

Spindle City Historic Society

Volume 7 Issue 2

Summer 2004

DID YOU KNOW

... that in November 1917, the girls of Egberts High School organized a Red Cross Unit? Their first officers were Thelma Jones, Margaret Thompson, Mildred Stiles and Edith Brown.

...that the *Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships* includes five submarine chasers (SC985 through SC989) built at the Matton Shipyard in Cohoes? They were commissioned in 1942-43. Three were transferred to the Coast Guard in 1945 and one was transferred to Russia in the same year.

...that, in the same vein, the *USS Frament*, a destroyer escort, was named for naval hero, Paul Stanley Frament? He was born on August 17, 1919 in Cohoes. The *Frament* was the same class of ship as the *USS Slater* docked in Albany.

...that Oliver's Cider Mill, established in 1867, did a prosperous business at the corner of Remsen and Schuyler Streets? They manufactured cider, sarsaparilla, soda, temperance champagne and vinegar.

...that Uriah A. Boyden invented an outward flow turbine in 1844? Two of the oldest surviving of these turbines are in Harmony Mill #3. They are probably the largest and most powerful built in the United States. The turbine room in the mill is a National Historic Mechanical Engineering Landmark.

...that the Mohawk River below the falls was a fisherman's paradise, according to historical records? Beside pike, eel, perch shad, and bass, a Dutch settler noted in 1642 that there were great amounts of sturgeon.

...that, the Sons of Temperance and the Grand Army of the Republic sponsored a lecture by Mark Twain at Egberts Hall on January 7, 1870? The event was poorly attended and the *Cohoes Cataract* chastised the citizenry for their lack of participation.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

The Spindle City Historic Society welcomes new members *Andrew Bania, Frank & Jane Gebosky, April Kennedy, Mr. & Mrs. Edward Kennedy, Barry McGraw, Patricia McLaughlin, Aloise Reo, and Joyce Stott*

HISTORIAN'S NOTEBOOK

THE OLD COHOES GAS WORKS

The recent demolition of the "winking" gas holder located at the site of the former South Troy Coke Plant prompted me to report about our own gas works here in Cohoes.

The illuminating gas industry emerged across the nation during the mid 19th century in response to the need to provide street and interior lighting. This ultimately culminated in the expression "Gas Light Era" that summarized a distinct period of history.

The Cohoes Gas Light Company, incorporated in January of 1851, was up and running by July of that same year. The small plant was located at the end of Sargent Street, near White Street and next to the Erie Canal. Since coal was needed to produce gas, getting the coal by canal barge was essential. The Sargent Street plant serviced the Village of Cohoes for the next eighteen years until it became too limited in production capacity to match the needs of an emerging city; a new larger plant was built on Whitehall Street next to the Champlain Canal. Here gas for lighting, cooking and heating was produced into the 20th century.

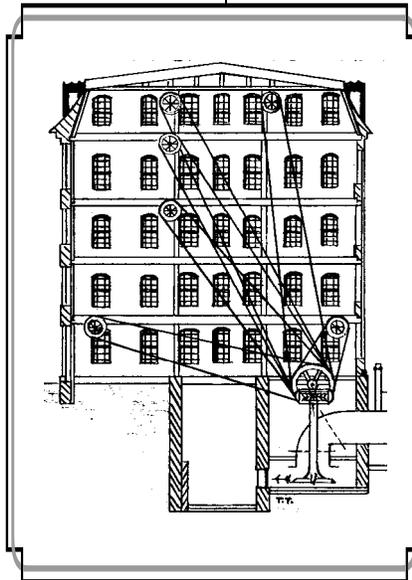
As the plant became obsolete, it was abandoned, rusted away, and was then demolished. Today the site is characterized by an empty open field and a small wooded area right behind St. Michael's Community Center at the end of Linden Street.

My research for this article proved very frustrating, with a lack of information about one of our smaller but essential old industries. I would be very pleased to hear from anyone with knowledge relating to the old Gas Works. This lack of data is common for all of the old smaller industries that once made Cohoes great. We need to preserve this history with text and images and sustain it for new generations of Cohoesiers, one of the primary missions of the Spindle City Historic Society. This past is too important to dismiss into obscurity.

Walter Lipka

The great arrogance of the present is to forget the intelligence of the past.

