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# Spindle City Historic Society

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Volume 11 Issue 1

Spring 2008

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## HISTORIAN'S NOTEBOOK

### 77 Mohawk Street – Some Thoughts

77 Mohawk Street is a very old building, arguably the oldest brick mercantile building in the City of Cohoes. It is located on the corner of Mohawk and Oneida Streets opposite Cohoes Commons and the First Niagara Bank, contiguous with what one could describe as Cohoes' only "urban renewal" area. For years it was the home of Swatling's Paint and Wallpaper Store and more recently Vital Signs. Controversy regarding the demolition of this building has been ongoing for at least two years.

Regrettably, the building will be demolished for no other reason than to replace it with a parking lot. The owner of the building, and also of the Cohoes Commons, David Wick of CT No. 1, LLC, based in San Diego California, has dismissively stated through his surrogates that: "the building is too expensive to repair" and has asserted that replacement with a parking lot would "serve both as a physical and economic improvement for the City of Cohoes." A small group of us calling ourselves *The Friends of Historic Cohoes* made efforts to discourage demolition by attempting to inform Common Council members and the city administration about the historic value of the building, but we unfortunately have been unsuccessful.

The proposal to demolish the building originally came before the city's Historic Preservation Commission in August 2006; the Commission voted to deny permission for demolition. With changes in the city zoning code, the Historic Preservation Commission was replaced by a Historic Preservation and Architectural Review Board. The new Board also voted to deny permission to demolish the building. The building's owner then appealed to the Cohoes Common Council to overturn the decision, claiming to be "aggrieved" by the Board's ruling (which was based on criteria outlined in the city zoning code, which states that "Properties which contribute to the character of a Historic Overlay District or a designated landmark shall be retained, with their historic features altered as little as possible"). Demolition, by any standard, would seem to constitute alteration of the most extreme sort. After a series of delays in their vote, the Council decided on the evening of January 22, 2008 to overturn the Board's decision. No substantive grounds for the appeal and overturn of the Board's decision were provided when the question was raised at public meetings.

77 Mohawk Street was listed in 1984 along with one hundred and forty six other structures on the National Register of Historic Places as the Cohoes Downtown Historic District. The building stock of this district  
(continued on p.6)

## DID YOU KNOW

....that on December 2, 1967 the Marine Midland Bank offered the Music Hall Building to the city of Cohoes for \$1.00? The bank had a branch on the first floor of the building, which now is the Cohoes Visitor's Center and home to the Spindle City Historic Society. The original plan was to convert the space into a city library, and preserve the upper floor as a performance space to recognize its historical significance. Key supporters of the project were the Hudson River Valley Commission and former Cohoes historian Dr. Edward Vandercar. The 4-story Music Hall building was constructed in 1873-74 at a cost of \$60,000.

.... that in 1894 Swatling's Paint Company was located on 50 Oneida St. (where Big G's Restaurant is today)? By 1900, the business had moved to 55 Mohawk St., and later to 77 Mohawk Street.

...that the Cohoes Manufacturing Co, started by Isadore Siegal, opened in 1933? In 1979, Isadore's son Herb Siegal and Ben Seidman sold the company to former Federated Stores executive Sanford Zimmerman. In 1989 the company, then known as Cohoes Specialty Stores, filed for bankruptcy and was purchased by Burlington Coat Factory. In 1999, the store in Cohoes, long a shopping destination, was moved to Crossgates Mall, severing the connection between the store and the source of its name. Bain Capital Partners LLC purchased Burlington Coat Factory in 2006 and in October of that year the decision was made to drop the Cohoes name and the store in Crossgates was closed, ending a long retail history. Many locals and visitors alike still recall the long waiting lines, crowds and the exciting and frenzied atmosphere of the Cohoes Manufacturing Company's annual Washington's Birthday sales.

....that the Marconi Club at 127 Hudson Avenue on Van Schaick Island was originally built as a school? The 2-story brick Romanesque/Italianate structure was constructed in 1895.

