

Spindle City Historic Society

Volume 2 Issue 1

Spring 1999

DO YOU KNOW.....

....that the Harmony Mills officially became a **National Historic Landmark** in January 1999?

....that around 1830, the water rights on the Mohawk River were sold to the Cohoes Company for \$1.00 by Patroon Stephen vanRensselaer?

....that Irish Poet, Thomas Moore, wrote 34 lines of verse immortalizing the Cohoes Falls after a visit in 1804?

....that, in October 1899, then Gov. Teddy Roosevelt came to Cohoes to give the opening remarks for St. Bernard's three week long Fall Festival?

....that, in 1900, the area at the end of Oneida Street, near the Champlain Canal, was known as "Little Poland"?

....that the first president of the Cohoes Savings Bank, chartered on April 11, 1851 as Cohoes Savings Institution, was Egbert Egberts, son of a Revolutionary War officer?

....that, in 1880, foreign-born residents made up 79.4% of the population of Cohoes?

....that the First United Methodist Church in Cohoes celebrates its 160th Anniversary in May? Their original chapel, erected on Mohawk Street in 1820, was the first within the present city limits.

....that the Leversee Family, one of the original families to settle in the Cohoes area, built their farmhouse in the vicinity of present day 318 Vliet Street?

....that, during the Civil War period, Amity Street was a sheltered dirt road known as a "Lovers' Lane"?

Wanted: Ephemera (old pictures, business letterhead, billings, postcards and other memorabilia)

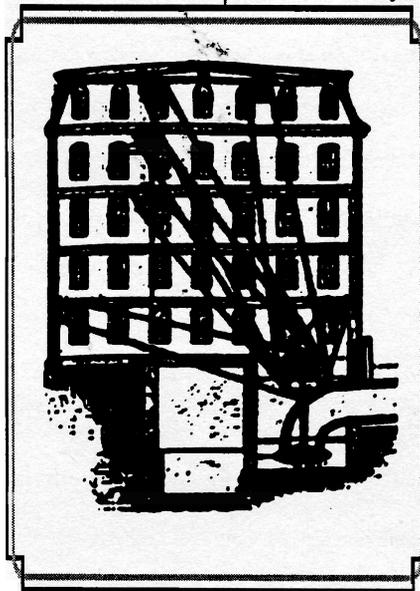
RACHEL BLIVEN, LOCAL HISTORIAN

Rachel Bliven, author of the National Historic Landmark designation for the Harmony Mills Company, will present the Harmony Mills story at the SCHS Annual Meeting in April. Her slide presentation will include historic photographs shared by local citizens as well as historic newspaper accounts. Rachel has years of experience in researching the history of our area. She helped research and write the videos and exhibits in the RiverSpark Heritage Area Visitor Centers in Cohoes and Troy and wrote the National Historic Landmark nomination for the Kate Mullany House. Among Rachel's other projects have been the Heritage Area Visitor Centers in Seneca Falls, Whitehall, Kingston, and Buffalo as well as videos for Adirondack communities and the New York State Capitol, to mention only a few.

Many thanks to Rachel, Interpretive Programs Coordinator with the Mohawk Valley Heritage Corridor Commission and a SCHS member, for all the work that she's done for New York State history and preservation. Come to our Annual Meeting/Program to learn more about our own Harmony Mills!

OUR WISH LIST

Although our Society's primary wish is to raise awareness of Cohoes' history and encourage participation in preserving it, we also have some more modest wishes. They include: office space to conduct the Society's business and store information, used office furniture/equipment, supplies and volunteers to help research a variety of subjects. You do not have to be a member of the Society to help research a topic that interests you. Since the Spindle City Historic Society is a not-for-profit organization, the value of donations may be tax-deductible.



