

# Spindle City Historic Society

Volume 3 Issue 1

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## DID YOU KNOW

...that the Cohoes-Waterford Bridge, a wooden span considered an insult to public enterprise, was destroyed by fire in 1871? The loss was of little concern to Cohoesiers since it had become a source of constant dread to those who had to cross it.

...that Clarence Darrow, the famous criminal lawyer, lectured the Cohoes Educational Forum the night of January 11, 1934 on crime, its causes and prevention?

...that the village newspaper became the *Cohoes Cataract* in 1849? Under a woodcut of the Falls appeared its motto "Goes sparkling, dashing, foaming on."

...that the first settlers of Cohoes belonged to or were descendents of colonists from Holland?

...that during November of 1880, a horse drowned in the power canal next to North Mohawk St.? The same water was used as city drinking water. The monthly meeting of the water board on January 11, 1881 determined that the dead horse was not a health hazard.

...that a campaign against the sale of poison liquor in Cohoes was launched in April 1934 by order of Police Chief John E. Burke?

...that around 1916-18, ladies, young girls and older children from the Harmony Hill area were taught knitting techniques, some knitting squares to be made into blankets for the soldiers during WWI?

...that in December, 1885 the first industrial electric lights in the city were installed in the Walker and Williams Batting Factory?

...that in 1886, Cohoes factories were rated the worst offender in the state in regard to employing children 14 years and younger?

...that the Spindle City Historic Society will hold its annual meeting on March 29, 2000 at 7:00PM at the Cohoes Community Center? Plan to attend!

## HISTORIAN'S NOTEBOOK

Cohoes City Hall is one of the four crown jewels of civic, material and spiritual architecture built during the year 1895. The other three are: the Masonic Temple on Renssen Street, St. John's Episcopal Church (the city library) and the Silliman Memorial Church. Never before or after were buildings of such stature constructed in our small city within a single year. Cohoes had reached its zenith as an industrial center and was about to begin its economic and political roller coaster descent throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Today, City Hall stands as a grande dame of city halls in the area, only bested in age by Albany City Hall which was built during the years 1881-1883. The others are younger in age or were not originally intended to be city halls. Mechanicville City Hall, for instance, was first used as a firehouse, the city of Rensselaer's as a factory and Watervliet's as a post office. Schenectady City Hall was

built in 1929-30 and Troy in 1974.

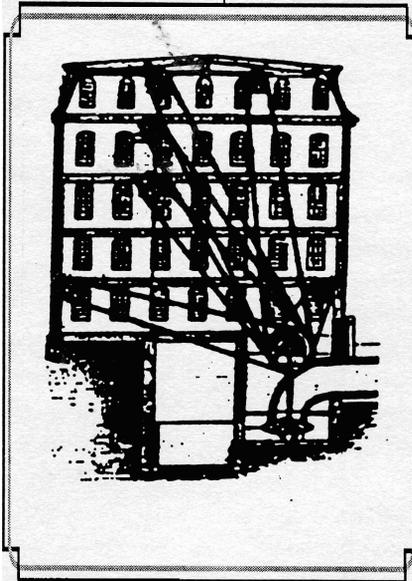
*Walter Lipka*

## SAVE OUR PRINT HISTORY

Cohoes Newspapers dating from 1860 to 1920 are currently housed at the New York State Museum. To preserve them, they must be microfilmed. A total of \$1,500 is necessary to complete this project. Anyone wishing to contribute may send donations to the Spindle City Historic Society at P.O.Box 375, Cohoes, NY 12047.

## WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

The Spindle City Historic Society welcomes new members *Susan Beattie, Thomas Comi, Barbara Demase, Frank Galarneau, Pauline Lavigne and Joan Ritson.*



## EGBERT EGBERTS

Today, the name Egbert Egberts would undoubtedly be a formidable burden to carry for someone born into our self-centered 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, during the late afternoon of Sunday, March 27, 1869, the quiet whispered utterance: "Egbert Egberts is dead" spread like wildfire in hushed tones of reverence throughout the town of Cohoes. The great man had died at 3:00PM and by dusk the entire settlement was mourning their loss. Tuesday, following his death, all business in the place shut down in respect to Egberts. A large assemblage gathered, both in and outside of the Reformed Church on Mohawk Street: his church, the one that he was instrumental in building.