....that this is the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Knights of Columbus, the world's largest lay Catholic organization? The Cohoes chapter of the Knights was formed on October 21, 1896, and the Cohoes fourth degree established in 1921.

### WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

The Spindle City Historic Society welcomes new members *Rachel Bliven, Kathleen Gill, Pat & Bob Gordon, Mr. & Mrs. John Lis, Mr. & Mrs. William Tschumi, and Judith Williams.*

## History of the Cohoes Moose Lodge

The Cohoes Moose Lodge #1332 was formed on June 2, 1913, when the fifty Charter members of the organization held their first meeting. They first gathered in a space at 232 Remsen Street. When a larger lodge building was required they moved to 137 Remsen Street, and later to the second floor of 109 Remsen Street over the Woolworth store. In 1924, the Lodge relocated to Ontario Street in the block between Remsen and Mohawk Streets next to the Silliman Memorial Church and the National Bank. The Lodge purchased the building from Julia B. Magette in 1924 for \$19,000. The first floor housed



*View looking west on Ontario Street. City Hall is on the right. The Moose Lodge with moose head is visible near the center of the photograph, to the left of the Silliman Memorial Church.*

Wagar's Ice Cream Parlor and the Pellerin and Mossey Barber Shop, the second floor contained a dentist's office and law offices, with a ladies' garment manufacturer and the Moose meeting rooms on the third floor. It was during the time at this Ontario Street location that the Lodge reached its peak in membership and activity. Trustees Louis Fernet, Daniel Murphy and Edward Potvin oversaw the transaction of purchasing the building, and during the planning of Lodge headquarters the members voted on and rejected proposals to install bowling alleys and showers for Lodge members in the building.

In 1926 Lodge members voted to lease a summer Moose Camp in Pleasantdale (in Rensselaer County north of Lansingburgh); it was later destroyed by fire. In 1932 the Ontario Street building's mortgage was paid during the term of Peter Ketz. Because of

their sacrifice in giving their lives during WWII, the Lodge's meeting room was later dedicated to the memory of Governor Vela Borden and George Bowen. Since the founding of the Lodge in 1913, three Governors were awarded the Pilgrim Degree for their outstanding work. This is the Fourth and highest Degree of the Order. The recipients were: Earl H. Bracken in August 1951, Lawrence Hebert in June 1965 and Mitchell LaMarre in June 1969. Until 1939 Governors served for one year, but in 1948, by special permit from the organization's national headquarters in Mooseheart, Illinois, the term was extended to two years; Mitchell LaMarre served four consecutive terms, Arthur Gleason would later serve twelve.

Lodge membership fluctuated over the years, dropping to a low of 78 during the Depression years of the late 1930s, rebounding to over 740 by 1946 under Governor Peter Dubrey. That year saw the largest enrollment of candidates (106 members) and the greatest initiate class in the history of the Lodge. Through the 1920s, the Moose Lodge consisted primarily of members of French-Canadian descent or origin since they comprised a large percentage of the city's population, but this too varied over time as the city's demographics changed. The Lodge's heyday came in the 1970s, when the organization had close to 1000 members.

On June 14-17, 1950, the 35<sup>th</sup> State Conclave was held in Cohoes, with Cohoes Mayor Rudolph Roulier as Honorary Chairman. The program included the initiation of 50 new members, ritual contests, meetings, a tour of G.E. in Schenectady and sport trophy awards. On the last day the 25<sup>th</sup> Member Club Dinner was held at Lanthier's Grove, followed by a farewell party at the Cohoes Moose Lodge.

The Lodge celebrated its 60<sup>th</sup> year in 1973, holding a series of events from June 15-17, including a banquet held at St. Michael's Pavilion on the 16<sup>th</sup>. Chairmen of the events included Michael Piterniak,

honorary chairman, Mitchell LaMarre, Kenneth Pierre, Peter Dubrey, James Bracken, Harold Bernard, Frank Connors, Arthur Gleason, Val Roberts, George Beaulac, William Parker and Lawrence Hebert. Law and Order representatives were Thomas G. Smith, John Kielb, Alphonse Gorski and Michael Robich.

