

Spindle City Historic Society

Volume 4 Issue 1

Spring 2001

DID YOU KNOW

...that Silliman University of Dumaguete City, Philippines was founded in 1901 and named for Cohoes businessman and Christian philanthropist, Dr. Horace B. Silliman? Watch for the story of this Philippine connection in a future newsletter.

...that the New York State Oral History Program was established by Governor Pataki on Veteran's Day, 2000 to preserve the stories of New York's Veterans in their own words? Initially, the program will be concentrating on the World War II Veteran community. Call 1-800-955-2791 to register and receive the basic information package.

...that the *Cohoes Republican* reported in 1908 that the city's transportation system was unsurpassed? In addition to two railroads and two canals, trolley lines ran to Albany, Troy, Watervliet, Green Island and Waterford.

...that, the Penrose & McEniry Brewery, located on Newark Street in the early 1900's, was on the same site once occupied by the Cohoes Brewing Company in 1890?

...that Presidents Washington, Lincoln, Grant, Arthur, Fillmore, McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt and Franklin Roosevelt all had a presence in Cohoes – however brief?

...that, one evening in legendary Mike Smith's saloon on Willow Street, Mike suggested that a customer not have any more to drink? The customer responded by nicking him on the neck with a knife and throwing a cuspidor through his plate glass window. Always the politician, Mike persuaded his angry but obedient and faithful patrons not to hurt the poor soul.

...that, in 1897, porterhouse steak was \$.15 a pound in contrast to frankfurters which were 3 pounds for \$.25?

...that, before the Barge Canal was designed, the canal commissioners briefly flirted with the idea of creating an elevator-like lock that would lift barges 130 feet and surmount the Cohoes Falls?

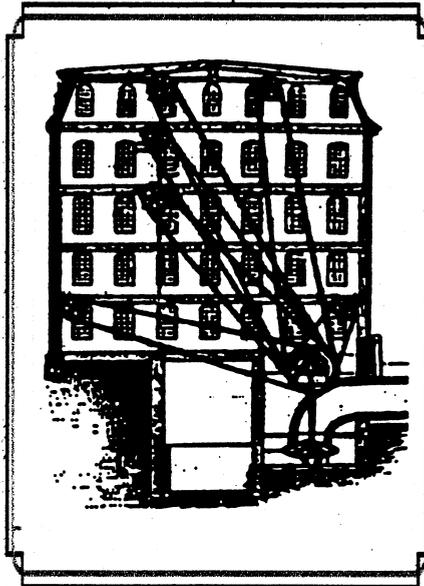
...of all the happenings this Spring? Check the back page of this newsletter for a list of upcoming events that you are sure to enjoy.

HISTORIAN'S NOTEBOOK

An event significant in the annals of Cohoes sports history took place at Yono's Restaurant in Albany on January 20, 2001.

The Hudson-Mohawk Road Runners Club held their annual meeting at which two Cohosiers were inducted into the HMRR Hall of Fame. Each inductee was lauded for their lifelong dedication, commitment and the perseverance it takes to be a true champion. Daniele Cherniak, the first woman ever enshrined, and Bill Robinson were elevated by their peers to this highest of honors.

Walter Lipka



GRANT AWARDED TO DAR

On March 21, 2001, Governor Pataki announced more than \$2.5 million in grants for projects that will conserve open space, enhance recreation opportunities, and preserve historic resources in the Capital Region. Included was a grant for the acquisition of the Van Schaick Mansion by the Daughters of the American Revolution. Built ca. 1735, the house served as military headquarters for British generals during the French and Indian War and, later, for leading American generals planning the pivotal Battle of Saratoga. Our congratulations to the Peter Gansevoort Chapter of the DAR for their success in obtaining this significant award.



WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

The Spindle City Historic Society welcomes new members *Robert Clark, Philip Comi, Thomas Donnelly, Roberta Farrell, Janet Furbeck, and Mary Chris Krawiec*. Volunteers are always appreciated for a variety of events and projects in which our group is involved. Come join us!

A GIFT OF MUSIC



The Spindle City Historic Society recently acquired a briefcase belonging to Abram W. Lansing. It contains 16 original songs composed by him ranging from religious music to polkas. The compositions were written for the pianoforte or choral voices. Among the sheet music is an unpublished composition, "Hear Us, O Father", possibly one he was working on when he died.

