

---

---

# Spindle City Historic Society

---

---

Volume 4 Issue 3

Fall 2001

---

---

## DID YOU KNOW

....that the General Peter Gansevoort DAR Chapter hosted a reception on August 22<sup>nd</sup> at the Van Schaick Mansion to commemorate their acquisition of the Mansion as their Chapter House? It was announced that the Mansion would soon be open to the public.

....that Erie Canal Lock #4 in Maplewood has been cleared and the surrounding area graded by the Town of Colonie? It is visible from Elm Street just west of the railroad tracks.

....that after the blizzard of 1888, some snow drifts were under second story windowsills requiring Cohoesiers to dig tunnels from their front doors, wending their way to cleared areas in the streets?

....that on August 31, 1891, Cohoes Mayor Garside ordered all obscene lithographs displayed in store windows or on billboards taken down by the police? Too many ankles revealed must have caused a heat wave!

....that by November of 1891, our present Cohoes Music Hall was no longer used as a theater? It had been converted into a dance hall and all theatrical performances were performed in the city theater which was across the tracks from St. Bernard's Church.

....that, in 1784, the first church in the vicinity was established – The Reformed Dutch Church of the Boght? The first pastor was Rev. John Demarest, who preached in Dutch; all church records were kept in that language during his ministry.

....that the last Wednesday in October is Halloween? Therefore, our October meeting will be held on the 24th at the Visitor's Center at 7:00PM.

The Spindle City Historic Society welcomes the congregation of the Good Ground Family Church to Cohoes. We wish them well in their new location, and are pleased to see the former St. Agnes building continue in use as a church.

## WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

The Spindle City Historic Society welcomes new members *Barbara Demase, Kay Duclos, Barbara & John Hildreth, Eileen Johnson, Katie Mayo, Frances Plouff and Bernice Valentine.*

## HISTORIAN'S NOTEBOOK

### William Adams Island

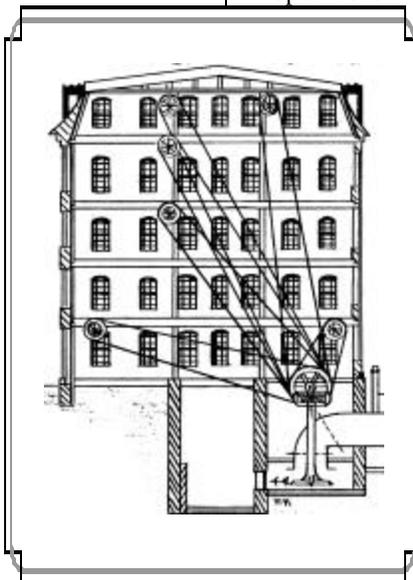
William Adams, a strapping lad of 19, went to work on John Van Schaick's farm during the year 1831. John was the last of the historic Cohoes family. John's farm encompassed the "island" as we know it today; it was very large, requiring constant attention. William, being smart and up to the task, soon began managing the estate's daily operations. John died suddenly, leaving his wife in somewhat of a predicament. Seizing the moment, William married the widow Van Schaick; thereafter, the farm was always referred to as "Adams Island". William prospered.

As shepherd of his flocks and protector of his estate, William reached legendary proportions as an enforcer of the Commandment "Thou shall not steal". He proved to be a terror to young petty thieves attempting to purloin fruits, vegetables or an occasional fowl.

The most convenient way to access the farm was to wade across the sprout of the Mohawk River near what today is Bridge Avenue. Fully aware of the shortcomings of adolescence, he would wait atop his old brown horse relishing the thought of another chase. With precise timing, at full gallop, he would spring upon the intruders. Fleeing back across the ford, straining against the shallow current, would be it to the lad that was too slow or luckless enough to feel the tattoo of his whip!

