
Spindle City Historic Society

Volume 3 Issue 3

Fall 2000

DID YOU KNOW

....that within the present limits of Cohoes, the Iroquois Indian Confederation was formed in 1450?

....that, before the Cataract House existed, two free black men had a refreshment stand at that site for the benefit of tourists visiting the Cohoes Falls?

....that a Cohoesier and Spindle City Historic Society member is the USA 100K (62.2 mi.) ultrarunning Champion? She is also the female Canadian 100K Champion and is ranked as the 7th woman in the world at this distance.

....that, during the time of the American Revolution, visitors to Cohoes included notables such as Gen. George Washington, Paul Revere, Thaddeus Kosciusko, Generals Gates, Poor, Knox, Montgomery and St. Clair, Colonel Dan Morgan and Benedict Arnold – the hero of the Battle of Saratoga?

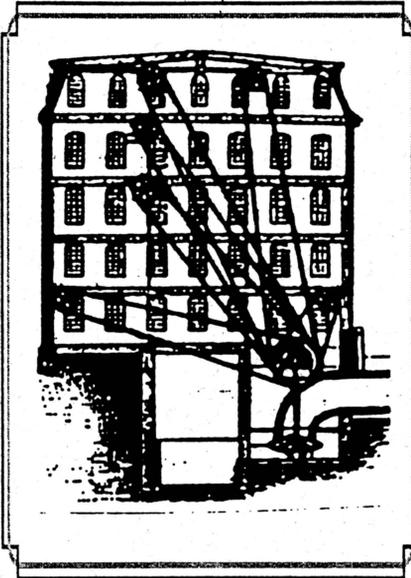
....that the Harmony Manufacturing Co. was named for Peter Harmony, a wealthy New York City entrepreneur of Spanish descent?

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

....that, in a 1908 newspaper article, the *Cohoes Republican* referred to Cohoes as a metropolitan city because of the diversity of languages that could be heard around town? Among them were English, French, German, Italian, Polish, Russian, Hungarian, Swedish, Norwegian, Chinese and sometimes Scotch and Irish.

....that, in the early 1900's, there was a group in New York City known as the Cohoes Society of New York? It consisted of former residents of this city who would sponsor an annual dinner for its members.

....that www.cohoes.com/ will connect you to the Cohoes Webpage? Among the many links, you will find the Spindle City Historic Society.



HISTORIAN'S NOTEBOOK

The small area just north of the Mohawk Paper Mills Saratoga Street plant between the Spring Street exit of 787 and the intersection of Main and Saratoga Streets is the oldest significant historic site in the City of Cohoes other than the Van Schaick mansion. During the month of October, this site will be rededicated by New York State with a marker proclaiming its importance.

From 1823, when the Erie and Champlain Canals opened in this location, to 1842, this spot was the first settlement and concentration of business in what later would be called Cohoes. For a short term Cohoes was actually called "**Juncta**" which means the joining of the two canals. It was here that a series of canal locks caused extended delays and layovers, which in turn resulted in demands for goods, services and lodging. A thriving little settlement emerged which actually was the first Cohoes.

Walter Lipka, Historian

DAY TRIP TO LOWELL, MA

On October 14th, join the Spindle City Historic Society for a trip to Lowell, MA. Lowell, once a textile industry center employing primarily women, is a sister city to Cohoes. It has been converted to a large Visitor's Center with a variety of free and low cost museums for self-guided tours. The bus will leave from the Cohoes Music Hall at 8:00AM and depart Lowell at 5:00PM. The cost is \$20 per person and seating is limited. Contact Paul Dunleavy at 233-8613 for details and reservations.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

The Spindle City Historic Society welcomes new members *Lois J. Comley, David & Michele DeRusso, Kurt & Margaret Nealand, Al Pailley, Tor Shekerjian, Mark Thaler and Joy Went.*