This gift of music was donated to the Society by Barbara Mayell, a lifelong resident of the Boght Road area. Barbara does not know how far back her family's relationship with the Lansings can be traced but she remembers that her grandfather served as overseer of the Lansing North Mohawk Street property and her grandmother handled housekeeping chores plus the care of an elderly Lansing relative. Both her grandparents and parents were good friends with Abram Lansing and they shared many social occasions together. Although only a young child, Barbara recalls spending much time at the Lansing home. She and her younger sister had specific instructions not to go near "Uncle Abram's" piano or desk. In spite of that, her sister, Janet, was found at the desk gluing his sheets of music together. Barbara tells that Mr. Lansing reacted to the incident laughingly, being a man with a wonderful sense of humor who enjoyed having the children around.

Barbara's recollections of Abram Lansing include the fact that his talent for music did not extend to driving his Hupmobile. Therefore, when required to travel outside of Cohoes, Barbara's father, Egbert Mayell, would drive Mr. Lansing to his destination. Around town, Abram's mode of transportation was a bicycle – with big wheels.

Abram Lansing, who was born in 1861, was educated in Cohoes public schools and Albany Academy, graduating from Williams College in 1883. He was supervisor of music in the public schools, organist and choirmaster for the Fourth Presbyterian Church of Albany and the Silliman Memorial Presbyterian Church, member of the Cohoes Musical Society and Director of the Cohoes Community Orchestra. He was also a member of the Board of Education and active in the YMCA. Abram Lansing died in January 1928 and is buried in Albany Rural Cemetery.

Our sincere thank-you to Barbara for both her donation and the personal glimpse of a man who contributed much to the Cohoes community.

GOOD NEWS

Articles entitled "Cohoes' Forgotten Railroads", Parts I & II, written by Steve Lackmann, appeared in the Summer and Winter issues of the Spindle City Historic Society's newsletters.

The president of the Society received the following message from J. Winthrop Aldrich, Deputy Commissioner for the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation:

"I am just delighted with your newsletter from Cohoes. I think it gets better and better. It's extremely well written and the articles are, without exception, interesting. I was fascinated by the account of the Rensselaer and Saratoga Railroad. I had no idea it was so early. And that wonderful picture of the locomotive and few cars coming past the Van Schaick house is marvelous. I hadn't realized that it was operating as recently as '77. You add a lot to our knowledge and I know it also encourages the people of Cohoes to see to their preservation. Thanks a lot."

We appreciate both Steve's contribution and Mr. Aldrich's recognition of our efforts to highlight Cohoes' history and people.

THE WINNERS ARE.....

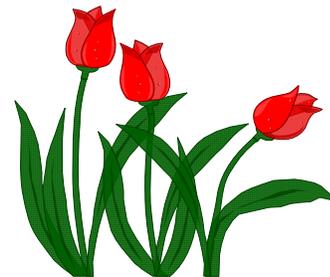
The Spindle City Historic Society's 2000 Raffle winners were picked at the Canal Square Christmas Tree Lighting on November 25th. They were:

Mrs. Imory of Schenectady - Matted Cohoes Village Water Rent Receipts donated by Rich Hogan.

John Wilmer of Albany - Crystal bells donated by Marra's Pharmacy.

Barbara McDonald of Cohoes - Baby afghans donated by Linda Christopher.

Congratulations and thank you for participating.



Thank you to **Deitchers Wallpaper Factory Outlet & Design Center** for their contribution of matting board for the SCHS's *Images of America* project, a pictorial history of Cohoes.

MEMOIRS OF ISRAEL BELANGER

I was born in a little Parish of St. Beatrix, in the County of Joliette, Province of Quebec, Canada. I suspect that at the time of my birth there was very little rejoicing for I was the thirteenth child of a family of fifteen and it must have been a bad omen to see me arrive just after the clock had struck the last bell of March 13, 1863, so my parents claimed that I was born on the 14th. My father and mother had married quite young, and being good Christians of sound body and mind and not familiar with the modern doctrine of child birth control, it is not surprising that they should have had such a large family.

After his marriage, my father bought a farm. It was what we now call a homestead, and cost him four dollars and fifty cents. He also bought a horse for forty dollars, and at the end of the month the horse died. So with a five dollar farm and a forty dollar debt, my parents started to raise this enormous family. But we lived!