The Moose organization has long been involved in community and humanitarian activities. Moose Haven, a retirement home for members and their wives, was founded in 1922 in Orange, Florida. Mooseheart Child City and School was established in 1913 in Illinois to care for orphaned youth and other children whose families are unable to care for them due to family crises. Mooseheart is supported by Moose everywhere through routine collection for its endowment fund at all membership meetings. Volunteer and fundraising efforts by Moose lodges in their communities include sponsorship of youth sports leagues and other programs for young people, outreach to hospitalized and ill veterans, assistance to senior citizens, and support of shelters for the homeless and victims of disaster.

The Cohoes Lodge, representing the sixth district in New York, served its community by offering many civic activities, sports, and special events. They conducted annual Mardi Gras, Halloween and New Year's Eve parties, Hobo Conventions and Old Timer's Night. Other activities included Bingo on Thursday evenings, breakfasts, spaghetti dinners and pot luck buffets. Over the years, the Moose Lodge contributed and raised about 30 million dollars for local charities and youth programs such as the Cohoes Head Start Program. Leaders in fundraising efforts were Mitchell LaMarre and Joseph George Vautrin.

Distinguished members of the Cohoes Moose include Honorary President of the New York State Moose Association Francis H. Shannon and District Vice-President and former Governor James F. Bracken. Bernie Heroux, who has been a barber in Cohoes for over six decades, was also recognized for 50 years of membership in the Moose. Other members also greatly contributed to the organization through their time and effort. Jerry C. Connors built a walk-in cooler for the Moose Lodge, completing the work while struggling with terminal illness.

In 1978, the Lodge moved from Ontario Street to Newcomb Street, where it remained until declining membership and financial difficulties resulted in their relocation to the former St. Peter and Paul's School on Simmons Island. The group was forced to disband in May 2006. The Lodge charter has been suspended but can be reinstated should there be sufficient interest to re-establish the organization before 2016; beyond that time a new charter would have to be granted.

After the organization disbanded, memorabilia and ceremonial items from the Moose Lodge were presented to the Spindle City Historic Society. These included banners, flags, altar cloths, statues and awards. Among these items was a moose head which hung outside of the meeting rooms on Ontario Street for many years. The moose head is currently on loan to the Cohoes Public Library, where he watches over the children's section of the library.

Although the Moose Lodge has disbanded, the Cohoes Women of the Moose Chapter 1051, also established in 1913, continue to be an active force in the community, meeting regularly at the Knights of Columbus on Remsen Street and sponsoring dinners and other events.

*Thanks to Art Gleason. Additional information for this article was obtained from "A History of the Cohoes Moose Lodge 1332", compiled by members of the Moose organization.*

## Name the Moose!

As noted in the article above, the moose has a new home in the Cohoes Library. But he is in need of a name. If you have a suitable name for the moose, please send it to SCHS Moose Naming Contest, 415 Vliet Blvd., Cohoes, NY 12047 by May 25. A winner will be announced in the summer issue of our newsletter.





## Off the Top...

If you have been reading the Spindle City Historic Society Newsletter for a while now, you must know that I have a great interest in the W. J. Dickey House on Imperial Avenue and in that famous vaudeville dancer who grew up in the house, namely La Petite Adelaide. I guess my message to you historians out there who are doing research is, try, try and try again.

In researching Mary Adelaide Dickey, aka La Petite Adelaide, I have had my own ups and downs. On the grand scale of finding out information, while doing research at the Lincoln Center Library, I found out that they had two complete scrapbooks just on Adelaide and Hughes (JJ Hughes was her dancing partner and second husband). The disappointing news - neither could be located. I connected, via phone calls and e-mails with a very supportive research librarian there who searched for me with no avail. Every once in a while I checked in with her without much luck. Two years later she checked again and found that one of the scrapbooks had been pulled for copying to microfilm for its protection and it was available. I got myself down there and ended up with 245 pages of information (mainly in the form of reviews), sometimes four or five items per page. So, historians out there, try, try, try and try again.

