

Spindle City Historic Society

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DID YOU KNOW

....that the Egberts High School hockey team won the Eastern New York interscholastic hockey championship in the 1911-1912 season? The team won 7 of 9 games.

....that a Cohoes baseball team called the White Stars were the 1921 Cohoes champions?

....that the Royal Five was a famous Cohoes basketball team in the first decade of the 20th century? One of the team's players, Leo Duval, went on to play center for an Albany team that succeeded in winning a basketball world championship in 1910.

....that on August 29, 1908 a four-mile race was conducted by the St. Agnes Athletic Association starting at Latham Corners and finishing in Cohoes at Brotherhood Park? Edward English of Cohoes bested the field of 48 runners from around the Capital District. He won a silver cup engraved with his name for the victory.

....that the Cohoes Insulars baseball team originated in the 1920s?

....that in 1885 there were 8000 French-Canadian residents in Cohoes, with new ones arriving daily?

....that Buffalo Bill Cody appeared at the Cohoes Opera House on February 2, 1884, along with a group of Sioux Indians? The show was called *The Prairie Waif*.

....that Cohoes has its own Baseball Hall of Fame? Two of its members, George Stacey Davis and Paul Bourgeois, are featured in this issue of our newsletter.

....that baseballs were once made in Cohoes? Caroline Comi sewed baseballs at home for the J. DeBeer Company during World War II.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

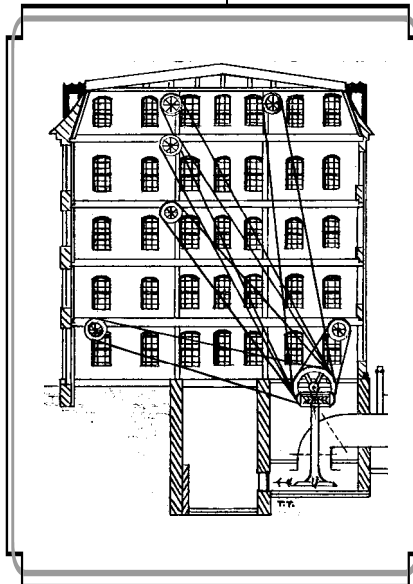
The Spindle City Historic Society welcomes new members *Paula Blizniak, Marlene Hickey, the Hudson Valley Pen Collectors, Joanne Kennedy, J.P. Madigan, jr., and Elizabeth Squires.*

Thanks to the Rickman Press for printing this issue of our newsletter, and for reliable printing service since our first issue in 1998.

HISTORIAN'S NOTEBOOK

George Stacey Davis

This issue features an extended version of Historian's Notebook, which offers unique perspective on some of the circumstances surrounding the induction of George Stacey Davis into the Baseball Hall of Fame, written by our regular columnist (and Cohoes City Historian) Walter Lipka. Walter has extensively researched Davis' life and baseball career, and was instrumental in earning Davis a place in Cooperstown.



Back on Sunday, July 26, 1998, a contingent of buoyant Cohoesiers boarded a tour bus headed for Cooperstown to attend its annual Induction Ceremony at baseball's national shrine. Fortifying the bus was a small fleet of passenger cars all focused on one thing: witnessing the induction of their hometown son into baseball's holy of holies. He was to be immortalized as "a star of shining prominence" which also established him as one of the best to have ever played the national game. To put Davis into some kind of perspective, consider that in 1902 he was the highest paid shortstop in the American League; his salary was \$4,000 a year plus perks.

Today, one hundred years later, the highest paid shortstop in the American League is Alex Rodriguez; he garners somewhere in the neighborhood of 20 million dollars a year (and perks).