His eulogy praised him as "having inflexible honesty, uprightness and a benefit to thousands of workers who were associated with him through his business." Also, "the edifices that bear his name will long remain as a monument to his business enterprise." Unfortunately, no buildings bearing his name, especially mills, remain. Three of his buildings do exist but their ownership has changed hands so often throughout the decades that any identity with him has been erased.

Egberts was born at Coeymans, NY in Albany County in 1791. His father, Anthony, settled there after he mustered out of the army of the War for Independence. The family history is obscure but by 1812 it is known that Egbert was in partnership with his brother Cornelius operating a store in Albany. The firm was called simply C & E Egberts.

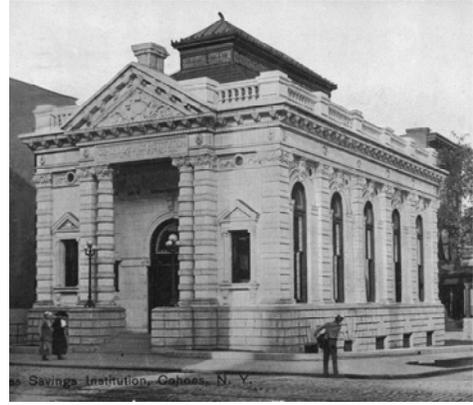
In 1826, Egberts, at age 35, had witnessed the entire political struggle that eventually launched the Erie Canal. A success, the canal was shipping heaven compared to graceless, sluggish wagon transport. In that same critical year, a group of entrepreneurs inspired by Canvass White, the gifted self-taught canal engineer, was about to incorporate a hydraulic power company. It was proposed that the "Cohoes Company" would harness the Mohawk River above the great falls. By diverting the water into ditches with a dam, then to waterwheels, cheap power could be made available for manufacturing.

Between 1826 and 1831, Egberts made the decision to become a knit goods manufacturer. Knit goods of the day were produced by clumsy hand operated knitting frames. With mass-produced goods emerging from every quarter, why not shirts, socks and drawers? Up in "Cahos" they were advertising available waterpower at very low prices. As good fortune would have it, Egberts found a mechanical wizard, in the guise of a cabinetmaker, working in Albany - Timothy Bailey.

Egbert hired Bailey and immediately sent him to Philadelphia to find a used hand-knitting machine. Tim found one, shipped it back to Albany, and within 6 days of his return, had the frame rigged with a hand crank. Over the course of the next year, he worked upstairs in a storefront perfecting his invention.

*(Cont'd)*

## THE COHOES SAVINGS BANK HISTORY



The Cohoes Savings Institution was chartered and incorporated by an Act of the Legislature of the State of New York, passed April 11, 1851. It was a mutual savings bank owned solely by its depositors. The doors of the new bank building were opened at 59 Oneida St., near Remsen St., on the morning of August 16, 1853. At this time, Cohoes was a little village of only 4,000 inhabitants and local business people founded the institution to serve themselves and their neighbors. This introduced a savings institution to the community that has always maintained its local character. Elected as its first president was **Egbert Egberts**, one of its incorporators. Along with President Egberts, the original trustees were men of prominence in both business and professional circles in the community. Although its first day deposits were a slow \$81.00 from 3 depositors, in 4 years the deposits climbed to \$29,248.78.

During the early years, the institution carried on its business through the Merchants Bank of Albany, whereby all money collected at the Cohoes office was sent to Albany. This was a wise move as it afforded a safe, profitable location for the people's money. In 1861, it changed its business techniques and began to make investments, issuing its first mortgage. Loans to develop real estate helped the community to grow. By 1880, the institution's assets exceeded \$570,000 and its resources and surplus showed a steady increase.

In August 1904, a lot at the corner of Remsen and Seneca Sts. was purchased while Wm. T. Dodge was president of the institution and a new building of terra cotta was completed in 1905. The Cohoes Savings Institution was renamed the Cohoes Savings Bank in 1922, by which time it had become a banking leader in New York State. In December 1923, bank president George H. McDowell realized that, due to the very large growth of deposits, the present quarters were inadequate, so an adjoining plot at 75 Remsen St. was purchased and an addition to the existing building was erected. In 1933, the bank merged with the Mechanics Savings Bank of Cohoes and the combined assets exceeded \$10,190,000.