The main reason for this message is what happened this weekend. This part is much more endearing. I Googled (Dickey Cohoes) and came up with a message on a list serve that was looking for information on some possible family members - my problem, the message was from September of 2002. I came close to just moving on, but I hesitated. Just in case, I sent a simple e-mail stating, "Is this still an active e-mail, I might have some information for you?" I sent that at 11:08 p.m., by the next morning I had the reply, "Paul. This is still active and I'd love to have the info. I'm still doing Genealogy and probably will until I either go blind, senile or am dead. Heck of an addiction isn't it! Thank you so much." Within the next 72 hours we had exchanged over a dozen e-mails, sharing a lot of information. Neither of us has quite hit the gold mine we were looking for, but it has each of us motivated again (and we shared a lot of fun information about the history of Cohoes). Who was it and what did we share, space is limited so tune in next issue. Again, my message here: try, try, try and try again.

A toast to Spring (written during another Northeast snowstorm)!

Paul D. Dunleavy  
President

## An Exhibit of Photographs of Cohoes by Mike Carey

On December 9, SCHS hosted an afternoon exhibit of photographs of Cohoes by Mike Carey. His collection of photos encompasses views of all sections of Cohoes, featuring the city's historic architecture and parks, and city activities including sporting events and holiday festivities. As a native of Lansingburgh, Mike spent a lot of time in Cohoes while growing up and has great enthusiasm for capturing the city on film. He is also official photographer for the Boght Fire Department. This was his 4<sup>th</sup> solo show.



## History of a Cohoes Quilt



*Lynne Shultis discusses her research on the quilt.*

Following the SCHS January 30 meeting, Lynne Shultis, an SCHS member with a longstanding interest in antique textiles and quilting, presented a program on a quilt made in the 1890s by Cohoes music teacher Esther A. Killian and her relatives, friends and students. Lynne told the story of her research on the redwork quilt and the ways in which its pictorial images, embroidered signatures and inscriptions reveal clues about the lives of its makers.

Her investigations also led to study of nineteenth century parlor music, children's books and art needlework advice literature, explorations of census records, newspapers, and published research on the Harmony Mills and the city of Cohoes, which provide additional insight into quilt making by immigrant millworker families and the influence of 19<sup>th</sup> century American popular culture. Lynne brought along the original quilt for SCHS members to view following her presentation, and also displayed a reproduction of the quilt she embroidered.



*The original redwork quilt.*

Lynne's research on the quilt has been published in *Uncoverings 2007*, the annual publication of research papers of the American Quilt Study Group.

She is also seeking additional information about the people involved in creating the quilt and their families, and other related aspects of Cohoes history. If you have any information about the following, please contact Lynne at [lshultis@nycap.rr.com](mailto:lshultis@nycap.rr.com).

- The Martin and Margaret Killian family: Esther A., Mary Killian Connery, Anne Killian McShane, Patrick (son), Ella/Ellen, John, Martin (son)
- The William Davidson family: Clara, Josephine Davidson Beers, Anna, William (son), Archie (son), Jane Henderson (wife)
- The Mary Cannon family
- The Mary McMullen family: Mary, William (husband), John (son)
- Lizzie F. Baldwin, 87 Vliet St.
- St. Patrick's church records
- St. John's Episcopal Church records