The Davis family can be traced to the early days of Cohoes. They sought work here in the mills after fleeing Ireland during the Great Famine. Arriving before Cohoes was incorporated as a village in 1848, they settled in the Sargent Street area. The family name, in various branches, persisted in the city well into the 20th century. His fame was affirmed here in 1895 by his friends and fans, when he was declared the "idol of Cohoes." However, by the decade of the 1950s his former fans were well into their golden years and the memory of Davis the ballplayer eventually evaporated. By this point, the type of baseball that was played during his time – "scientific baseball" – had long since been made obsolete by the likes of Ty Cobb, Babe Ruth and other power hitters from the succeeding era. Yet in the record books, in his own day, he was a supreme team player.

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PAUL BOURGEOIS' BASEBALL ADVENTURES

Long-time Cohoes resident Paul Bourgeois enjoyed a baseball career that began with pitchouts with his brothers on Main Street and pick-up games with friends in Lansing Park. But baseball took him on a series of adventures including playing an All Star Game in the hallowed Polo Grounds, where he met some of the greats like Joe DiMaggio, pitching in Springfield against Dusty Rhodes, and playing professional ball for the Chicago Cubs farm team in Louisiana. At the request of the Spindle City Historic Society, he pieced together memories to tell the story of his baseball adventures in the 1940s and 1950s.

We lived on Main Street in Cohoes. My brothers Bernie and George, and I would have a catch on the sidewalk. We played a game with passing cars. When a car got even with me, I would try to 'throw the car out' by getting the ball to one of my brothers before the car reached him. Sometimes we played at the Brewery Field on Lancaster Street between George and Newark Sts. on what is now St. Rita's parish property. Home plate was at the corner of George and Lancaster Sts. We also played at Lansing Park. We managed to organize pick up games with just six players: two batting, four fielding and no catcher. As more players came along we would adjust the ground rules. Our favorite field was in the Erie Canal bed south of the Central Avenue firehouse and north of Newark Street. Home plate was behind 47 or 49 Central Avenue. It was our neighborhood field and we took pride in maintaining it.

My first experience in organized baseball was as a batboy in 1942 with the Cohoes Merchants team. They were in the Greater Troy Area Junior League. The team was: Ed Gallerie, Harvey Rivet, Oliver Rivest, Paul Rivest, John Whalen, Walt Wrobel, Frank Beauregard, Jack Stopera, Ed Trembley, Frank Watson, Stan Majewski, and Andre Amyot, with Paul Amyot as Manager and me as bat boy. Andre Amyot gave me a lot of help and practice with my pitching and fielding.

As a freshman at Catholic Central High School (CCHS) in 1945, I played on the varsity, their only team. I was a batting practice pitcher but never played in a game. As a sophomore on the varsity at CCHS in 1946 I had a 5 and 1 win/loss record. We played 7-inning games. According to newspaper clippings I had 7 strikeouts against Watervliet, 8 against LaSalle and 11 against Cohoes High that year. The newspaper publicity about my pitching at CCHS earned me an invitation to play for St. Mary's team in the Troy Amateur League during the summer of 1946. I had nine wins and no losses as best I can determine. In my junior year at CCHS in 1947 we won the Principal League Championship. I was 4 and 0 for the season, with 34 strikeouts in 28 innings.

In the summer of 1947 I played for the Cohoes Van Schaicks, in the Greater Troy Area League. The squad was: 'Cap' Diotte, Myron Glusko, Iggy Stoberski, Ed Shephard, Verne Lafreniere, Joe Eckert, Jim Halloran, Buck Jordan, myself, Mike Hogan Jr., 'Doc' Cepiel, Ed Slivinski, Gene Sullivan, John Bosko and Stan Majewski. The Van Schaicks were an amazing team. We ended the season with 45 wins, 14 losses and 3 ties. I think I won 5 and lost one that summer. One thing is clear, I was robbed of a no-hit no-run game. After 6-2/3 innings the potential last out got on base on an error. He stole second base and scored on a base hit by my CCHS teammate Frank "Turk" Mulqueen. As a senior at CCHS in 1948 I won 4 games and lost one, and for the second year in a row we were the Principal League Champs. My most memorable game that season was a 3-2 win in 8 innings against LaSalle. I pitched a one hit game with 9 strikeouts. The opposing pitcher 'Rip' Coleman, who went on to play professional baseball, also had 9 strikeouts.