JULIA ETTA MABY & MABY'S STORE

In high school I had to do a report for my high school English class about a famous person who had inspired me in some way, whether it be a president, movie star or athlete. But I have now learned that a special friend can be more inspiring – namely, my friend, Julia Etta Maby. Miss Maby is the proud owner of Maby's Store in Cohoes. In 1997, I was introduced to her and agreed to help her by assisting in re-opening her store after it had been closed for 10 years. When that first day I was to work with her came, I arrived at her house to pick her up. Driving to her store, I felt a bit nervous as I had never met her before and didn't know that to expect. As we walked toward the storefront, antique mannequins watched as we approached. When I entered the store, it was like stepping into the past. Old oak display cases lined the aisles and clothing racks full of 1940's and 50's clothing still hung with their original tags on them. As I walked further into the store, I saw the big brass hand crank cash register. I remember seeing the number \$3.49; that was probably the last sale that register had seen in nearly 10 years. Old advertising posters of Debbie Reynolds and Connie Francis lined the walls right above the display of neatly folded Ship & Shore blouses. It was amazing how everything down to the pen was of a time period I had never known. Not only did the store's atmosphere take me back to the past, but Miss Maby's incredible stories of her life and the lives of people around her were even more interesting. I grew very fond of Miss Maby over the year as each day we would go down to her store. I knew she was happy to be there once again, and although my daily salary was \$5.00, the knowledge and information that she passed on to me were worth so much more.

Her mother established Maby's Store in 1911; it specialized in the fitting and selling of girdles and women's undergarments and also sold a fascinating collection of gloves, hats, dresses and children's clothing. She told me of an early childhood memory when her father bought a car; it was a Franklin. The family all piled in and went for a ride but her mother was afraid of cars - perhaps it was their speed of 15mph. After that one ride, they sold the car and continued riding the trolley. They thought cars were just a fad that would die out quickly. Miss Maby grew up in Cohoes and graduated from Cohoes High School in the Class of 1935; her class graduation picture still hangs in her house. She had grown up in a household where she was taught to cherish her toys, be to dinner on time, clean your plate and never leave the dinner table without asking to be excused. After the death of her parents in the late 1930's, Miss Maby and her sister, Lemyra Maby, were left a flourishing business but at the time her sister worked in Montgomery Ward in Menands. So Miss Maby took control of the store and became a woman with leadership, dignity and a strong will to continue what her parents had started, which kept the family business going for many successful years. In the early 1980's, Miss Maby's sister died; they had lived together their whole lives, never marrying. Soon after, she closed her store, not to open it again until 10 years later.

We would speak of Cohoes on many occasions. She remembers that next door to her store was a theater and you could hear the movies through her walls. She enjoyed many quiet nights listening to a movie. I would talk to her about life during the Depression and she remembers many friends of hers who lost their businesses during that era. However, she had what it took to operate hers, even though the financial status of some of her customers was a major concern. She spoke of ice cream parlors, Carlson's Pool & Ice Rink, the parades and hundreds of businesses that were once part of Cohoes. It was fascinating listening to the stories of the town in which I live.

As I would browse around her store, I would find unique things and she always had an interesting story to tell about them. I could sit for hours and listen to what she had to say. After I started college, we couldn't go down to her store everyday like we had before, but I found time to go once a week. She enjoyed being at her store; people often came in and told stories of how their parents had shopped there - they carried on conversations for hours. It showed Miss Maby that people appreciated all she and her business had done over the years. I remember that on December 23rd, 1997, I went to Miss Maby's house to drop off a Christmas card and when I walked in she said "Santa Claus was just here, and he left this for you"; she handed me \$10 and wished me a Merry Christmas.

After I graduated from college and moved into the retail business, I took with me skills learned from Miss Maby - her dedication, loyalty, commitment and tenaciousness. Miss Maby and I still go down to her store but it's not to open it for business, but to close it since new owners have purchased the building and she must leave. I can see how she handles old checkbooks and receipts and gathers up old price tickets to bring home as keepsakes. She had me wrap up a piece of glass that had her store name on it so that she could bring that home too. She tells me it's time to lock the door for good and to clear out a store that was once prosperous.

I will always remember all that Miss Maby had taught me and I'm sure that her former customers will remember her also. If I should ever need advice in retail management or a friend to talk to, I can always call on Julia Etta Maby. She's a fun, caring person who is young at heart. She's been a good friend to me and I am always willing to visit her and help in any way I can. It's my way of saying thanks, having learned that you don't need a famous person to inspire you – your inspiration could be right next door.