In 1950, under the presidency of James S. Calkins and the executive presidency of Wm. A. Scott, the Cohoes Savings Bank began an extensive *(Cont'd)*

## Memories of Virginia McDonald

By Lawrence B. Favreau



*“The only liberties people have are those they exercise”* – Motto of the Cohoes Citizens Party

The Cohoes Citizens Party was an independent movement composed of people who were registered Democrats, Republicans, Conservatives, and Liberals as well as those without affiliation. The party’s candidate for mayor, Dr. James (Jay) McDonald, won office in 1963. During his tenure, Cohoes received the honor of being an “All American City” by the U.S. League of Municipalities and *Look* magazine.

Dr. McDonald’s wife, Virginia, and I co-chaired a fund drive and raised over \$550,000 of local monies and received matching funds, after many trips to the New York City regional offices of the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development, for the construction of the Cohoes Community Center which now stands at the corner of Cayuga and Remsen Streets.

Dr. James McDonanld died while in office in 1969. Virginia B. McDonald, a nurse and resident of Sunset Court, was selected by the Citizens Party to be its nominee for mayor. A special election was held in 1969 and she was voted in to serve for the two years remaining in Dr. McDonald’s term. Her opponent in this race was Samuel Sorel, a local insurance agent. Upon her election, she became the first woman mayor in the State of New York. She was again elected in 1971 in her own right to a full four-year term. In this contest her opponent was Frank Brandt.

During her time in office, Virginia was appointed to the Committee of Development of the National League of Cities, a lobbying organization of municipal leaders concerned with problems related to community development. She was also an active member of the New York State Conference of Mayors.

Cohoes was designated a “Model City” by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development during her term in office. Federal grant monies were given to the city for urban renewal (urban removal?), recreation, social programs, neighborhood improvements and youth and senior citizen programs.

Citizen participation was the name of the game then as people took great interest in the future of their city. Many committees were formed, comprised of members with a range of financial backgrounds and experience, to decide how these funds would best be spent. The former St. John’s church was purchased for the city public library and now stands as a fine example of adaptive reuse. The Music Hall was purchased, restored, and reopened in 1974 with a performance of *London Assurance* – the same play that opened the Hall in 1874. McDonald Towers was constructed for senior housing and the northern end of Remsen Street, where the structures stand, was permanently closed to traffic. New Courtland Street was opened and attracted new businesses: Equity Meat Products and Latham Heating.

New housing development sprang up on the edges of the city during this time. Recreational opportunities in the city were increased with the creation of a trail along the old Erie Canal towpath and the eventual completion of the Cohoes segment of a rails-to-trails path extending to Colonie and Niskayuna. The Overlook Park, offering an outstanding view of our treasured Cohoes Falls, was established.

Virginia McDonald’s salary as mayor was \$5000 per year. She was voted a raise to \$7000 by the Common Council but accepted only \$6000. The city tax rate then was \$55 per \$1000 of assessment.

Virginia McDonald was defeated in her run for mayor in 1975 by Ronald Canestrari, an attorney and our present NYS Assemblyman; the margin of victory was only 70 votes. She died of natural causes at the age of 86 on Wednesday, November 3, 1999. We, as Cohoesiers, can be indebted to her and her memory for her many accomplishments as mayor of the City of Cohoes.

RE-ELECT  
DR. J. McDONALD  
MAYOR

Success

ELECT  
VIRGINIA  
MCDONALD

VOTE  
FOR  
YOURSELF  
VOTE  
CITIZEN

VOTE  
CITIZEN

He has lived well and achieved success who  
has loved well, laughed often, loved well and  
much; who has enjoyed the trust and respect of  
his fellow man and the love of little children;  
who has filled his niche and accomplished his  
task; who has left the world better than he  
found it; who has never lacked appreciation of  
earth's beauty or failed to express it; who has  
always looked for the best in others, and given  
them the best he had; whose life was an  
inspiration; whose memory a benediction.

MODEL CITIES  
EXPOSITION  
1869-1969  
COHOES CENTENNIAL

VOTE  
CITIZENS

This was "Dr. Jay."

I loved him dearly,

Virginia

COHOES, N.Y.  
ALL-AMERICA CITY

COHOES  
ALL-AMERICA CITY  
FINALIST



## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

**March 26** at 2:00PM at the Waterford Museum - *A Land Beyond the River*, Author/Speaker Jack Casey

**April 30** from 1:00-6:00PM at Peebles Island – *Hudson/Mohawk Labor Festival*

Music, speakers, workshops, poetry, videos, food, bus tour of Riverspark Historic Area.