The summer of 1948 was very hectic. Our doorbell rang at about 9:00 a.m. on the Monday following my graduation from CCHS. It was a local umpire who was also a scout for the New York Giants baseball franchise. He had a contract in hand for me to sign, and wanted me to report to a Giants farm system team in just a few days. I turned down the offer because discussions were already underway for me to play for the Chicago Cubs organization. That summer I played for the Panthers in the Greater Troy Area League and won 4 games. At the request of CCHS coach Bill Carley, I also pitched for his American Legion Post 628 team in Troy. We were the Rensselaer County champs and went on to beat Schenectady, but we were eliminated in the quarterfinals of an American Legion tournament in Syracuse. I had six wins and no losses, and also played first base in a few games.

The Albany *Times Union* sponsored an All Stars game pitting the Albany City All Stars against the Albany Area All Stars. The game was played at Hawkins Stadium in Menands on Friday, June 18, 1948. Leonard 'Bud' McClure and I were selected to pitch for the Albany Area All Star team, coached by Bill Carley. I pitched the first three innings, striking out seven batters and retiring two on infield ground balls. 'Bud' McClure pitched the next three innings, also allowing no hits, striking out five batters and walking one. We won 16-5.

As a result of that game 'Bud' McClure and I were selected to represent the Albany *Times Union* on the US All Star baseball team, for a game at the Polo Grounds in New York City. They put us up at the Hotel New Yorker and treated us to a memorable week of baseball and other activities. We arrived in New York on Friday, August 20th. The first stop was to be measured for baseball uniforms, which were ready the next day. I still have mine, but it no longer fits! That first day also included a bus tour of the town.

On Saturday we practiced at the Polo Grounds in the morning, watched the Phillies play the Giants in the afternoon, and saw a movie at Radio City Music Hall. On Sunday we took a boat tour around Manhattan and visited Coney Island. On Monday we practiced, toured Rockefeller Center, and ended the day as the guests of the Yankees for dinner and their night game against the Chicago White Sox. On Tuesday we practiced, then took a bus trip to West Point, including dinner at the famous Bear Mountain Inn. On Wednesday there was more practice and then dinner at Hotel Astor, where I was asked to recite "Casey at the Bat." The main speaker was Grantland Rice, the sports editor of *The New York Herald Tribune*. He had written a few spinoffs on "Casey at the Bat." Dinner was followed by a stage play "Angel in the Wings," then back to the hotel for a good night's sleep before the All Star game at the Polo Grounds on Thursday.

Many pitchers were selected on the 24-man All Star Team. While pitching during a practice session at the Polo Grounds, I was spiked on the right foot as I went to cover first base. The injury was not severe but did need medical attention. During that practice session I pitched 1-2/3 innings giving up no hits, no walks and fanned 2 batters. The big game was on Thursday August 26, 1948 at the Polo Grounds – the hallowed home of the New York Giants. A crowd of 25,000 watched our US All Stars beat the NYC All Stars 9 to 7. Although I was not able to pitch because of my injury, I did play first base for one memorable inning. Throughout the week I met Joe DiMaggio, Yogi Berra, Phil Rizzuto and other baseball greats. During the All Star game a monument in deep centerfield was dedicated to Babe Ruth, who had died just ten days before.

Perhaps because of my All Star appearance, I was selected in September 1948 as one of 80 ballplayers to receive the A.G. Spaulding & Brothers equipment award. I was notified of the award in a letter from the Brooklyn Dodgers Scouting Department. The award was a pair of baseball shoes and a baseball glove. Despite the attention from other teams, I chose to sign with the Chicago Cubs. The Troy High School baseball coach was also a scout for

the Cubs and he helped arrange a contract with the team that included a four-year college scholarship. I signed on and agreed to start playing professional ball in the summer of 1949.

