

The Discovery

“In the month of September, 1866 the workmen engaged in excavations for the foundation of a new mill to be erected by Harmony Mill Company, of Cohoes, N.Y., discovered the lower jaw of a mastodon with a single foot bone, resting upon a projection of rock between two depressions or concave walls of small pot-holes, in the margin of what afterward proved to be a larger pot-hole.”

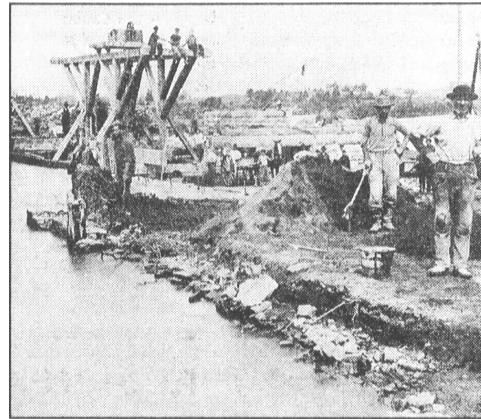


Harmony Mill #3, today standing on the discovery site of the bones

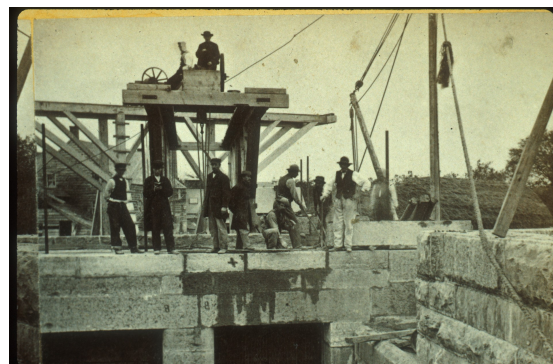
“Several thousand of loads of muck and peaty soil with trunks and branches of decayed trees had been removed previous to coming to the level where the jaw was found. . . .”



“The discovery of the jaw with a single bone in such a position led to the inference that other parts of the skeleton would be found at the bottom of the pot-hole, could it be reached, and the progress of the excavation was watched with great interest. After considerable delay, the excavation was resumed and the peaty earth was removed from the eastern and central part of the pot-hole, which later proved to be the deepest portion. In the bottom of this cavity, lying upon a bed of clay, broken slate, gravel and water-worn pebbles, and covered with river ooze and vegetable soil, lay the principal parts of the mastodon skeleton . . . the head, with tusks unbroken and undisturbed, was directed to the eastward. . . .” according to a report by Professor James Hall, the New York State Geologist.



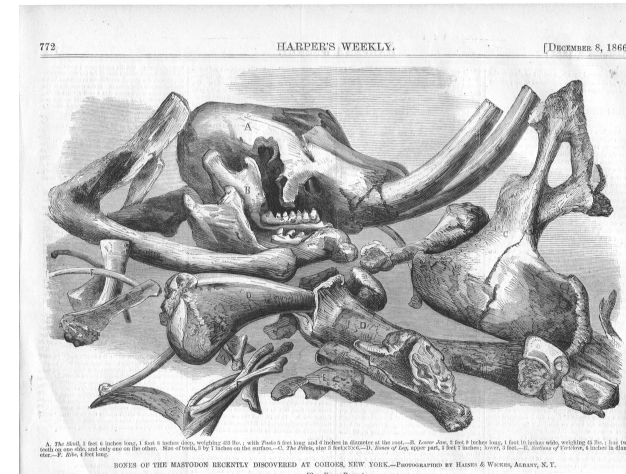
Photographs of excavation for Mill #3 construction (NYS Museum)



In the Headlines

This event became the talk of the town and was quite vividly described in one issue of the *Cohoes Cataract* newspaper on September 29th:

“Assuredly there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed in our philosophy! Those who during the present generation, have trod the earth of Cohoes have never taken onto their wildest imaginings the strange things that were concealed beneath the surface. But the late excavations made by the Harmony Company have brought to light the fact that a huge mastodon once dwelt where our village now stands, in an age that has been followed by the mightiest convulsions and upheavals. Fifty feet below the surface the jaw of this monster has been found, and has created in our village such a sensation as few events ever excited. The jaw is somewhat decayed and flaky but the teeth are in excellent preservation.”