HARMONY MILLS

Cohoes' First National Historic Landmark

Once the extension of Harmony Mill #3 was completed in 1872 it became the largest cotton mill in the country. It was referred to as the model cotton producing plant in the country, with industrialists from around the nation and abroad visiting the complex. Locally, the Cohoes Cataract newspaper noted that, situated in a pleasant and attractive setting, the “.....architecture and detailed finish made it the principal ornament of the city”.

The success of the Harmony Mills was not realized “overnight” and a number of factors provided the basis for its eventual dominance: its location at the confluence of the Mohawk and Hudson Rivers plus the canal systems, availability of cheap water power and the contributions of a number of individuals: e.g.: Canvass White, visionary, canal builder and civil engineer for the Cohoes Company; inventors, Augustus & Demas Goffee, Timothy Bailey, John Maxwell, and S. D. Fairbank with their development of knitting, carding and spinning machines. In fact, Timothy Bailey’s reciprocating frame introduced the first power knitting machine.

Originally, the Cohoes area was a farming hamlet, populated primarily by the Dutch and English. Purchases of large portions of these farms eventually became the Cohoes Company. *By 1826, it controlled* most of the power of the river, a control which was held until around 1910 when it was sold to New York Power & Light. The construction of the Erie and Champlain Canals, beginning in 1817 and completed around 1823, opened up the west and north to commerce and brought new inhabitants to Cohoes, including many Irish who eventually worked in the Cohoes factories.

Manufacturing in Cohoes had its start even before the inception of the canal with the building of a factory, by the Cohoes Manufacturing Co., in 1811, which produced iron screws for woodwork. When the factory burned around 1815-1816, it was rebuilt as a cotton factory, the only one in the county at the time.

In 1837, Harmony Manufacturing Company began the erection of a large cotton factory on Harmony Hill and three, two-story brick tenements for use of its operatives. The builder was Joshua Clark and the mill was named after Peter Harmony, founder, first president and one of the most enterprising and wealthy men of the era. In the same year, the Erie Canal began the project to enlarge it and change its course, the project being completed in 1843. By 1847, a variety of factories had sprung up in Cohoes which manufactured cotton, cotton and worsted apparel, axes, bedsteads and tools; there were grist and saw mills, paper and paint mills, an iron foundry and machine shops.

Initially, the Harmony Manufacturing enterprise was not considered successful and in 1850, its assets were sold by the sheriff and the original corporation ceased to exist. It was then purchased by Garner & Company who also operated mills in Rochester, Newburg, Wappingers Falls and Reading , PA. It was incorporated in approximately 1853 and Robert Johnston was named superintendent of the operation. Robert Johnston, born in Dalston, England in 1807, worked in cotton mills as a child and became an expert spinner. He

immigrated to American (Providence, RI) in 1830 and moved to Cohoes in 1858. His practical knowledge, intuition and management of the mill greatly contributed to its success.

In 1856-57, Harmony Mill #2 plus 22 brick tenements were built. Progress continued, helped along by Cohoes based inventions integral to the knitting and cotton mills and the Harmony Mills expanded. From 1859 to 1866, Harmony purchased, enlarged and improved the Ogden Mills; an addition to them in 1864 connected the two buildings. They also purchased the Strong Mill, enlarging and remodeling it too, and built Mill #3 plus 100 new tenements. With these accessions, a local monopoly in cotton goods manufacturing was attained.

Harmony Mill #3 was built in stages: the north section 1866-1868, the south and central sections 1871-72. In excavating for the north section, bones of a mastodon were found. The skeleton of the mammoth was presented to the New York State Museum and Mill #3 became known as the "Mastodon Mill".