The Chicago Cubs paid my tuition to attend Illinois State Normal University (ISNU) in 1949 and 1950. I was able to pay the \$7 a week cost of lodging in a private home by working in the equipment room of the ISNU gym. I also worked at least 3 hours a day at a local restaurant, which entitled me to three meals a day. The baseball coach, Mr. Goff, arranged both jobs. Some 78 players tried out for the ISNU baseball team in 1949, and I was one of 18 that made the squad. The team went south for spring training, including a game I pitched against the Naval Air Technical Training Station team in Memphis. I struck out 11 and walked 3 in the seven inning game we won 4-2. During our regular season home opener at ISNU, I finished off a no hitter, pitching the last 4 innings of the 9 inning game.

In June of 1949, the Chicago Cubs sent me to the Springfield Rifles, of the New England League in Springfield, Massachusetts. When I arrived, the manager said he had enough pitchers, and would arrange for my transfer. During the week-long wait for the transfer I pitched batting practice every day, which gave me the opportunity to pitch to James "Dusty" Rhodes, who was an outfielder on the team. When pitching batting practice, Rhodes demanded that I pitch to him at a specific spot. If I didn't do as he instructed he would drive the ball through the pitchers' mound to shake me up. I was never more alert on the mound as when I pitched to 'Dusty'. He rose to national fame in 1954 when he led a sweep of the Giants over the Indians in the World Series. In that series, he was 4 for 6 with two homers and 7 RBIs.

I left Springfield and traveled to Louisiana where I was assigned to pitch for the Baton Rouge Red Sticks in the class "C" Evangeline League. Many of the teams were in the bayou region where the Acadians settled, as recounted in H. W. Longfellow's poem *Evangeline*. My ability to speak Canadian French came in handy in Louisiana, where I took the opportunity to talk with Cajuns whenever possible.

In my first game in the pros, I came into the game in the third inning with no outs and the bases loaded against the team from Hammond. The first batter I faced hit into a double play. Although I filled the bases again, their pitcher flied out to end the inning with no runs scored. In the next inning I walked three batters and struck out one. The next batter hit a perfect double play ball to me but I threw it over the catcher's head allowing a run to score. The good news is that we won the game 13-9, putting an end to the team's long losing streak. On my next assignment, against the Alexandria Aces, I struck out 7 and gave up 5 hits and 6 walks, and we won 9-4. In another game against Hammond, I lost 4-1 on 9 strikeouts and 6 walks. In still another game against Abbeville I gave up 9 hits, a base on balls but struck out 7 batters to get the win by a score of 6-3. In yet another game, it took 10 innings to beat Houma 6-5. I gave up 10 hits, one base on balls and had 4 strikeouts. I ended the first season with 4 wins and 6 losses. The Red Sticks ended the 1949 season in the cellar.

The 1950 season was much different. Our new manager, Paul 'Pappy' Bruno, was well respected by the players. He was a playing manager who pitched, played first base and was a good hitter. I recall a double header against the New Iberia Pelicans. We lost the first game 15-3. I pitched the second game, giving up three runs in the first inning but then settled down to get the 15-3 win. One of my best games was in a losing performance. I lost by a score of 2-1 to the Lafayette Bulls, who ended the season in first place, in an 11-inning game even though I had pitched five-hit ball. We ended the 1950 season in second place behind Lafayette. I pitched against the Thibodaux Giants in the first round of the playoffs, and got credit for the win. John 'Red' Murff came to my rescue in the 8th inning preserving a 6-4 lead. In the final round of the series, I pitched the first game at home before a crowd of 2400, the largest of the season. A grand slam by the second baseman enabled us to win by a score of 5-3. The Baton Rouge Red Sticks won the playoffs, their first playoff win since the early 1930s.