Robert W. Langley, Jr.

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCHES

When observing St. John's Episcopal Church, located on Vliet Boulevard near the western edge of the City of Cohoes, a modern style church is revealed. The architectural lines, contemporary in nature, create a sense of imminent departure – a suggestion of flight, a soaring upward in a heavenly direction. This modern looking church complex is the fourth church in the long history of the congregation. St. John's was actually organized seventeen years before the area called Cohoes officially became incorporated as a village.

Cohoes as an industrial center and St. John's as its oldest incorporated religious congregation were conceptualized then launched by the same men: members of the Cohoes (hydraulic power) Company. One man in particular, David Wilkenson, deserves special attention.

Wilkenson was born in New England in 1771. His brother-in-law, Samuel Slater, is widely recognized by historians as founding the American textile industry. Wilkenson, as his chief assistant, became the first American to specialize in the making of cotton machinery. Both gave the United States of America its industrial independence from England.

Wilkenson was recruited by the Cohoes Company because of his expertise with the infant industry of textile manufacturing. Along with several experienced friends, he arrived in Cohoes in 1831. One of the inducements to get him here was the pledge by the company to set aside a plot of land upon which a church could be built. Almost immediately upon his arrival, St. John's was organized. Wilkenson was a devoted churchgoer and had previously organized two other churches.

The congregation met for a year in a tiny schoolhouse until a small wooden church was built. Designed and built by Joshua Clark, a friend of Wilkenson from Pawtucket, Rhode Island, it was only 28'x 38' in size and located in Richard Heamstreet's cow pasture; later, his entire farm was purchased by the Cohoes Company. In front of the new little church a path meandered from the towpath of "Clinton's Ditch" on the east to the Champlain Canal on the west. The path, which became Oneida Street, crossed two deeply rutted "roads". One, later called Mohawk Street, stretched from Watervliet eventually merging with the canal towpath near the present ruins of old Harmony Mill #2. The other, now Saratoga Street, was the road to Waterford.

As the textile industry expanded so did the congregation of little St. John's. A parish schoolhouse was built on the east side of the church grounds in 1846 and in the autumn of 1847 a parsonage was built on the western side lot. Lengthened by 30 feet in 1859 to accommodate more seating, St. John's was developing growing pains.

The population of Cohoes had grown from about 100 widely scattered residents in 1833 to well over 6,000 by 1860. Richard Heamstreet's pasture had literally been obliterated by factories, offices, retail shops, tenements and residences, all emerging through the common thread of cheap and plentiful water power.

During 1863, while the cannons of the Civil War were thundering a national cataclysm of painful division, the textile machinery was responding. It was during that year that the Reverend John H. Brown became rector of St. John's. Under his leadership the number of communicants increased. Finally after thirty-four years, the modest church was deemed inadequate. Vestrymen Chadewick, Clarke and Rector Brown began to make plans for a new building in a new location.

The new site was "comprised of a large hollow and well, from which portable water was taken by many people". The site at Canvass and Mohawk Streets would accommodate the second and eventually the third churches of St. John. The lots, owned by the Cohoes Company, were purchased on July 1, 1868. One of the best church architects of the day, Richard Morris Upjohn, was hired and on April 4, 1870 ground was broken. Within a little more than a year the construction was completed. The first services were held on June 18, 1871 in a vastly different environment than the old "Yankee" style church. It was described as the "prettiest church in the area". Large, Gothic in design, it was built of Schenectady stone faced with brick. The lofty interior space was appropriately decorated with a blue ceiling and the upper walls were decorated in a pattern of red. The complex also included a chancel, choir loft, Sunday school and rectory.

Over the course of the next twenty-three years the congregation diligently paid off the over budgeted but splendid building. Free of its mortgage, the second St. John's was consecrated by Bishop Doane of Albany on June 18, 1893.