Engraving of the discovered bones from Harper's Weekly December 8, 1866

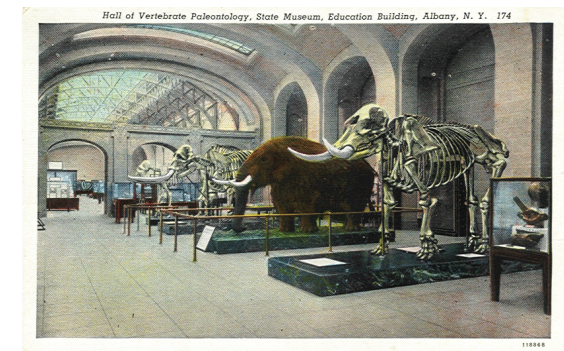
On the Move

After two-thirds of the bones were recovered, the mastodon's skeleton was displayed in the offices of the Harmony Mills Company. Later it was exhibited at the Troy County Fair and at various other places. The State of New York purchased the mastodon bones for \$2,000.



The bones on display in the Harmony Mills Office

In 1867 the almost complete skeleton was assembled and displayed at the State Cabinet of Natural History on State Street in Albany; it was later on exhibit in the museum in the State Education Building. When the museum was moved to its current location on Madison Avenue in Albany, the bones were put into storage.



The mastodon bones and replica on display at the Museum in the State Education Building, in Albany

Seeing the Mastodon Today

Today the conserved and reassembled Cohoes Mastodon stands in the New York State Museum, enriched by information obtained by leading scientists studying this magnificent specimen.



The mastodon replica that once stood beside the bones in the State Education Building now resides in the Cohoes Public Library on Mo-

hawk Street and can be viewed during regular library hours.

On North Mo-hawk Street north of Harmony Mill #3 there is a historic marker commemorating the discovery of the mastodon.



Mastodon Facts



The Cohoes mastodon was a young male who stood about 8 feet, 5 inches tall. His tusks are 4 feet, 6 inches long. His spine is 15 feet long and he weighed between 5 and 6 tons. The mastodon is named for its teeth. In Latin, *Mast* means nipple and *Dont* means teeth. The scientific name for this creature is *Mammut americanum*.

Mastodons ranged in size from 6 to 10 feet tall and were 15 feet long from the base of trunk to root of tail. They weighed between 4 and 6 tons, and had a life span of 60 years. They lived in North America – from Alaska to Central Mexico. They fed on shrubs, herbs and trees and had few predators besides the saber-toothed cat and early humans.



The Spindle City Historic Society

is a group of individuals who...

...publish a quarterly newsletter with stories about people, places and events of Cohoes history

...present programs, tours, exhibits and events about Cohoes and regional history

...promote and assist with original historical research

...advance a greater understanding of the history of the State of New York, particularly of Cohoes and its surrounding area

...gather, preserve, display, and make available for study artifacts, relics, books, manuscripts, papers, photographs, and other records and material relating to the history of Cohoes and the Capital Region

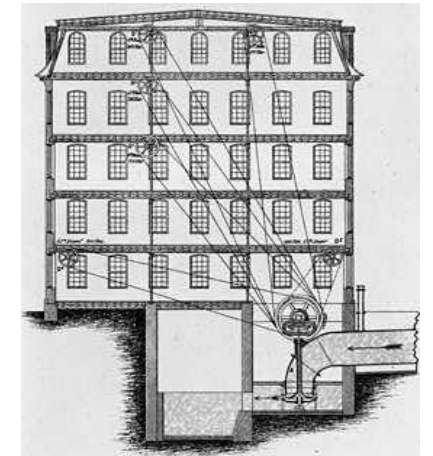
...develop signage that marks places of historic interest

...advocate for the maintenance of the historical character of Cohoes by encouraging preservation and restoration of its physical structures

Find out more about our upcoming events on our website and facebook page

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membership@spindlecit.net

A Guide to the Cohoes Mastodon



Spindle City Historic Society

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