After the 1950 season I did not see my teammate "Red" Murff again until 1997 at a chance meeting at the Hall of Fame induction ceremonies in Cooperstown. Phil Niekro, a pitcher for the Atlanta Braves, was inducted and in his speech asked 'Red' Murff to stand and be recognized for the role he played in his career. Following the ceremony, I went over to 'Red' and we talked about the old days at Baton Rouge. 'Red' played a brief period in the major leagues. He has written several books on baseball and was a baseball scout for many years before his retirement.

I had a losing record in both of my seasons in Baton Rouge. My only consolation was that I did win two games in the play-offs. My salary with the Red Sticks was \$200 a month. At home, we were responsible for all of our expenses, but on the road the team paid for our lodging and gave us \$5 a day for meal money. My nickname was 'Gumbo' because I regularly ate chicken or shrimp gumbo. I also learned to enjoy grits, okra and black-eyed peas. I rented a room at the YMCA, where the team bus, like a school bus, picked players up for home and away games. The weather was hot and humid so all of the games were played in the evening. On a couple of occasions there were so many bugs getting into the eyes of the batter, catcher and umpire at home plate that the game was stopped. The lights in the infield were shut off, the bugs would move to the outfield, and then play would resume.

My experience in Baton Rouge was an enriching one. I was shocked when I experienced blatant racial discrimination against African Americans. This was especially true when I attended Mass. The African Americans sat in the last pews and went to communion after the Caucasians. 'Separate but equal facilities' was not the reality. The facilities were separate and unequal.

After two seasons of professional baseball, I decided not to accept a new contract. Giving up baseball was not a painful decision for me. I am grateful for the many opportunities that I had because of my baseball experiences. I certainly never gave up baseball altogether. I coached Little League and Babe Ruth in the 1960s and 1970s when my sons were playing, attended countless minor and major league games over the years, and I still enjoy having a catch or batting practice with my grandchildren.

In June of 1950 I was selected as the sixth of six baseball players -- along with "Chick" Robitaille, James Barry, George Webb, George Davis, Thomas Lynch -- to be named to Cohoes' Baseball Hall of Fame. A.F. LaMarche was the Cohoes Baseball Hall of Fame Committee Chairman. I was in Louisiana and could not attend the June 27 awards banquet at the Van Schaick Island Golf Club, but my father Alcide Bourgeois proudly accepted the plaque on my behalf. In June 2002, I was inducted into the Catholic High Athletic Hall of Fame. This time I was able to attend the ceremonies held at Michael's Banquet House. My wife Monica, my brother Bernie and my children Tom, David, Theresa and daughter-in-law Emi joined me. I was once again able to publicly thank the late, great Coach Bill Carley who helped set me on the path to a brief but adventure-packed baseball career and a lifelong love of the game.



Off the Top...

The Spindle City Historic Society (SCHS) changed its line of activities this summer, just as we all do during July and August. We cooled down the heat of July with an Ice Cream Social (courtesy of Stewart's) and cleaned out a few attics and basements during our first Garage Sale in August. Many thanks to all our members who donated articles that made the sale a success. We are getting back to history with our fall events. "Spindle City Images" opened on September 14 and the art stays on display through October 25. The works are a must-see.

We are continuing to do our 'second Saturday of the month' picture collection sessions. When you tell folks about our current programs and presentations, encourage anyone with Cohoes memories to share their photos with us so that we can preserve them for future generations. See this newsletter for the October 12 "Working in the Mills of Cohoes" program. Millhand Maggie tells about working in our mills, and we invite all of you to share your own recollections, or stories from your parents, grandparents, other relatives or friends, of working in the mills of Cohoes. This is another way for us to preserve an important part of Cohoes history.

Many Cohoesiers who have moved ask what they can do to get our newsletter. The answer is easy; become members of SCHS. We now have many states represented by our membership. I have a challenge for our current members: help to get us SCHS membership in every state. If you know about any Cohoesiers who have moved, let them know about becoming a member. If it is a family member or close friend, make their membership a gift. They will receive mailings about our upcoming events along with this newsletter each quarter. What better way to keep up with the old and new Cohoes? I will keep you updated on the states we are still looking for in future issues.