Much had transpired during the decades between groundbreaking and consecration. Cohoes, as an industrial center, was approaching its apex. The Civil War marked the beginning of rapid growth in Cohoes. In 1870 the population was 15,357 and Cohoes was an established manufacturing center. Six Harmony Mills ran 203,000

spindles and 18 knitting mills, two foundries and three machine shops sustained a dynamic stream of goods requiring a vast community of diverse support. Cheap labor was a vital element for corporate profits; immigrants were flooding Cohoes.

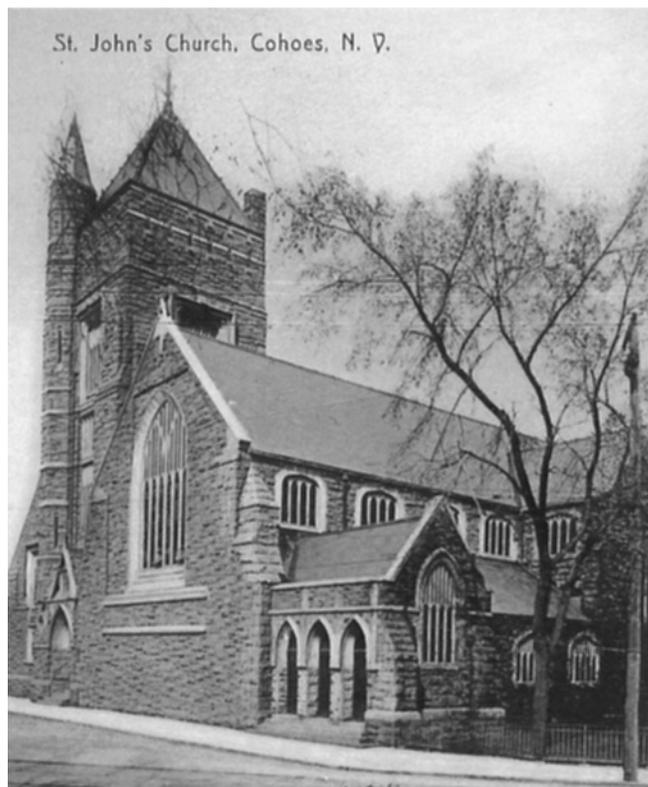
On the morning of September 6, 1894, a little over a year after its consecration, the parishioners awoke to find that their “beloved church” was destroyed by fire. The blaze originated in the rear of the church in the basement Sunday school room. Although the source of the fire was never clearly determined, it was suspected that a cigar or cigarette ignited a cushion or rug. Undetected, the fire gained considerable momentum, bursting through the floor above where the well-oiled Georgia pine interior fueled the conflagration. By the time three steamers arrived on the scene, the situation was described as a “hopeless task”. Nothing was left.

Undaunted, the resilient congregation set out to rebuild. On June 4, 1895, the cornerstone for the third St. John’s was laid in a ceremony attended by 500 parishioners. The singing of psalms and hymns punctuated the event with Bishop Doane presiding. The new church opened within a year and served the parish throughout several economically declining decades.

By the 1960s, manufacturing had, for all intents and purposes, moved out of the northeast. A great exodus to the new suburbs occurred. The congregation of St. John’s could no longer maintain the old church. John Farrar, a longtime parishioner was asked: “Why did the people move out and build a new church?” He said: “Because like all the other churches in the area, the parishioners were diminishing. It became too expensive to keep the church in good repair and to heat. The trust funds that had helped to maintain the church were running out. This prompted them to sell the church and use the money to help build the new one.” The newest St. John’s complex, on Vliet Boulevard, was opened in 1971. Included in the modern structure are the church proper, a choir area, the Baptistry, two meeting rooms, restrooms, a Sacristy and a kitchen. A rectory and garage are attached to the church.

A postscript to mention here is that the third St. John’s building now houses the Cohoes Public Library which has been cited nationally as a model of adaptive reuse. Now dedicated to knowledge, the old building displays a model of the Cohoes Mastodon where the altar stood and rows of books have replace the crowded pews.

Staff/W.L.