- Ken Burns, documentary filmmaker



Introducing Adelaide

by Paul D. Dunleavy

“W. J. Dickey, superintendent of the Egbert Woolen Mill moved into his new house on Imperial Avenue a few days ago. Last night he was surprised by a visit from a large party of his friends, who ... presented them with a handsome hanging lamp. Mr. M.A. Metcalf was among the guests and sang several choice selections. The evening was a most enjoyable one,” read an article in the Personal and Society News section of *The Cohoes Daily News* on Saturday, March 1, 1890.* If proper Victorian etiquette was followed, the three children of the Dickey household, Mary, Helen and Amy, would have been tucked in upstairs. Not only was this announcement carried in the Cohoes paper, but it was in the two Troy papers of the day. None of these three papers had any idea that the big headline would be about the oldest of the three girls that slumbered through that housewarming celebration.

Mary Adelaide Dickey was born in Cohoes in 1882. The Dickey family, W. James and Josephine, were living on Remsen Street (the 4 Adams block, near Cataract Alley). Helen joined the family in 1886 when the family was living at 150 Remsen Street, at the corner of White Street. The youngest, Amy was added in 1889, when the family was residing at 188 Remsen Street, which is now the annex to Deitcher's. They bought the plot of land at 16 Imperial Avenue in 1889 and moved into their new Stick Victorian home in February of 1890.

During this time, Mary, who was known as Addie, was studying dance in Troy under C.H. Van Arnum in his new and elegant parlors on River Street. Mary later reminisced of how she danced “on the sidewalks of Troy to the music of a hand organ.” They sent her to “dancing school early, and it was there the idea of going on the stage was first put into (her) head.”

Van Arnum regularly utilized the National Bank hall (now known as the Cohoes Music Hall) to showcase his performers. The first documented local performance of this little dancer was at the National Bank hall in February of 1893 at a benefit for the Cohoes Press Club. As early as 1894 she was being showcased in New York City, appearing at George Lederer's New York Casino, the Bijou and the Columbia in Brooklyn. These appearances continued for many years. Now being billed as La Petite Adelaide, she was taking the town on point. Her specialty was powerful and energetic toe dancing. In 1897 she made a movie for American Mutoscope Company, *La Petite Adelaide*.



In 1898, on one of her visits home after a run of “Belle of New York”, she appeared again at the National Bank Music Hall in two performances to benefit St. Bernard's Alumni Association, dancing at the kermis and children's carnival where tickets were 25 and 35 cents. She left with her mother the following day by train for Chicago where she had a Sunday performance at the Masonic Temple Roof Garden. During the week's run in Chicago, she also headlined a benefit for the Press Club of Chicago. She performed frequently around the country over the next three decades.

At the turn of the century, two major events occurred for this hometown dancer. In “The Casino Girl” she had introduced a “characteristic cakewalk” and a piece of sheet music entitled “Loquatias Moll,” bearing her image, was published. She even danced the cakewalk with Harry Lehr, one of society's smart set.



Secondly, while appearing with Dan Daly and Marie Dressler in the Boston production of "The Lady Slavey," she married William A. Lloyd. Lloyd was an advertising agent for a fair. The marriage was short lived. Adelaide had him publicly arrested within a year for stealing her clothing and pawning her jewelry. The two were divorced shortly after.

Adelaide continued to perform for the likes of B.F. Keith, Lee Shubert and Oscar Hammerstein. Her routines included two or four additional female dancers. She appeared in "The Blue Moon" with James T. Power and in "The Orchid" with Eddie Foy. Ned Wayburn was one of her choreographers. In 1908 she toe danced on horseback at the Hippodrome. At age twenty-seven, standing four-foot five-inches and weighing less than 100 pounds, she was still filling child roles successfully. Her specialty at this time was the "Doll Dance," where she mimicked the mechanical movements of a doll. At the turn of the new decade, she added Johnny J. Hughes to her act. In 1911, they sailed on the Majestic to tour all the capitals of Europe and took the continent by storm. Upon returning to the

states they had perfected their act, which was described as "operatic, ballet, and stage dancing, dashed through with the paprika of the Cakewalk and the Tango."