## **Spanish-American War Exhibit and "Remember the Maine" Memorial Service**

On February 16, SCHS and the Sons of the Spanish-American War, Joseph Melvin Leonard Camp #168, co-sponsored the opening reception for the exhibit "The 2<sup>nd</sup> NY and the United Spanish-American War Veterans ." The exhibit, displaying items from the collections of the Sons of the Spanish-American War, Joseph Melvin Leonard Camp #168, features

uniforms and gear used by Spanish American War veteran Frank O. Stiles, jr. of Troy, as well as medals awarded to him, newspaper accounts of the war



and publications concerning Spanish-American War veterans. The reception was preceded by a memorial service and wreath-laying at the United Spanish-American War Veterans Hiker Monument in Canal Square to memorialize the sailors lost aboard the U.S.S. *Maine* in 1898. The occasion was also the opportunity to present some recently discovered history. Cohoesier William C. Hanrahan, serving under the alias (his brother's name) John C. Hanrahan as a coxswain on the *Maine*, was believed to be a casualty of the sinking of the ship, and his name is included on a plaque on the Hiker monument. However, recent research by Joseph Melvin Leonard Camp President Raymond LeMay indicates that Hanrahan survived the disaster.



*Raymond W. LeMay III, President of the Sons of the Spanish-American War, Joseph Melvin Leonard Camp #168.*

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

comprises most periods and architectural styles produced in Cohoes throughout its history. This elevation to the Register theoretically offered a measure of protection. However, these safeguards were ignored by Wick's surrogates, who stated that: "the structure defeats the City's goals and needs." It is not quite clear how preserving a historic building in a historic district in a historic city like Cohoes defeats "goals and needs."

By no stretch of the imagination was 77 Mohawk Street an architectural classic. Is there one in Cohoes? It was built for a common purpose by itinerant craftsmen to serve the needs of an immigrant working class. It has survived within the plain humility of its brick exterior for at least one hundred and fifty years. It has witnessed the profound change of this place called Cohoes from a port on the Champlain and Erie Canals through an industrial phase that catapulted Cohoes into national prominence then through an economic free fall to its present status as a bedroom community.



At the time 77 Mohawk was constructed, Cohoes was not yet a city, and just barely an incorporated town. All of the area at the present northern end of downtown above Onieda Street was owned by the Cohoes Company. It was here at the north end that Cohoes started as an industrial center. Back then upper Mohawk Street was the primary business district while upper Remsen was the location of mills. During this period, Cohoes could almost be characterized as a frontier town. In 1842 The State had just opened up the Enlarged Erie Canal. The original Erie Canal was transferred to the Cohoes Company and became the main artery of water power feeding their land holdings in what is now downtown. This stretch of land from Cayuga Street to Fountain Place became prime real estate for industrial development. One mill was already there near Cayuga Street (which was called Factory Street at the time) and it was in this mill that power knitting was invented by Egberts and Bailey. This first mill was generally within what is the footprint of the Community Center. Today the original Erie Canal (later used for water power) lies under a linear park stretching from Ontario Street along Olmstead Street, behind the Community Center and Cayuga Plaza to the end of New Courtland Street at Fountain Place. It is along this stretch of embankment where Cohoes was born, at least industrially speaking. This was the western edge of what could have been defined as the historic core of Cohoes. 77 Mohawk is the last structure standing from that early time period. In a better world it would be lauded for the historic tales its walls could tell.

As compared to today, living conditions were harsh back then. Only a few streets, as we now know them, were defined as public thoroughfares. These streets were ankle deep in mud during wet weather and rutted, hard and dusty during dry periods. There was no such thing as sidewalks, only an occasional platform of sorts in front of places of business to help dislodge mud or animal waste from shoes and boots. For the most part, water was drawn from the power canals for cooking, bathing and drinking. As housing and industry proliferated along the canals, the water became more and more contaminated with industrial and human waste. Cholera was a frequent visitor. These canals, although a boon to commerce and industry, were additionally hazardous to human life because their banks were unprotected by barriers of any kind. On occasion they became a terminal slippery slope in the darkness of night. Alcohol greatly enhanced the odds for tragedy. Streets intersecting them, at first, were traversed by rickety wood bridges but soon "stone arches" were built. Incidentally, recent excavations for the new Hudson River Bank (now First Niagara) exposed the long buried stone bridges at Seneca and then Oneida Streets. The power canal remnants under Ontario Street, it is said, could accommodate an 18 wheeler. Originally it was a very large ravine arched with brick in the 1860s. This gorge, beginning on the hill,

descended in a meandering direction under the new Rite Aid, down Ontario with a sharp left through Silliman Park, through Cohoes Commons to the river. Primeau's Auto Body Garage is built on the former path of this chasm.

