Henry Corr on November 14, 1892 in St. Bernard's Church in Cohoes. Joseph Henry and Margaret had three children, Margaret, Elizabeth and William. Joseph worked as a blacksmith and a laborer and died in Cohoes on May 16, 1920. Margaret was active in the Cohoes Women's Democratic Club and the Albany County Democratic

Club. She served as a registered nurse during WWI and later worked at the Ann Lee Home in Colonie. Margaret died in Albany on January 22, 1944 and was interred with her husband in St. Agnes Cemetery in Menands.

Many thanks to Warren Broderick for this generous donation and for providing biographical information about Margaret Corr.

Historian's Notebook (continued from p. 1):

murder, as he had a prior arrest in 1893 for a criminal assault on a woman on the "hill." He was held in the Cohoes station house, and the police did not reveal what evidence they had against him. Davies was short and stout with a heavy black mustache, corresponding with the published descriptions previously given. The ladies who saw the man going away with Anna Mae were not positive in their identification, but a suspicious fact was his inability to account for his whereabouts on Sunday night, as he claimed that he was drunk. Davies was a boarder with Mr. Wilson at the corner of Oneida and Mohawk Sts. and Mr. Wilson stated that he left the house at 1 o'clock Sunday afternoon and did not return until 8 p.m. Monday night. Mr. Wilson noted nothing peculiar in Davies' appearance and stated that his demeanor was always quiet and he seemed harmless. A report from another source stated that on one day that week someone came into McDermott's Saloon at Lock 10 and changed some clothes, leaving the old ones behind, clothing which then came into the possession of the police.

The inquest was held on May 27th at 7:30 p.m. in the Common Council Chambers, where the council offered a reward of \$1000 for information that would lead to the identification and conviction of the murderer. On May 29, Charles N. Davies was taken to Albany in chains, where he was incarcerated upon the request of District Attorney Burlingame as a requirement for his attendance at the Cohoes inquest on May 30th. It was at this inquest that damning evidence pointing toward Davies was introduced. A new witness, Joseph Gainor, reported that he spoke to Davies when he was with Anna Mae Shannon. On June 5, the Coroner's Jury found Davies guilty and charged him with the murder. On June 26 he was taken to court where he pled not guilty and was provided with counsel, lawyers John H.Gleason and Patrick C. Dugan.

On August 7th Davies and a fellow prisoner charged with murder dug a hole through an 18 inch wall and attempted to escape, but the blanket rope they used was discovered and they were returned to jail. Davies stood trial in Albany, with Judge William Rumsey presiding and Norton Chase as additional counsel, and was found guilty. He was taken to Dannemora Prison on September 21, to be executed by electrocution on October 29. Witnesses to the electrocution from Cohoes were M.B. Smith, Captain of Police, Dr. John Archibald, Health Officer and Dr. James H. Mitchell. He was electrocuted at 11:57 a.m. on October 29, 1895.

June Cherniak

Articles from the Cohoes Republican newspaper assisted in research for this column.

Spindle City Historic Society Membership Application

www.spindlecity.net

President - Paul Dunleavy

First Vice President - Daniele Cherniak Second Vice President - Tor Shekerjian Secretary - Linda C. Christopher Treasurer - June Cherniak \$10.00 ___Individual Membership ___Institutional Membership \$25.00 Senior Citizen Membership \$5.00 Contributing Membership \$35.00 ___Student Membership \$5.00 Sustaining Membership \$50.00 ___Family Membership \$15.00 We have great things planned in our home in the Cohoes Visitor's Center! Please help if you can with an additional donation to support our upcoming programs: ____ \$5.00 ___ \$10.00 ___ other gift membership NAME_____ADDRESS_______
CITY_____STATE___ZIP CODE_____
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

Wanted - Historic Postcards

The Spindle City Historic Society is beginning work on its next book, a collection of historic postcards of Cohoes. If you have historic postcards you would like to share for the book, please contact us at cohoes90@nycap.rr.com or at 518-237-5618. Postcards will be scanned and returned to their owners unless they wish to donate them to SCHS.

Electronic Option for Delivery of the SCHS Newsletter

The Spindle City Historic Society is now offering its members electronic mailing of the newsletter. This assures that you will receive the newsletter more quickly. To sign up for electronic delivery, please e-mail us at cherniak@nycap.rr.com and provide the e-mail address where you would like your newsletter sent. Otherwise, you will continue to receive the newsletter through the regular mail.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Wednesday, January 5, 2011 - Spindle City Historic Society planning meeting. 7 p.m., Cohoes Visitor's Center. All are welcome to participate in this session to plan the events, programs and activities for SCHS in 2011.

Wednesday, January 25 - Spindle City Historic Society meeting. 7 p.m., Cohoes Visitor's Center.

Wednesday, February 23 - Spindle City Historic Society meeting. 7 p.m., Cohoes Visitor's Center.

Wednesday, March 23 - Spindle City Historic Society meeting. 7 p.m., Cohoes Visitor's Center.

Wednesday, April 27 - Spindle City Historic Society meeting. 7 p.m., Cohoes Visitor's Center.

Photo credits this issue - Daniele Cherniak, Walter Cherniak

> SCHS Newsletter Staff ◆

Daniele Cherniak ~ June Cherniak ~ Linda Christopher ~ Anne Marie Nadeau ~ Dennis Rivage Editorial Assistance: Tor Shekerjian ~ Columnist: Paul Dunleavy

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