They appeared in "The Passing Show of 1912" with Charlotte Greenwood, the leggy dancer who is best known as Aunt Eller in the movie musical "Oklahoma." Adelaide and Greenwood even bought neighboring stucco homes in Brooklyn. Adelaide and Hughes opened a dance studio in Brooklyn named "Bensonhurst-by-the-Sea." In June of 1913, they appeared for the first time as husband and wife in real life. J.J. presented his new bride with a diamond tiara and Mrs. Dickey gave her daughter a pearl necklace. The pair then went on an 8,000 mile honeymoon, touring in a show that would take them from Philadelphia to the West Coast.

Adelaide & Hughes continued to grow in popularity. Newspapers and magazines covered their career in detail. The pair wrote their own material, introduced new dancers, and had many songs dedicated to them. Their appeal continued



until J.J. died in 1927. The twenties were a tough decade for Adelaide; she lost her father, James, in 1923 and her mother, Josephine (nick-named La Grande Marmalade by the stage hands), in the same year as her husband.



Adelaide lived until 1960. She was quite the colorful character. It was a color and a story that could have been lost, except in the annals of Ballroom dancing and of Vaudeville history. However, a connection was made. A connection between a house that her parents built, which still stands at the crest of Imperial Avenue, and this virtuosic toe dancer. She was a headliner. She was a Cohoesier. She was La Petite Adelaide.

**For additional information on the William J. Dickey House see the Fall 1999 issue, which is available at the SCHS website.*

Join the SCHS for the detailed story of La Petite Adelaide on June 12th at 7 pm in the Cohoes Music Hall, complete with pictures and music. This event also celebrates our 10th Anniversary so plan to stay for refreshments.



Off the Top...

Spring is coming to a close and summer is just around the corner. This great weather can now be enjoyed in Cohoes' newest park, Silliman Memorial Park. Sunday, April 25th turned out to be a great day for the park dedication, which was developed and coordinated by the Spindle City Historic Society (SCHS). Cohoes was returned to 1897 and Cohoesiers were out enjoying their new green space. Be sure to check out the plaque, grass, trees, flowers, and seating in this new park at the corner of Ontario and Mohawk Streets, a tribute to Horace B. Silliman, a man who made a huge impact on Cohoes.

Also in April, William Krattinger presented "The Work and Influence of Architect and Author A.J. Downing," examining the influence of Andrew Jackson Downing on American residential architecture in the mid-19th century. In May, we had our Second Annual Art Show celebrating the talent of students from Cohoes High School. Their prints, sculptures and other works of art are inspiring. Many thanks to all the students who contributed.

Our event in June is particularly special to me. To celebrate its 10th Anniversary, SCHS is "Introducing Adelaide." Between 1892 and the 1930s, this native Cohoesier needed no introduction. She headlined in America and in all the capitals of Europe as "La Petite Adelaide." Her father was a mill superintendent in Cohoes, she was born when her parents lived on Remsen Street, and her parents built my home in 1890. Talk about finding something neat in an old house. Come join us for the pictures, stories and music of this hometown girl.

In August, we are still looking back, but to a more recent past when we are "Looking Back from Within -- A Tribute to Keveny Memorial Academy." The August 14th opening reception for this exhibit of photographs by Paula Symanski of the last days of Keveny Academy promises to be a powerful night. Ms. Symanski's art will be accompanied by reflections and recollections from alumni and city residents. Keveny memorabilia is also being gathered and will be on display.

Many people have been sharing and donating photographs, memorabilia and artifacts for our growing collection. The SCHS is appreciative of these wonderful contributions. Our regular meetings are the last Wednesday of the month at 7 PM (6 PM during July and August for a brief meeting followed by a bite to eat together) in the Cohoes Visitor's Center at 58 Remsen Street (the 1st floor of the historic Cohoes Music Hall). Hope to see you at a meeting or presentation. Let's keep Cohoes' history alive and the memories shared.

Paul D. Dunleavy
President

Silliman Park Dedication

The dedication of Silliman Park was held on Sunday, April 25. Because of its long advocacy for a park on the site and involvement in its planning, SCHS was invited to direct the dedication ceremony.



The ceremony recreated "A day in the life of Cohoes 1897", with members of the Victorian Social Club in period attire reading Cohoes and national news of the day.

There were also readings from the 1897 dedication ceremony for the Silliman Memorial Church, including some by Horace Silliman, here portrayed by Paul Dunleavy. The Mayor spoke and proclaimed the day "Silliman Park Day."



Members of the Spindle City Historic Society held signs highlighting Horace Silliman's contributions and philanthropic work in Cohoes and beyond.