**May 1** from 6:30-9:30PM at the Cohoes Music Hall/Riverspark Visitors Center – *May Day Celebration*

Welcome by Mayor McDonald, The Future of Labor – Paul Cole, AFL-CIO, Dan Walkowitz, Author, Michael Yates, Univ. of Pittsburgh and Bhavair Pesai, NYC Taxi Driver, plus music and light refreshments.

**May 13** – Waterford Canal Fest at Lock 2

**May 20** – Peebles Island Open House (Delaware Ave. off Ontario St., Cohoes before the 112<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge).

### Egberts

He refined the machine until it produced four shirt bodies at a time, racing the threads back and forth 30 times per minute. Cutting edge stuff for the era!!

Timothy's brother, Joshua, a farmer, saw the light and joined the partnership. Egberts and the brothers Bailey abandoned their Albany laboratory and moved into one floor of a newly built factory in Cohoes. Actually it was the only factory in Cohoes. The first one built had burned down in 1829. This one was first to receive water from the Cohoes Company's new ditch. The year was 1832. Starting slowly at first, the Bailey brothers, and others apprenticed to the task, continued to build machines. The Egberts and Bailey partnership continued to grow and eventually prosper. The business flourished over the course of the next 11 years forcing the partners to build a new mill alongside a new Cohoes Company ditch which was located on what later would become Ontario Street. Today the site is the parking lot for the Spindle City Market, and if you look carefully, you can see the fading ghost of the old Egberts and Bailey mill on the parking lot side of the building.

In 1852, at age 61, Egberts divested himself of his manufacturing investments and retired. For the next 17 years, he was very active in the community.

In retrospect, it must be said that Egberts had a penchant for "firsts". He was the driving force behind the manufacture of waterpower produced knit goods - the first in America. In Cohoes, he was the president of the first bank in Cohoes, the first gas/light commission, on the board of the first Albany and Cohoes railroad, the first board of health and on the commission to buy the first fire engine. He built the first high school and even built what was the first community center in Cohoes - the precursor to the venerable Cohoes Music Hall.

Today the only tangible reference to the name Egberts is Egbert Street, which was at best a path during his lifetime. However, this path led to the reservoir, which was another "first" in which he was involved.

### Bank

rehabilitation program to modernize the interior of the quarters. This remodeling was done by the office of Marcus T. Reynolds, Architects. Reynolds was a noted Albany architect whose best-known work in the area is the D&H Building at the foot of State Street in Albany. The project was enhanced by historical murals, painted by David Cunningham Lithgow, depicting area Indian legends and the Cohoes cataract, the coming of the white man, the birth of industry and the discovery of the Cohoes Mastodon during the excavation for Harmony Mill #3. These murals continue to be an attraction and the bank provides booklets that include reproductions of the murals and a brief history of the bank up to 1951. At this time, there were fifteen trustees and eight officers, all community businessmen and professionals.

Since then, the Cohoes Savings Bank has expanded throughout the Capital Region to include twenty branches, among them Queensbury, Catskill, Schaghticoke, Clifton Park and Halfmoon. It is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Cohoes Bank Corp., Inc. December 1998 was a pivotal year in its history, as it went public under the leadership of president and CEO Harry L. Robinson. In the fiscal year ending 1999, the operating income increased to \$5.4 million, a 31.7% increase over the previous year. Total assets also increased 21.4%, a net loan growth of 26.2% was realized and 9,535,225 shares were issued. A one time, contribution was made to establish the Cohoes Savings Foundation, a charitable entity which will permit an independent means of funding community causes. The Foundation was funded with authorized but uninsured shares of the company's Common Stock. During Fiscal 1999, the Company declared dividends of \$528,000, - \$.06 per share of its common stock.

The Cohoes Savings Bank has remained "a bank of the community and for the community with the best of new-fashioned boldness and old-fashioned grace".

# *Spindle City Historic Society*

## OFFICERS & TRUSTEES

Linda C. Christopher, President

Walter Cherniak

Craig Bock/Helena Keilen, Secretary

Jayne Counterman

June Cherniak, Treasurer

Walter Lipka

Daniele Cherniak, First Vice President

Janice Tracey

Dennis Rivage, Second Vice President

Harry Woods, Sr.

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### MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

<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	<input type="checkbox"/> Tax-Deductible Donation	_____

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

Spindle City Historic Society

P.O. Box 375

Cohoes, New York 12047