William aged and Cohoes expanded. The cagey old farmer saw the opportunity to reap a different kind of harvest. His vast holdings presented an ideal place for the crowded tenement dwellers to relocate. In 1876, at his own expense, he built the first bridge to his island near the old fording place. Speculators soon gobbled up large tracts of land to sell off as building lots. A retirement to "gentlemen farmer" status was assured. He retreated to his ancient brick home overlooking the Hudson River. Nestled within a buffering ring of trees and grassy pastures he enjoyed his autumn years while his island was being transformed into a network of streets and avenues sprinkled with "modern" dwellings. In an appropriate coincidence William passed away during the end of the harvest season in late September of 1891.

*Walter Lipka*



## Lt. Colonel Robert Craner – A Cohoes Hero



Robert Craner was born in 1933 to Grace and Alfred Craner, who lived at 27 Church St. in 'the Orchard' section of Cohoes. He graduated from Catholic Central High School in 1950 and enlisted in the Air Force at the age of 19. He found great satisfaction in military service and began to work his way up through the ranks. At Hanscomb Air Force Base, he received his navigator and pilot training in 1953 through the Aviation Cadet program. His early military career included piloting F89 aircraft in Labrador and F100's in France and Germany, and he served as weapons instructor at Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada. While in Labrador at Goose Bay Air Force Base, he met Audrey, a native of England who worked at the base as a civilian employee. They married in 1959, and had two children – a son Lorne and daughter Charys.

As a fighter pilot with the 37<sup>th</sup> Tactical Flight Wing PACAF, he was on his second volunteer tour in Southeast Asia in December of 1967 when the plane that he and a fellow airman were flying was hit and they were forced to bail out over North Vietnam. Craner was captured and imprisoned in Hanoi; for the first three years of his captivity he was kept in isolation and was subject to beatings and interrogations. He communicated with fellow POWs by tapping on walls and leaving notes hidden in a water hole where the prisoners were taken once a week to wash. Repatriation and his freedom were secured in March 1973, some five and one-half years after he was first imprisoned.

He returned to New York's Capital District, where a crowd of 1500 at the Albany Airport welcomed him and his family. March 23, 1973 was "Robert Craner Day" in Cohoes. The Cohoes American Legion Post color guard, Mayor Virginia McDonald, city Executive Administrator Lawrence Favreau, and aldermen Frank Coloratuolo and Ralph Surzyn saluted him. Craner was given a lifetime membership in the city's E. T. Ruane American Legion Post, and a key to the city was presented to him during the ceremonies in front

of City Hall. The City of Cohoes made plans to honor its hero Robert Craner in a lasting way by renaming the Devlin St. Park in 'the Orchard' section of the city, not far from the place of his birth, as Craner Park. The rededication of the park was held on Memorial Day, Saturday May 25, 1974. Five hundred neighbors and supporters attended, and further expressed their admiration by signing a full-page testimonial in an issue of the *Times Record*.

Craner received numerous military honors, including two Purple Hearts for wounds sustained during his internment. He was also awarded three Silver Stars, the Distinguished Flying Cross, four Bronze Stars, eight Air Medals, the Legion of Merit, and the Air Force Commendation Medal. He was cited for heroism in combat, professionalism and meritorious service in Southeast Asia. The 40-year old Cohoesier received his awards in a ceremony at Randolph Air Force Base in San Antonio on December 11, 1973 with his proud family in attendance. While at Randolph AFB, Craner completed pilot requalification training.

Craner and his family moved to Worcester, Massachusetts, where he enrolled at Holy Cross College. He graduated summa cum laude in 1976 with a degree in Russian studies.

After his graduation in May 1976, Craner traveled to Washington, DC, where he was to be trained as a military attaché, with eventual assignment to Sofia, Bulgaria. He then had training in West Germany and served as air attaché in Budapest, Hungary. He returned from overseas in September 1980 to study languages in preparation for his next appointment as Air Force air attaché in Honduras. But this was not to be.