A commemorative sign for the park recognizing Horace Silliman's accomplishments was unveiled. Standing with the sign are the sign design and park dedication planning



team - Tor Shekerjian, Paul Dunleavy, and Daniele Cherniak. The sign was funded by contributions to the Silliman Park Fund, through the generosity of Joe Koval, and by the Spindle City Historic Society.

We are grateful to have played a role in bringing to life this new park that honors one of Cohoes' great citizens and is an attractive downtown greenspace to be enjoyed by all. Many thanks to Mayor John McDonald, Ken Radliff and the Department of Public Works, Joe Koval, contributors to the Silliman Park Fund, the Rev. Nick TeBordo, the Victorian Social Club, and Stefanie Lewendon.

"Of Wind and Water -- Seascapes"

March marked the opening of a show of seascapes by artist Ron "Skip" Kemmy. Kemmy, who is a carpenter by trade, was inspired to sketch and paint by his father and grandfather, who were both sketch artists. His skill as a carpenter and his love of the sea led to an interest and expertise in the restoration of wooden boats; these interests and talents are also reflected in his ability to capture the moods of wind and waves and the ships that sail along them. This was the first public showing of Mr. Kemmy's artwork.



Ron Kemmy converses with SCHS Art Show coordinator Mary DeRose.

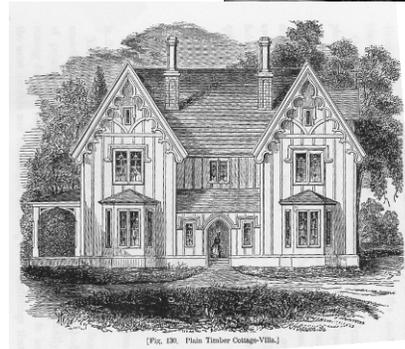
The Work and Influence of Architect and Author A.J. Downing

Our March program was a presentation on Andrew Jackson Downing, given by William Krattinger, Historic Preservation Specialist at the State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation.

Downing was a preeminent designer and landscape architect in the pre-Civil War period, whose books, illustrated with detailed architectural renderings by collaborator Alexander Jackson Davis, were widely read and greatly influenced American domestic architecture. He promoted Gothic styles modeled after English country houses, and advocated the virtues of rural life at the dawn of America's Industrial Age. Downing was also well-regarded in Europe for his writings on horticulture.

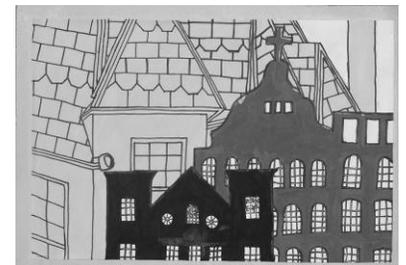
Downing's life was cut tragically short (he died in 1852 at the age of 37 in a steamboat accident), but his influence endured long after, both through his writings and those whom he mentored. Among those who studied with Downing was Calvert Vaux, who went on to a distinguished career as an architect and collaborated with Frederick Law Olmstead in the design of Central Park.

A Downing-inspired Gothic revival house in Cohoes (right), and the design from the pattern-book from which it was adapted.



2nd Annual Cohoes High School Art Show

Following from last year's "Spindle City Images", the Spindle City Historic Society again sponsored a show of artwork by Cohoes High School students. The show opened with a



Artwork by John Bowen

reception in the Visitor's Center on Saturday, May 8. This year the subject matter ranged beyond the historic places and architecture of Cohoes, and the artwork included sculpture, pastel drawings, prints, pen and ink sketches, and paintings. We thank Cohoes High School art teacher JoAnn Johnson, the art students, and all who attended the show opening. The show will remain up through June.



Artist Ayisha James and her work.

The History of St. Michael's Church

by Jane J. Gebosky, Marion Janowska Jaffarian, and Sister Beverly Schickel, C.S.J.