Our regular meetings are the last Wednesday of the month at 7 PM in the Cohoes Visitor's Center at 58 Remsen Street (the 1st floor of the historic Cohoes Music Hall). Many of our meetings include a short program by a guest speaker. See the last page of this newsletter for details.

Thank you for being a member of the SCHS.

Hope to see you soon,

Paul D. Dunleavy
President

Breathing Life into Older Buildings: Case Studies from Architect Mark Thaler

The Spindle City Historic Society's June meeting featured a presentation by Mark Thaler, historic preservation principal at the Albany-based firm of Einhorn, Yaffee, Prescott Architecture & Engineering (EYP). Thaler, a Cohoes native and SCHS charter member, specializes in the preservation and adaptive reuse of older buildings. His 1984 thesis, written while obtaining his bachelor's degree in architecture at RPI, focused on plans for restoration and adaptive reuse of the Silliman Memorial Church.

Thaler's expertise has taken him to projects around the country, which include the Washington State Capitol in Olympia, Ellis Island, and Valley Forge. A focus of his June presentation for the SCHS, held at the Cohoes Visitor's Center, was the restoration of Montezuma Castle near Las Vegas, New Mexico. The building, constructed in the 1880s as a hotel, was listed among the "11 most endangered" of America's architectural treasures by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. EYP, with Thaler as lead architect on the project, was hired to restore the structure for use by the United World College of the American West, an institution that focuses on world peace and promoting cultural understanding. Thaler described the process of restoring the castle, and some of the issues that must be addressed when adapting historic buildings for modern uses.



Montezuma Castle after restoration

He also discussed historic preservation projects closer to home -- the transformation of Albany's Union Station into Fleet Bank headquarters, the stabilization of hospital buildings on Ellis Island, and proposals for Albany's waterfront, including the restoration of the old Erie Canal basin and the re-creation of historic Fort Orange.

Harmony Mills Historic District Tour



Paul Dunleavy leads a group into the turbine room at Harmony Mill #3.

On June 7, the Spindle City Historic Society offered a tour of the Harmony Mills Historic district, and introduced the first in a series of self-guided tour brochures featuring the historic sites of Cohoes. The tour was co-sponsored by the Cohoes Multi-Service Senior Center, which provided bus transportation for some of the tour participants. Sites on the tour included the buildings of the Harmony Mill complex, mill worker housing, remnants of both the original Erie Canal and its 1840s expansion, and the Cohoes Falls. The tour group also visited the turbine room in Mill #3 to view the massive Boyden turbines that once powered the mills, and explored other areas of Mill #3.

The day was graced with ideal weather, and recent rains brought the falls to their spectacular best. Tour participants ended the afternoon at the Visitor's Center with refreshments, which included the now-famous SCHS mastodon cookies.



A tour group gathers at the base of Vliet Street near the old Harmony Mills Office, across from Harmony Mill #3.

If you missed our June event and would like to take the tour, self-guided tour brochures are available at the Visitor's Center.

Photo credits: Tom Donnelly

Old Fashioned Ice Cream Social

On July 13, the society hosted an ice cream social in the Visitor's Center following our regular Saturday "Collecting Memories" photo collection session. Those in attendance assembled make-



your-own sundaes with Stewart's ice cream and toppings, and enjoyed the exhibits at the Visitor's Center.

Mary DeRose prepares to serve the ice cream.

225th Anniversary of the Battle of Saratoga



On July 20, some SCHS members participated in the events at the Van Schaick Mansion commemorating the 225th anniversary of the Battle of Saratoga. The day included re-enactments of the battle and encampment, as well as period artisans and entertainment.

Summer Garage Sale

August featured the Spindle City Historic Society's first Summer Garage Sale. Several SCHS members set up tables inside and outside the Visitor's Center with items of their own to sell, and many generously contributed items for the society to sell. We thank all for their participation and donations, and look forward to an even greater event next time.