Following a massive heart attack during a game of tennis, Lt. Col. Robert Craner passed away in Washington, DC on October 8, 1980. He received a burial with full military honors in Arlington National Cemetery. A memorial Mass was offered in his memory at St. Bernard's Church on Thursday, October 9.

Cohoes can truly be proud of this fine citizen and military hero, who never forgot his roots and served his country with honor and dignity. In an obituary in *The London Times*, Bernard Levin wrote, "...the language Robert Craner spoke is the oldest in the world, and the best, for it is the language of freedom, and it is spoken from generation to generation by the brave...I salute the memory of this valiant man."

## THE NATION'S OLDEST ARSENAL

In June, Jim Catlin, SCHS member and former Watervliet Arsenal employee, conducted a tour of the Arsenal grounds and museum for a group of our members. In 1967, the Arsenal was included in the Registry of National Historic Landmarks. The Commanding Officers' Residence, the Big Gun Shop, the old Barracks, and the Iron Building were singled out as unique and important features of the Arsenal's heritage. The grounds also include both walls of the original Erie Canal, which ran through the site and provided power for the operation of shops. The Department of the Army authorized establishment of the Watervliet Museum of Ordnance in 1968 in recognition of its many decades of support to the nation's armed services. It is housed in the Iron Building, built in 1859, and includes a priceless collection of weapons and the history of the development of cannon making. Among the notable visitors to the Arsenal over the years have been Lafayette, President McKinley, General John Pershing, and Franklin D. and Eleanor Roosevelt.

The Arsenal began on 12 acres purchased in 1813 in the Village of Gibbonsville, which became the city of Watervliet in 1897. That area was selected because of its excellent location in proximity to the Hudson and Mohawk Rivers. The Arsenal is, in fact, an Army Post and Major James Dalliba was the first commanding officer. Military discipline was a prime concern of the Major, and the Hudson River was frequently used as a source of discipline. Being "ducked" in the Hudson meant being thrown off the public wharf several successive times. One soldier, who was so sentenced for disobeying orders and drunkenness, had his sentence deferred until he was again found drunk, lest his health be injured by being put in the water when sober.

During the economic depression of the 1880s the House of Representatives proposed the sale of six arsenals including Watervliet, the largest. Only Watervliet survived, aided by Brigadier General Stephen Vincent Benet, Chief of Ordnance, who argued against the bill recommending the sale. In 1887, the Arsenal was selected as the Army's Gun/Cannon Factory. The Seacoast Cannon Shop was started in 1889 and by World War I, extensions and additions resulted in the building being about 1,300 feet in length.

In June of 1944, during World War II, the Arsenal employed about 7,200 people; 36% of them were women. August 14, 1945 marked the end of the war with Japan and all production work came to a temporary halt.

The Arsenal has had its share of ups and downs, depending on whether or not a state of emergency existed. In 1958, the new commanding officer, Colonel Walter Tisdale arrived and placed heavy emphasis on research, development, and engineering; this was continued by Colonel Keith O'Keefe. The result was the dedication of the Benet Research and Engineering Laboratories in May 1962, named after Brigadier General Stephen Vincent Benet. By 1977, Benet Laboratories had won the Army Research and Development Achievement Award eight times.

In the early 1970's, rumors circulated that the Benet Laboratory may be transferred to another defense installation; the concern was that that might be a precursor to the closing of the Arsenal. Congressman Samuel S. Stratton of the 28th Congressional District, a ranking member of the House Armed Services Committee, became a leading promoter of the Arsenal's cause. Stratton argued that integrated manufacturing, research, and development would be more efficient and economical than the separation of these interdependent activities. Presenting his arguments to the Secretary of the Army, he advised that he was "emphatically opposed" to the transfer of the Benet research and staff, stating that it would be carried out "over my dead body". In December 1976, the decision was made that the Benet Weapons Laboratory would stay physically at the Arsenal but organization control would pass to Picatinny Arsenal in Dover, New Jersey. Stratton continued to be a long time friend of the Arsenal and his actions during this time, along with other local, State, and Federal officials including Senators Jacob Javits and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, were instrumental in the Army's decision. A strong advocate for the Arsenal, Sam Stratton was often referred to as the Arsenal's very own "Uncle Sam".