Our first Polish and Slovak immigrants arrived in Cohoes in the late 1800s, bringing with them their spirit and religious faith. They were drawn to Cohoes because of the opportunities they had for employment in the textile and the Cohoes Rolling Mills, which flourished at that time. As the Poles increased in number, they felt a strong desire to build a church where they could worship. Rev. Valentine Gierlacki arrived in Cohoes in December of 1903 for the sole purpose of organizing a Polish parish. Father Gierlacki was a newly ordained priest, having studied at the American College in Louvain, Belgium. He spoke seven languages, one of which was French. He became acquainted with Rt. Rev. Msgr. Dugas, pastor of St. Joseph's Church, and was given permission to conduct services for his potential parishioners in the basement of St. Joseph's Church. Prior to his arrival, services were held in the old St. Bernard's School by Rev. Malakaitis, pastor of St. Casimir's Church in Albany.

A church planning committee was formed to look for a site for the new church. It was decided to buy 5 lots on Page Avenue. By Labor Day 1903 \$4000 had been raised, and \$7000 was borrowed from the Cohoes Savings Institution (which later became the Cohoes Savings Bank). It had been decided to build a two story brick edifice, with the first level a school, and the second level the Church. Work began the day after Labor Day under the direction of James Dooley, the contractor, and Thomas Gratton, C.E., the designer. Every evening thereafter parishioners volunteered to dig the hard slate for the foundation to save money for the parish. The work was very difficult, especially since for most it was done after a hard day's labor in the mills, but no one was discouraged.



The ceremony for the laying of the cornerstone for the church, 1904

The cornerstone of the Church was laid by Most Rev. Thomas M. A. Burke, Bishop of the Albany Diocese, on October 2, 1904. This was a joyous occasion for everyone with much rejoicing. The impressive ceremony, with more than 1500 in attendance, including the 52 Founding Fathers, and area church and civic dignitaries. The procession was led by the Knights of St. Michael, the first Polish organization in the city of Cohoes, established by Father Gierlacki, who also served as its first President. During the next few years many church societies were formed as social and mutual aid organizations, including the Knights of St. Michael, St. Joseph Society, Rosary Society, Altar Boys Society, and the Children of Mary Society; in later years a total of fourteen organizations were formed.

In 1907 the land on both sides of Page Avenue was acquired and a new parsonage was erected. In December 26, 1924, a fire began in the church, causing much damage. The parishioners came

together as a congregation and worked to put the church and school back in order; two days later a service was held in the school. A new church, built with a 26 foot addition, new altars, statues, and other furnishings, was dedicated on Sunday, November 29, 1925. Most Rev. Edmund F. Gibbons, Bishop of the Albany Diocese, blessed all the statues and our first stained glass window, dedicated to the Ladies of the Rosary. Over the years, 13 additional stained glass windows were added, each depicting a symbolism and the name of the generous benefactor. The twelve murals on the ceiling were painted on canvas.

In 1927 a convent was built opposite the Church to house the Sisters of the Resurrection, who replaced the lay teachers that had staffed the school. The Sisters served a vital role in guiding the youngsters spiritually and academically. This was their primary purpose, but they also became involved in taking care of the sacristy, altar linens, baking the altar bread, visiting the sick, assisting families in need, and forming several youth organizations. Due to increased school enrollment a new two-story elementary school building, with 10 classrooms, office space, and recreational facilities, was erected by the parish. The ground breaking ceremony on July 18, 1954 was in conjunction with the Golden Jubilee Celebration, held that October.

On October 1, 1954, two days prior to a planned Golden Jubilee Parish Celebration, Father Gierlacki, the dearly beloved pastor, died. Father Gierlacki came to the parish as a young ordained priest and shepherded his flock for fifty years, truly committed to his ministry. The founder of the parish had a deep love for the children and a sincere concern for the families of the parish. The parish was his family, and the parishioners in turn showed great love and respect toward this holy man. He was a priest of profound learning, exuding great dignity; his legacy lives on in the stories heard from many parishioners.

Rev. Sigmund Olszewski was named pastor on October 11, 1954. During Father Olszewski's tenure, buildings were purchased on Ontario Street and Page Avenue. A beautiful new church entrance was constructed with a Rose Memorial window, donated by the Rosary Society, adorning it; the sanctuary and suitable vestries were also built. The rededication of the church was on September 10, 1961. In 1965, the construction of a new convent for the Sisters was completed. Father Olszewski retired on June 30, 1974. He was an inspirational leader of his flock, respected by all the people, always there to give spiritual guidance and to set an example. He had a great interest in the youth of the community, helping many of them to attain the goals of higher education.