I remember very little about Canada. I hazily see the large square frame house a short distance from the road and a small orchard with apple and cherry trees. I can also remember the beautiful evenings, when after a hard day's work, the whole family would sit on the grass in front of the house and my mother would sit on the steps and tell us some of the legends which are so plentiful in Canadian history, or sing hymns or simple songs. My father was an honest, sober and hardworking man; my mother was a saint.

On November 1, 1869, lured by stories of riches which spread through our Canadian parishes, the family left St. Beatrix for Cohoes. I remember the day as if it were yesterday. It was terribly cold, the frozen ground was covered with snow, and we had to travel 30 miles in uncovered sleighs to reach the railroad. Little did I then believe that I was bidding an eternal goodbye to our homestead.

The Civil War had ended, an American proclamation setting the Negro free. We arrived in Cohoes, this prosperous little village of the north, just in time to take up the burden of the black man and become a part of the northern slavery. When I was 8 years old, I started working for the Harmony Mills, getting the princely salary of \$1.50 a week. The company had a collection of all the dirty skunks of the United States and made them bosses of the departments where children were employed. When I say that I was getting \$.25 a day, I should add that I was receiving over 50 kicks and punches along with it. We worked from 6:30 AM until 6:30PM, with 20 minutes for noonday lunch, 5 days a week and on Saturday from 4:00AM until 4:00PM. And so it went for 12 years.

My father died when I was 17; neither he nor my beloved and devoted mother ever knew the suffering of their little children. They never suspected the moral degradation in which we were being brought up. Thanks to labor organizations and human laws those days have disappeared, but too late for me.

In 1883, thanks to the money my mother had saved, I was able to leave the mill and enter Joliette College. I will never forget my first day there. Imagine a lad of 20 years of age, sallow, 5'9", weighing just above 100 lbs. I looked upon my professors with the same diffidence that I had looked upon my mill bosses and suspicion at their friendly advances. For me, the man with power was an enemy and I almost laughed outright the first Sunday at chapel when one of the professors, a priest, spoke of the necessity of brotherly love. Was it possible that there was a world outside of the world I knew where there were people who could be kind to me through simple love of humanity? I enjoyed being called Mister instead having curses hurled at me daily.

My classmates were boys of 10 to 12 years of age and they looked at me with the same amazement that Jack looked at the beanstalk. They surely wondered that I was in their class. How could they know that I needed primary education? But they found it out when the professor made his first report and they discovered that out of a class of 34, I was 32nd.

I remained at college for 7 years and I studied fast and furious. My ambition, once awakened, became unbounded. Literature, history and philosophy were my favorites. Of course, the curriculum was in French so that my favorite authors were French and I worshipped them all. So after such a poor start you can imagine how proud I was when on my day of graduation, I carried in my suitcase the first prizes for oratory and history, the medal of Pope Leo XIII for the best essay on philosophy and my degree of bachelor of letters from Laval University of Quebec. It was a very different individual that arrived in Cohoes on June 23, 1890 from the one who had left on September 1, 1883. I did not weigh very much, 150 lbs., but I was an athlete; football, baseball and handball had been my favorite sports and I could run, box, and wrestle.

I had chosen law and politics as a profession. I entered the law office of Hon. Henry A. Strong on September 1, 1890. Up to that time I had always studied in French and I felt it a great handicap to begin to study English. I had to translate into French before I could grasp the meaning of many of the phrases. I remained with Mr. Strong until October 15, 1891 when I left him to enter the office of Hon. George H. Fitts. One thing I can say of both Mr. Strong and Mr. Fitts while I read law in their offices – they never knew I was alive. At last, on December 2, 1892, I was sworn in as an attorney and counselor at law. I never went to law school, not having the means to do so and I always found it to be a great handicap. But I had health, education and ambition, and with those blessings, I cared not for the future.

I married Albina E. Amyot, pure as an angel, kind as a mother should be with all the devotion of a simple

and honest soul. We had 10 children only 4 of which are still living – Raymond, Estelle, Gabrielle and Lionel.

Anyone who has run for office will know what it means to win or to lose. I have had both sensations. The first time I was a candidate for public office was at the spring election of 1892. I ran for supervisor of the first ward of Cohoes and was defeated at the rate of about 2 to 1. My second experience was a more fortunate one. In the spring of 1894, I was, by a handsome majority, elected Justice of the Peace of the City of Cohoes. On January 2, 1895, I took my seat on the bench. I felt a warm wave cover my body when they addressed me as “Your Honor” and I realized that the appellation of “Judge” would follow me through life. I served as Justice for 7 years.