For those who grew up in the area, the Arsenal has always been a strong presence, but how many of us have actually been inside its walls and seen the site which was so instrumental to our county's defense from the War of 1812 to today? Many past and present residents of the region were employed or stationed at the Arsenal over the years. The Watervliet Arsenal has established a reputation for excellence in supporting the nation's defense needs that is unsurpassed. It has also been a good neighbor, with a commitment to the capital area community.

The book *1813-1997 The Watervliet Arsenal – A Chronology of the Nation's Oldest Arsenal*, available at the Arsenal's museum, provides much more information about the history of this facility. To obtain guided tours of the site, call the Public Affairs Office at (518) 266-5090.

## THE COHOES ARMORY

The Cohoes Armory was designed by Isaac Perry and built in 1892-93. Perry designed about thirty armories in upstate New York. As the first official "State Architect", his initial duty was to design the State Capitol. In a 1997 article, *The Capital District Business Review* reported that many of New York's armories date from the 1870s-1890s, "the era when horse cavalry was the supreme light tactical unit" per Walt Wheeler, spokesman for the New York National Guard. These castle-like structures were used as training centers and staging areas for reserve troops and contained huge rooms that served as indoor parade grounds.

Cohoes' Company B of the 105th Infantry was accepted into the National Guard on February 14, 1876. During the Industrial Revolution, the National Guard was often used to quell union riots. Company B first went on duty in July 1877 during a railroad strike in Troy.

The Cohoes Armory housed the Seventh Separate Co., which was reorganized in 1898 as a component of the Second Regiment for service during the Spanish American War. Company B, as part of the 27th Division, was called into active duty during both World War I and World War II. The Guard vacated the Armory in 1964. It was purchased by Oscar Cramer in 1972 and converted into a commercial retail space known as Cramer's Armory. It was sold to a corporation and moved out of Cohoes in 1997. Four years later, Cramer's went out of business and in its January 29, 2001 editorial, *The Record* referred to the closing as losing an old friend. Cramer's sold uniforms, shoes, and tuxedos along with other apparel. Among its many customers were General Electric, Town of Colonie, nurses, schools, police and fire departments and blue-collar workers. There have been new owners since Cramer's left but it's good to remember the history of this imposing structure and hope that it may be preserved.



### CONGRATULATIONS AND THANK YOU TO.....

Francis J. Baillargeon	Wilfred H. Dickinson	Elaine Perry Diller	Donald D. Elliott
Raymond R. Gadoua	Arthur Griffin	Albert Gisondi	Eugene Guillaume
George Hume	Donald Landry	William Lanoue	Robert Leonard
Stephen Mack	Ed Majewski	Emmett Marinucci	John Maxwell
Edward Rifenberg	Joseph Therien	Normand Vautrin	Edward J. Walsh
Edward T. Walsh	Peter Wyrshyhora		

These veterans, who were unable to complete their high school education due to the United States entrance into World War II, were awarded their high school diplomas on June 9, 2001. In a recognition ceremony at the Cohoes Middle School, the veterans were joined by family and friends, Mayor John McDonald and County Executive Mike Breslin. Presentation of the diplomas was made by Superintendent Charles Dedrick.

## The Rickman Press

In 1915, Henry E. Rickman arrived in Cohoes and was hired as a reporter for the *Cohoes Republican*, which had its offices at 76 Mohawk St. In his capacity as reporter, he made numerous acquaintances and developed lasting friendships with many Cohoesiers and residents of surrounding communities. He remained in this position until 1921, when the newspaper became the *Cohoes American*. At this time, he decided to enter the printing business, establishing a shop at 17 Newcomb St., located behind the J. Colson Cabinet Company (now the site of Tables and Chairs). The business remained there until 1926, when it was relocated to the second floor of 122 Remsen Street.