The whole continuous building was 1,185' long and 76' wide with five stories and a mansard roof. The large central tower connected the north and south wings. The mill was designed by David H. VanAuken, C.E. and was uncommonly elaborate (in the Victorian style) for an industrial structure. The junction of the extension with the main building was marked by the central tower, a fire proof structure eight stories in height, the main entrance underneath this tower substantially built of granite. In June 1868, The Cohoes Cataract reported that the building of the mill required 2,000,000 feet of lumber, 1,000,000 yards of stone, 3,000,000 bricks, 1,000,000 lbs of wrought and cast iron, huge amounts of sand, limestone and nails. Its vertical turbines were among the largest in the US and it was lighted by 1,000 gas lights. The foundation was of cut granite blocks, the window heads and sill in the north section were of sandstone; it had arched doorways and curving wood staircases inside. When running, it could produce 60,000 yards of cloth per day.

The Harmony Mills were selected to exemplify the ultimate development in American Cotton mill technology by the eminent British textile engineer, Evan Leigh and in 1873, it was described as the richest, largest and most complete Cotton Manufacturing Establishment on the American continent. In the niche of the central tower, a colossal bronze statue of the owner, Thomas Garner stands. It was cast by the Ames Manufacturing Co of Chicopee, MA from a model made by Millmore, celebrated Boston artist.

At this time, a large influx of French-Canadians immigrated to Cohoes adding to the substantial Irish population already employed in the mills, and in 1869 Cohoes had 16,000 inhabitants and Harmony Mills employed 5,172 employees by 1872.

The Harmony Mills was a patriarchal company. The housing, brick tenements which were erected for rental by their employees, incorporated quality materials and good workmanship, standards which provide for their occupancy even at this time. In addition to good housing for its operatives, it established the Harmony Mill Union Sabbath School, 5 boarding houses for its unmarried employees, company stores tended by company employees, a company clinic, volunteer fire company and, in the early 1900's, a day-care center. It maintained its own streets, had its own repair staff of plumbers, masons, mechanics, etc. and, in fact, owned three-quarters of the property in Cohoes. The Mills provided relatively steady employment and stability to a population that had known very poor working conditions and poverty.

To its advantage, Harmony Mills had a sizable cheap workforce of primarily women and children, textile technology which increased production, persuasive company paternalism, and worker dependency which

inhibited protests. (In order to remain in Harmony Mills Co. housing, at least one family member had to be employed there and families could be evicted if one member was a striker). Immediately following the Civil War, the make-up of the Mills' employees was as follows: 2/3 female, 58% of employees under 20 years old and about only 16% were males over 20. There was frequent turnover as women got married and left the mills; when male children/adolescents got older, they often found employment in other areas which paid better. All of the above, contributed to a workforce whose protest was generally low-key, unorganized and lacking in direction. In effect, the company controlled the social, economic and political life of Cohoes.

In 1872, during the nationwide "panic", the Harmony Mills shut down for one month beginning in October 1873 but, basically, it and other Cohoes mills weathered the panic better than other parts of the country. However, approaching the turn of the century, Harmony Mills was faced with increased competition from eastern and southern mills, excessive taxation, labor disputes and a decline in the importance of water power in the manufacturing process.

In 1910, Garner & Company sold its interest in the Harmony property and the Cohoes Company. In 1911, the Mills were incorporated under the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, having been purchased by Saco-Lowell and Draper Corporation. They never regained the prominence they once had. A five year liquidation plan was voted on, beginning in 1932. Harmony Mill #3, with an assessed valuation of \$500,000, was sold for \$2,500 in 1937.

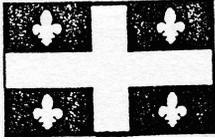


MARK YOUR CALENDAR

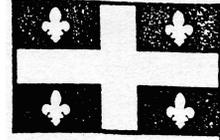


April 18, 1999	Spindle City Historic Society Program, Cohoes Music Hall from 1:00-4:00PM <u>Harmony Mills: The Company that Built the Town</u> , by Rachel Bliven.
April 24 & 25, 1999	Exhibit by Bernie Ouimet at the Waterford Museum & Cultural Center <u>French-Canadian Influence on the History & Culture of Cohoes & Waterford</u>
May 1, 1999	<u>May Day in Troy</u> - An All-Day Celebration of Labor
May 8, 1999	<u>Canal Fest at Lock 2</u> , Waterford - Music, food, crafts, boat rides, and more.
May 15, 1999	<u>Peebles Island Open House</u> from 11:00AM to 4:00PM - Special events, exhibits, guided history walks, and tour of conservation laboratories
May 19, 1999	The Albany Institute of History & Art presents <u>Drawings of Emanuel & Charles Mickles</u> at the Cohoes Music Hall - 6:00 PM. Sponsored by The Spindle City Historic Society and The Society of Architectural Historians.