During these years I gained some importance in politics and the Republican Party organization paid a little more attention to me. I was a public speaker of no mean ability and the Republican State Committee had availed itself of my services at every national and general election from the Fassett Campaign of 1891 to the McKinley run of 1900. After the election 1901, I resigned as Justice of the Peace and on January 1, 1902 was appointed Assistant District Attorney by Hon. George Addington, a very fine fellow.

I served 6 years with Addington. I felt as if I was the fifth wheel on a wagon. I was seldom consulted and if I was, my advice was never followed. No one seemed to have any confidence in my ability and I was looked upon, not as a lawyer, but as a politician receiving a stipend for political services. My old timidity came back and with it my suspicions of good will and brotherly love. Those 6 years were the worst of my political life, but I did not lie down. I came to Cohoes after 6 years as Assistant District Attorney and after the election of 1901, a campaign in which I took an active part, I was appointed Recorder of the City of Cohoes by Hon. Merritt C. Hanson, Mayor. I enjoyed being Recorder in spite of all the malice, calumny and doing of a group of alleged Republican politicians who had been repudiated by their party and the Cohoes electorate. My interest in the success of my party had always been paramount; money held out nothing for me. I had a family and I did not have the brains to provide for a casualty. I carried insurance on my life and I paid as I went. I was Recorder for 4 years, 1908 to 1912, and then came the crash.

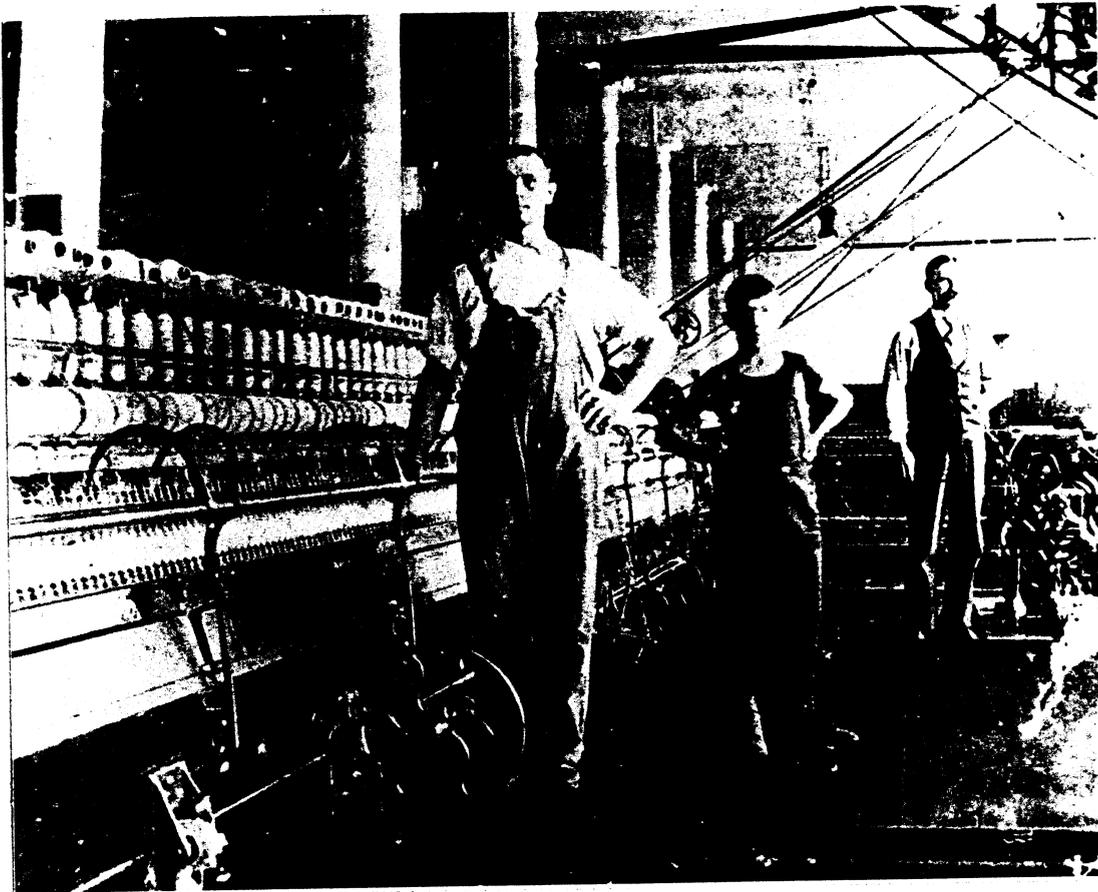
In 1912, the Republican organization, at my request, chose as its standard bearer in the mayoralty campaign, Dr C. E. Carruth. His only qualifications were that he had always been a willing and easy Republican and he did not know more than the law allowed. His seeming friendship to me appeared to the organization a guarantee of my reappointment.

