

## The Week the Water Went Out

By Anne Marie Nadeau

My mother, Rhea Grandchamp Nadeau, had several dear friends who were much older than she was. When these elderly ladies visited our home, the conversations were always interesting and especially gossipy. Having all worked in the cotton mills at some time, they often spoke of “the good old days” in Cohoes. They discussed fellow workers and their bosses. These gatherings were really “hen parties.” One of these women was Malvina Payette, whom we fondly called “Viney.” During their reminiscences it was mentioned that, “Viney got married THE WEEK THE WATER WENT OUT.” Hmm. What did that mean?

Since no one at the Spindle City Historic Society knew what that expression meant, I decided to solve that mystery myself. My first step was to find “Viney’s” wedding date. Fortunately, in the French genealogy section of the Cohoes Library I found that “Viney” was married August 22, 1910. My next step was to read microfilm of an old Cohoes newspaper which was published at that time. The year 1910 was not available so I looked for August newspapers in the years before and after 1910. Local newspapers 100 years ago devoted much space to neighborhood news and personal items of interest to all. The following is a composite of local news of the day in the early days of the twentieth century.

### ***The Cohoes Republican, August 19 to August 31, 1912***

Next week (August 26 to September 3, 1912) will be vacation week in Cohoes, All of the mills of the city operated by water power will remain closed throughout this week and operations will be resumed the day after Labor Day (Tuesday, Sept. 3, 1912). This year marks the 32<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of Labor Day.

*THE WATER WENT OUT for vacation time August 24<sup>th</sup> in 1888, 1889 and this year. The earliest date was July 4, 1879 for 10 days and the latest Sept. 8, 1883 for one week.*



During the time the water is drawn from the canals, necessary repairs will be made to the plants and factories and other waterways. Sometimes new water wheels, which last for years, are to be put in some mills. This means a large expense and lots of trouble to repair the wheel.

Employees of the company who are not at their regular work in the mills have the preference of securing employment as there is a large amount of work to be done in repairing the canals of the water supply and in the mills themselves.

Earlier this month, The Cohoes Company filed an application with the State of New York for the land under the Mohawk River, below the Cohoes Falls, for the building of a big electric power station so that in the future

the mills will be able to operate at all times of the year with equal expediency and will never be obliged to shut down on account of low water.

These are some of the repairs that will be done in the mills this coming week:

New water wheels are being installed in the *Harmony Mills*, the *Cohoes Iron Foundry and Machine Works* and the old *Egbert Mill* on the corner of Remsen and Factory streets.

*Tivoli Mill #1* will have a new slate roof.

*Peerless Fibre Company* has new machines and will renovate old ones.

At the *Enterprise Mill* on Courtland St., the interior of the mill is being remodeled and renovated. Workmen are also re-enforcing with concrete the east wall of the power canal at the side of the mill.

The *Hope Knitting Company* and *Fitwell Knitting* are both installing new boilers.

The *Granite Mill* is getting an entirely new heating system.

*Fuld and Hatch* is also undergoing alterations.

## Other Activities During Vacation Week

A few weeks ago, local vacation savings clubs began to distribute the \$20,000.00 that had been saved up for the annual outing. As a result, a large number of employees of the mills will be enabled to spend a week or two at the seashore, mountains or country. All trains leaving this city Saturday and Sunday were well filled with Cohosiers bound on their annual vacations.

These are some of the destinations of the vacationers: Sacandaga Park, Lake George, Saratoga Lake, Glens Falls, Snyder's Lake, Friends Lake, Elizabethtown, Sylvan Beach (near Syracuse), Atlantic City and Brighton Beach.

*(Compiler's note: There were no French names listed as going out of town.)*

For those not leaving town, there are many day trips being sponsored by various organizations. Fourth Ward Republicans are having a clam bake at Murray's Grove. St. John's Church has an excursion to Ondawa Park. Sacred Heart church has a picnic excursion to Averill Park. Cohoes Lodge R.A.M. has an excursion to Sylvan Beach. Painters and Decorators are having a festival at Larkin Hall. By far, the most popular excursion leaving Cohoes during vacation week is the Knights of Columbus excursion to Sacandaga Park at the low fare of \$1.25 for adults and 75 cents for children. Excursion trains leaving N.Y.C. & H.R.R.R. depot, Cohoes, at 7:45 and 8:00 a.m. Monday, August 26<sup>th</sup>.

*(Compiler's note: 1,645 people took that train ride in 1912 which was 425 more than in 1911.)*

Others planned a different type of vacation. In the neighborhood of 100 people left for the hop fields of Schoharie County. Many Cohosiers take their vacation in this manner each year, going to the same place to help in gathering the hop crop and enjoy the pleasure attendant upon the work. *(Hops are used in brewing beer.)*



*This article came to be because of a wedding that took place THE WEEK THE WATER WENT OUT in 1910. Following are some of the weddings that took place that week in 1912 on Sunday, Monday and Tuesday.*

The wedding of Charles Surprenant and Addie St. Esprit was solemnized yesterday in St. Joseph's church by Msgr. Dugas, the pastor. Paul St. Esprit and Zephirin Surprenant were the witnesses. The couple is receiving the well wishes of mutual friends throughout the city.

Francis Fountaine and Samilia Robert, both of Cohoes, were married at St. Joseph's church this morning by Rev. Father J.B.P. LeFebvre, assistant pastor. Theophile Fountaine and Amable Robert were the witnesses. Both of the contracting parties are well known in the city and they are being generally congratulated.

The marriage of Walter J. Duffy, very well known in this city and vicinity as a young business man of ability, and Miss Mary Shields was solemnized at 10 o'clock this morning at St. Bernard's church by Rev. Father Francis A. Roach, assistant pastor, in the presence of many friends and relatives. The bridesmaid was Miss Sarah Shields

a sister of the bride, and the groomsman William O'Neill. The bride was attired in a traveling suit of blue with hat to match and the bridesmaid wore a handsome dress of light colored material. After the ceremony Mr. and Mrs. Duffy left immediately for Atlantic City and other ports south. They will reside on Main street on their return to the city.

*Compilers note: For another couple, a reception was held at the bride's home. A couple who were married in St. Patrick's church took a short wedding trip and were the recipients of a large number of handsome and valuable gifts.*

I hope you enjoyed reading about life in Cohoes 96 years ago as much as I did writing about it.

*Originally published in the Fall 2008 issue of the Spindle City Historic Society newsletter*