The French-Canadian Influence in Cohoes



ROOTS



Following the Civil War, Cohoes was in a good position to attract immigrants. It could offer jobs, dependable wages - generally speaking-and, in many cases, lodging. This was much better than being on a farm where one was always at the mercy of the elements and one's income was never a certainty. So it was that the French Canadians started coming to Cohoes.

According to the *Guide Francais de la Nouvelle Angleterre et de l'Etat de New York*, the first French Canadians came to Cohoes in 1831. They were LaLouise Benoit dit Cayen, Guillaume and Etienne L'Ecuyer, Henri Marcoux, Joseph Bagley dit Peclair, Bourdon Russeau, Joseph Caisse, George Beaudoin, a shoemaker by the name of Paquette, Francis Marcoux, someone by the name of Hebert, David Godin, John Sinclair, Louis Carriere, Marcel Duhamel, Pierre Chenard, Jerome and Jean Germain. A few years later, they were joined by Louis Ducharme and Pierre Benoit dit Cayen. In 1839, there were about twenty French Canadian families in Cohoes.

In 1839, a Mr. Jean Dalaire, from St. Jean, Quebec, was in Cohoes on his way to Chicago, where he intended to live. There were jobs in Cohoes due to the work being done on the Erie and Champlain Canals. Friends in Cohoes convinced him to stay. He went to work for Wheeler & Sage, the contractors for the canals. His work must have been satisfactory because the contractors sent Dalaire back to Canada to recruit more French* workers. Dalaire made three trips to Canada and was able to recruit 300 French laborers. They were paid one dollar a day, a good wage at the time. (A room cost two dollars a week in 1840).

Other French immigrants followed. By 1842, there was the beginning of a French community in Cohoes. In 1847, a French-speaking Belgian priest, Father Bernard VanReeth, came to Cohoes. He visited the Catholics, numbering about 300 French and Irish families, and decided to establish a parish. The church, begun in 1847, is today's St. Bernard's Church of Cohoes.

Many more French immigrants came since, by 1868, the French population of Cohoes (and presumably North Side in Waterford) numbered 2,209. In that year, the French petitioned Bishop Conroy for a parish of their own. This was the second time they had asked for a parish, the first demand having been denied. This time, Bishop Conroy gave his permission. On June 18, 1868, St. Joseph's French Catholic Church of Cohoes, New York, was incorporated. On August 23 of that year, Father Joseph Saugon, a French priest who had formerly taught at the College of Turcoin, France, was named pastor. A lot was purchased on Congress Street, between White and Hart Streets and, on November 22, 1868, the corner stone of the church was laid, Bishop Conroy in attendance. The work on the church proceeded at such a pace that on December 12, 1869, the church was ready for dedication. Because Father Saugon was too sick to attend, Father Keveny celebrated the first Mass. The cost for the building and furnishing of the church amounted to \$10,837. Unfortunately, the new church had been built more with enthusiasm than with sound materials. It was soon realized that the building was not safe. In 1870, the steeple was removed because its weight threatened to crush the body of the church.

Bernard Ouimet

*The expression "French" will be used to mean French Canadians except when the content indicates otherwise.

Spindle City Historic Society

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<input type="checkbox"/> Senior Citizen Membership	\$ 5.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Contributing Membership	\$35.00
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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

Spindle City Historic Society

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