I will never forget that campaign of 1911. There were 3 tickets in the field: James H. Shine, Progressive, John S. Scott, Democrat and Carruth. During the month preceding the election, I was Carruth’s right hand man. Before every audience he spoke of me as his friend, advocate and faithful supporter. He advised me to tell the people that his election would mean my reappointment and he know what influence it would have upon the voters of Canadian descent who numbered 1600, a majority of whom were inclined to support Mr. Shine. Delegations of those voters came to my office begging me to drop Carruth, saying that he was no good and would turn me down at his first opportunity. I pointed out that he had been regularly chosen, that he would be bound by the decision of the organization and that I would not be a traitor to a party that had been kind to me.

Before the end of the campaign, my friends realized the importance of electing Carruth and rallied to his standard. He was elected by a plurality of nearly 400. My relations with him after election seemed to be the best. He took office on January 1, 1912; my appointment was due on July 15, 1912. Carruth’s election had cost me a pretty penny and, financially, I was in bad shape. But I argued that I was going to be reappointed for 4 years and everything looked rosy. On July 12, 1912, I discovered that all was not right. I was informed that the Mayor, who was very sick, had called the ministers of Cohoes to consult with him as to the appointment. In spite of Mr. LeRoy, our most respected leader and Mr. Barnes, our County Leader and Chairman of the State Republican Committee, I was heartlessly turned down. Poor Carruth, that was his last official act, for within a month, he had to do with another Judge more powerful and more just than even the Recorder of the City of Cohoes.

When I was turned out of office, I was in debt to the amount of about \$400.00, had practically no practice and had a wife and four children. Mr. Barnes came to see me and suggested that I leave Cohoes and enter the Consular Service of the United States. But after consultation with Secretary of State Philander C. Knox, and considering the political conditions at that time, Roosevelt and Taft were running for President, I resolved to fight it out at home. There were two forces that stood by me during that critical period, Divine Providence and my wife. I started practicing with a vim and courage I had never known before and, on January 1, 1915, I was free of debt.

What more can I add to this little sketch of my life? Nothing except to offer thanks to God to Whose invisible protection I owe what success I have had, my political friends who have stood by me in my hours of need and sorrow, and to Hon. Egbert E. Woodbury and Hon. Merton E. Lewis for their fine treatment of me since I have become a Deputy Attorney General on January 4, 1915.



Typical adolescent mill worker as described by Israel Belanger.

Spindle City Historic Society Membership Application

President - Linda C. Christopher

First Vice President - Daniele Cherniak

Second Vice President - Dennis Rivage

Secretary - Helena Keilen

Treasurer - June Cherniak

<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 _____ 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

- April 10 thru 30 **The Erie Canal – A 19th Century Wonder**, Albany Visitors Center, Quackenbush Sq.
- April 22 **Spindle City Historic Society's Annual Program**, Cohoes Music Hall 1:00 – 4:00 PM
Historic Lansingburgh – Presentation by Michael Barrett, Assistant Director of the Hudson Mohawk Gateway & the Burden Iron Works Museum.
- April 28 **May Day: Songs of Working America**, Cohoes Music Hall, 7:30PM
- May 1 **May Day Forum: *Remember This Day***, Cohoes Music Hall, 6-9:30PM
- May 12 **Waterford/RiverSpark Canalfest**, Lock 2, Battery & Button Park 10:00AM – 6:00PM
- May 19 **Peebles Island Open House**, Delaware Ave., Cohoes 11:00AM–4:00PM
Exhibits, facility tours, special presentations and more.
- May 25 **Memorial Day Parade**, Columbia Street to Canal Square.
- June 15, 16, & 17 **Celebrate Historic Cohoes**, Remsen Street Historic District

Spindle City Historic Society
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Cohoes, New York 12047