Father Richard Dybas, an Assistant Pastor at St. Michael's, was installed as Pastor on July 1, 1974. He focused his zeal on the school, which then had an enrollment of over 200 students. He was able to do this quite successfully for another decade, until declining enrollments and other problems began to surface in the 1980s. Fewer women answered the call to a religious vocation, causing a decrease in the religious staffing of the school. The consequent need to hire more lay teachers created a great financial burden on the families and the parish. After much consideration, the school sadly was closed in 1988. Father Dybas directed the installation of a new lighting system in the church, and the dedication of a new pipe organ in 1988. He also led the efforts to raise funds for an elevator for those who were incapable of climbing the steps, which was completed in 1995. In 2003 the interior of the church, including altars, statues, and Stations of the Cross, was restored to its original beauty.

The parish maintains connections with its Polish heritage. Joseph Cardinal Glemp, Primate of Poland, visited St. Michaels on September 26, 1991. An evening in August is dedicated to honoring Our Lady of Czestochowa with vesper services. Father Dybas initiated a Thanksgiving Polka Mass with the assistance of Joseph Kosek and his band. This draws people from the entire region, and donations are collected at the Mass for the Food Pantry. At Christmas the parishioners contribute wrapped packages of clothing for the children of St. Catherine's Home.

A Pastoral Associate, Sister Beverly Schickel, C.S.J., has been assigned to St. Michaels. In her ministry she visits the sick and needy and brings them spiritual nourishment in the Holy Eucharist. She provides transportation for doctor's appointments, grocery shopping, and other needs as well. Father Dybas also continues in his ministry to the sick in hospitals and nursing homes, and is always available for the sick and needy. St. Michael's participates in the parish nursing program through the Seton Health System; Susan Waldron has served in this capacity for the last 6 years. She conducts a blood pressure clinic once a week, sets up the flu clinic and a blood drive, helps people in need with referrals, and includes health awareness notes in our Sunday bulletins.

After a century of existence, St. Michaels Church continues to flourish as it reaches out to face the challenges of the present time. The centennial celebration for St. Michael's will be on October 17 of this year, and will include a mass celebrated by Bishop Hubbard followed by a gala dinner at the Polish Community Center in Albany.



Spindle City Historic Society Membership Application

www.timesunion.com/communities/spindlecity

President - Paul Dunleavy

First Vice President - Linda C. Christopher

Second Vice President - Daniele Cherniak

Secretary - Tor Shekerjian

Treasurer - June Cherniak

___ Individual Membership \$10.00

___ 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

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

The August 14 exhibit of Paula Symanski's photographs of Keveny Memorial Academy will be accompanied by a display of Keveny memorabilia. If you have any items you wish to loan or donate for the exhibit, please contact us by phone at 518-237-5618 or by e-mail at chernd@rpi.edu.

Wanted - Contributions to the Newsletter! If you have a story about people, places, or events in Cohoes history, we want to hear from you. The newsletter staff welcomes written articles, as well as information that could be used in newsletter articles. Contributors will be acknowledged. Please contact us at 237-5618 or 237-9146 if you have a story to share.



Saturday, June 12 - SCHS will be celebrating its 10th Anniversary. The celebration will include an important announcement about a former Cohoesier, a woman ahead of her time. Her father was a Cohoes mill superintendent whose house still stands in Cohoes, she danced at the historic Cohoes Music Hall and later became world renowned. Find out who she is, why she had her first husband arrested and other wonderful stories about her life and times. Presentation in the Cohoes Music Hall at 7 p.m., followed by a reception in the Visitor's Center.

Wednesday, June 30 - Spindle City Historic Society monthly meeting, 7 p.m., Cohoes Visitor's Center.

Wednesday, July 28 - Spindle City Historic Society monthly meeting, 6 p.m., Cohoes Visitor's Center. Note special summer meeting times for July and August only.

Saturday, August 14 - "Looking Back from Within -- A Tribute to Keveny Memorial Academy." Photographs by Paula Symanski of the last days of Keveny Memorial Academy, accompanied by reflections and recollections from alumni and city residents. Keveny memorabilia will also be on display. Opening reception, 7 p.m., Cohoes Visitor's Center.

Wednesday, August 25 - Spindle City Historic Society monthly meeting, 6 p.m., Cohoes Visitor's Center.

*Photo credits this issue:
Walter Cherniak, Tom Donnelly, Paul Dunleavy, Tor Shekerjian*

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