Along the way myriad individuals, from presidents to the severely destitute, have crisscrossed 77 Mohawk's location. Future President Chester A. Arthur, as a young man, taught school in Cohoes at what was called the "Depot School." This school was on Oneida Street close to the railroad tracks. Arthur passed by the site of 77 Mohawk regularly on his way to his duties as principal. After leaving Cohoes to practice law in New York City, he eventually became Quartermaster General of the State of New York during the Civil War. His job was to direct provisions and material needs to New York State troops. Arthur never forgot Cohoes, because there were still relatives of his here. You may be familiar with the book *History of Cohoes* by Arthur Masten. Masten was Chester Arthur's nephew. At any rate, Cohoes provided socks and underwear to the New York soldiers during the war, therefore giving Cohoes' economy a huge boost which resulted in more mills and the population to work in them.

Future president Teddy Roosevelt's impact in Cohoes was not quite so impressive. While Governor of New York, he was extended an invitation to attend a St. Bernard's Fair, which was being held in Larkin's Hall. The hall was in what is now the parking lot of 77 Mohawk. He accepted the invitation, had dinner at St. Bernard's rectory then traveled to the Fair in his coach. Roosevelt's visit was a little more ominous than it appeared. He was softening up Cohoesiers to mitigate the anger when the Erie Canal would be closed in the city to be replaced by the Barge Canal routed through Waterford.

Throughout the span of three centuries the merchants and vendors of 77 Mohawk's commercial spaces have ranged from auto repair to wallpaper sales with a varied mixture sandwiched in between. Nevertheless the end has been contrived for a venerable old landmark that still had some life left in her until acquired by the Wick organization. The demolition will occur because "of the economic opportunities provided" by a parking lot within what is already a small sea of parking spaces. It's best not to think about that concept for too long.

Walter Lipka

Note: The quoted statements in this column, except for the excerpt from the Zoning Code, are from documents in the public record submitted as part of the State Environmental Quality Review Act process. The opinions expressed are those of the author.



**Spindle City Historic Society Membership Application**

[www.timesunion.com/communities/spindlecitcity](http://www.timesunion.com/communities/spindlecitcity)

[www.spindlecitcity.net](http://www.spindlecitcity.net)

President - Paul Dunleavy

First Vice President - Daniele Cherniak      Second Vice President - Tor Shekerjian

Secretary - Linda C. Christopher      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		

*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

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Mail completed form with membership fee, payable to Spindle City Historic Society, to:  
June Cherniak, Treasurer, 415 Vliet Boulevard, Cohoes, NY 12047

**UPCOMING EVENTS**

**Wednesday, March 26** - Spindle City Historic Society meeting. 7 p.m., Cohoes Visitor's Center.

**Tuesday, April 1 - Friday, May 9** - 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Cohoes High School Art Show. An exhibit of artwork by Cohoes High School students. Cohoes Visitor's Center. Exhibit can be viewed during regular Visitor's Center hours (11 a.m. - 4 p.m. Tuesday - Friday).

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

**Wednesday, May 28** - Spindle City Historic Society meeting. 7 p.m., Cohoes Visitor's Center.

**Sunday, June 8** - A presentation about Albany Rural Cemetery by author, historian and businessman Peter Hess. 1 p.m., Cohoes Visitor's Center.

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

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

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



The mastodon goes west! SCHS received a report from member Barry McGraw, our 2007 raffle winner. Barry is delighted with his prize, and the carved mastodon occupies an honored place in his office in Arizona.

*Photo credits this issue: Walter Cherniak, Barry McGraw*

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