Henry lived in Cohoes until 1918, when he moved to Troy and finally to Lansingburgh, where he resided until his death in 1971. Henry found considerable success in the printing business, helped by his friendly, outgoing personality and his many contacts made over the years. His clients included Barclay, Royal Undergarments, Star Textiles, Tek-Hughes, Union Fern Furniture, and Ehrlich Supply.

The business remained at its second floor location on 122 Remsen for many years, above such occupants as the Oneida Market and the National Furniture Store. When National Furniture closed and the building was sold, Rickman Press was required to move. Several locations in the city were considered, but the best option was found to be at 15 St. Agnes Highway, just outside of the Cohoes City line.

Henry was an active manager of the business until his retirement in 1969, when he turned business operations over to two of his loyal employees, Gilbert Liberty and Eleanor Rettinger, who became President and Vice-President/Secretary, respectively, of the company. Both had long worked at Rickman Press. Gil started as a pressman in 1936, and Eleanor began working there as a bookkeeper in 1949 following her graduation from Cohoes High School. For Eleanor, getting to work in those early years was not too much of a problem, since she lived at 118 Remsen, right next door. The business flourished under their management for many years. In 1984 Gil died and Eleanor continued to run the business until her retirement in the late 1990s.

Shawn Vadney took charge of the Rickman Press after Eleanor Rettinger's retirement. The company competes with larger printing firms by offering full-service printing at reasonable cost, full color prints and posters, laminating, rubber stamps, typesetting and graphic design, wedding invitations, specialty die cutting, brochures, numbering, carbonless and continuous forms, raffle tickets and books of chance, letterhead and envelopes, door hangers, bindery services, and promotional products such as magnets, pens, and mugs. The Rickman Press has also printed our newsletter since its first issue in 1998.

The Spindle City Historic Society would like to extend a sincere thank you to Shawn Vadney and staff for providing quality printing and consistent good service throughout these years.



### *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

<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"/> 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

## ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPCOMING EVENTS

**Hidden Treasures: Cohoes and Victorian Fashion from 1874-1905** - October 14 at 2 p.m. at the Cohoes Music Hall. Tickets are \$10.00 for adults, \$8.00 Seniors/Students; proceeds will benefit the historical society. For more information, call 237-7999.

**September Meeting Presentation:** The September 26, 2001 regular meeting of the Spindle City Historic Society will feature a report by Walter Lipka and Daniele Cherniak on the Cohoes Historic Preservation Commission and Historic Districts.

**Researching the Civil War:** A one-day workshop will be hosted by the New York State Library and the New York State Archives on November 8 from 10:45 to 3 p.m., to aid researchers of Civil War history or those seeking their ancestors. For more information, visit the New York State Library website at [www.nysl.nysed.gov](http://www.nysl.nysed.gov), or contact Vicki Weiss at [vweiss@mail.nysed.gov](mailto:vweiss@mail.nysed.gov) or 518-474-2274.

**Images of America: Cohoes Published:** We have just finished work this spring on a pictorial history of Cohoes for Arcadia Publishing's "Images of America" series. The book is now available and can be purchased for \$19.99 from the historical society.

**Get your own Cohoes Music Hall!** The Society is selling reproductions of the Cohoes Music Hall from The Cat's Meow Village™. The painted wooden Music Hall miniatures are 5"x4" and can be obtained for \$13.50. Please contact June Cherniak if you would like to purchase one.

**Raffles:** We are raffling off a 23" Victorian doll and an afghan. The doll is dressed in handmade, beautifully detailed period clothing in teal with black lace trim. Second prize for the raffle is a handmade pastel striped afghan. Chances for the raffle are \$1.00 each. The drawing for the raffle will be held at the Christmas Tree Lighting in Canal Square in late November.

Spindle City Historic Society

P.O. Box 375

Cohoes, New York 12047