The Cohoes Harmony Hill Business District

By 1872, under the able management of Robert Johnston, the Harmony Co. was transformed into the finest, largest, and most complete cotton-manufacturing establishment on the American continent. He had a dwelling built at 2 Summit St., a site proximal to the mills. By 1869, the Harmony Mills had established and owned seven hundred tenements, with apartments ranging in size from four to ten rooms, which could be rented for rates of \$3 to \$8 per month. Only Harmony Mills employees and their families were allowed to live in these dwellings; the rental fee was deducted from the employee's salary.

This collection of tenements was a city in itself, with its own fire department, police force, and a group of cooperative stores (the cost of purchases made in these stores by Harmony Mills employees and families was also deducted from salaries). Two- and three-story commercial buildings, constructed in the nineteenth century, were located along Willow Street, Vliet St., Garner St., Johnston Ave., Summit St, and Mangam St.

Robert Johnston's son David built a mansion, called 'Longview', at the top of Summit St. in 1874. The residence looked down over the mills and the workers' dwellings, further enhancing the paternalistic feel of the complex, an example of industrial social engineering not uncommon in company towns.

Among the workers, the tenement housing led to the cultivation of fraternal relations and neighborly support, since new immigrants from Ireland comprised the majority of mill workers at that time. The stores and businesses that existed on Willow St. in the Harmony Hill district in 1884 included 10 saloons, 3 boot and shoe stores, three grocers, 3 stove and tinware stores, 2 meat markets, one wholesale liquor distributor, one hairdresser, a locksmith, a news and variety store, a baker and a druggist. On Vliet St. in the district, there were two news and variety stores, one saloon, a hairdresser, a meat market, a grocer and a shoemaker. There were three grocers, a saloon, and a shoemaker on Johnston Ave. On Summit St., there were two masons/builders, one saloon and a physician. Two grocers and a shoemaker had establishments on Egbert St.; Mangam St. also housed a shoemaker and a pair of grocers.

When evening fell, gas lamps were lit in the numerous saloons (most notably on Willow St.!) and they filled with mill hands and rowdy canallers from the nearby waters. This district's liveliness and business activity diminished with the switch from waterpower to electricity to run machinery, the decline of the canal system in hauling freight and for transportation, and worker unrest at the mills. City businesses became more centrally located in downtown Cohoes on Remsen, Mohawk, White, and other downtown streets.

By 1911, the mill complex was purchased by Saco-Lowell & Draper Co. of Massachusetts, and by 1930 an annual operating loss of \$250,000 precipitated a liquidation. During the next five years all machinery, 700 tenements, five boarding houses, six mills and several parcels of land were sold at considerable loss.

This area is now a district designated on the National Register of Historic Places; last year the Harmony Mill complex was designated a National Historic Landmark, a rare honor. The district is considered "the largest extant nineteenth century textile mill complex in New York State", and one of the few remaining in the country featuring massive mills, portions of the Erie Canal and power canals, hundreds of houses formerly for factory workers, and the mill manager's mansion. Many of these structures remain standing, and this unique legacy of our city's great history is something all Cohoesiers should be proud and strive to preserve for future generations.

June Cherniak

Spindle City Historic Society Membership Application

President - Linda C. Christopher

First Vice President - Daniele Cherniak

Second Vice President - Dennis Rivage,

Secretary - Craig Bock/Helena Keilen

Treasurer - June Cherniak

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___ Family Membership	\$15.00	___ Tax-Deductible Donation	_____														

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

DAR VAN SCHAICK MANSION PROJECT

Linda Christopher, President of the Spindle City Historic Society, received the following notification:

It is with great pleasure that the General Peter Gansevoort Chapter, National Society Daughters of the American Revolution announces that the contract of sale for the Van Schaick Mansion has been accepted by the Canestrari family. We anticipate a transfer of ownership on or around March 1, 2001.

From this point on, the focus will shift into a fast pace mode of fundraising. We thank you for all your efforts in helping us to coordinate this. We will keep you posted!



Note: "Tea at Ten Broeck – Getting to Know the DAR" will be presented at the Ten Broeck Mansion, 9 Ten Broeck St., Albany on October 15, 2000, 2:00-5:00PM. Guest speakers will be Deborah Skivington, NYSDAR Custodian and Linda Aiken, District III Director. The event is open to the public.

Spindle City Historic Society

P.O. Box 375

Cohoes, New York 12047