

# Spindle City Historic Society

Volume 9 Issue 1

Spring 2006

## DID YOU KNOW

...that the Spindle City Historic Society's new book, *Cohoes Revisited*, is now in print? If you haven't already purchased a copy, please contact us. See page 8 of this issue for more details.

...that a reservoir was once located between Morris, Division, Reservoir and Egbert Streets? The site is now occupied by Sunset Park. Industrialist Egbert Egberts was a leading figure in incorporating the Cohoes Water Works Company in 1855 and establishing the first reservoir in Cohoes.

...that Mohawk and Remsen Streets once intersected? In 1902, the Wm. Lowenthal Shoddy Mill was near this intersection.

...that Lincoln Avenue and Congress Street were not always connected? When the old Cohoes Hospital (at the site of the present Price Chopper supermarket) was in existence each street ended at the hospital grounds, with Lincoln Avenue coming from the south and Congress Street from the north. The streets were joined after the hospital was moved to its new location on Columbia Street.

...that in late 2005 Cohoes native and actor Mike Mazurki was inducted into the Professional Wrestling Hall of Fame? The Hall is located in Amsterdam, New York.

...that in 1951, AM radio station WOKO 1460 had a program "Cohoes on Parade" daily from 8 to 9 p.m.?

...that the extension of Bridge Avenue west from Van Schaick Island across the Mohawk River to Saratoga Street was called Ship Street? The street spanned the Champlain Canal via an iron bridge.

...that the song "My Sweetheart was a Hero" was written by Alfred F. LaMarche of Cohoes? It was dedicated to the New York National Guard, 2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment of Cohoes during World War I. The first printing of 60,000 copies of the song sold out. Mr. LaMarche also composed 22 other songs.

## WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

The Spindle City Historic Society welcomes new members *Clark Patterson Associates*, *Diane Conroy Lacivita*, and *Mike & Rosemary Zandri*.

## HISTORIAN'S NOTEBOOK

### Cohoes and the First *Half Moon* Replica

Decades have passed since the last local, national and international tourists climbed aboard the 1909 replica of Henry Hudson's ship the *Half Moon*, once displayed at the Van Schaick Island Park. The following is a condensed timeline outlining the fate of that celebrated little ship.

**1909** Built specifically for the 1909 Hudson-Fulton Celebration, the ship leads a maritime parade of vessels in the Brooklyn Harbor to kick off the massive 16 day celebration in New York City and the Hudson Valley.

Ironically, the event's concluding ceremonies were held here in Cohoes on October 11, 1909. Lawyer Daniel Cosgro was one of 15 members of the local organizing committee.

**1921** Daniel Cosgro is elected the twenty-third mayor of Cohoes.

**1923** The *Half Moon* sits waterlogged near Kingston, NY, 14 years after the celebration. Mayor Cosgro begins to lobby the State for its custody.

**1924** A battle ensues for the ship's custody, with the cities of Albany, Cohoes and New York as rivals. Governor Alfred E. Smith signs the bill awarding the ship to Cohoes on March 17, 1924 with the understanding it will be

properly maintained and protected. The ship is towed to Cohoes, and anchored off Van Schaick Island during the month of May.

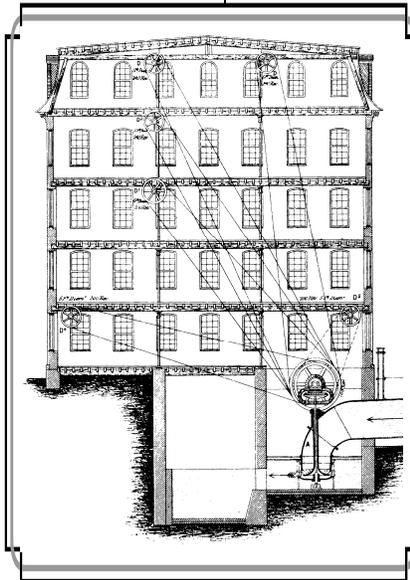
**1925** The ship is dragged up the slope from the river and placed near the pond in the park. A protective fence is installed surrounding the vessel.

**1926-1929** A period of popularity ensues when the ship is opened to the public during the summer months. Daniel Cosgro is swept out of office by the Democratic Party machine candidate James J. Dooley.

**1930-1932** A period of decline descends on the vessel when the protective fence is compromised. During 1932, six fires break out in the ship. On December 22, 1932 a final devastating fire destroys it.

Former Mayor Cosgro accuses city officials of neglect. But with Cohoes and the country sinking deeply into the Great Depression, the *Half Moon* is soon forgotten.

Walter Lipka



## Ice Harvesting

In the “good old days” before refrigerators, gathering ice formed naturally on lakes and rivers was necessary for refrigeration but extremely hard work. Many of the region’s lakes, ponds and rivers were optimal sources of ice, which needed to be at least 10-12 inches thick to be cut into usable and durable blocks. Until the early 1930s, when large quantities of manufactured ice became available, natural ice was the dominant source of ice for both home and commercial refrigeration. Ice cut on the Mohawk River was used both locally (sometimes shipped along the canal) and sent to points as far as New York City.

Preparation of the ice field was the most important step of harvesting, and began with a wooden stake driven into the ice. A length of heavy cord was stretched from the stake to another stake about 200 feet away. A short pole was used to make a mark from one stake to the other; this line was a guide for the marking machine. Marks on the ice were made about 3 inches deep and 22 inches apart. Once the field was laid out, a small canal was cut extending from the far side of the ice field to an elevator on shore used to lift the blocks of ice. The canal, cut with a large tooth saw, was used to transport ice cakes. Typically, 50 cakes of ice could be cut, using an ice saw, out of each large channel leading into the canal. Two workers, stationed on a small wooden platform, lifted the ice cakes with two-pronged ice picks into the canal toward the elevator. The cakes were pushed along the canal by workers with poles. The channel had to be kept ice-free, which inspired various ingenious solutions, one of which entailed pulling a manned rowboat up and down the channel. Some of the ice harvest workers were farmers, who found ice harvesting a lucrative venture during the slow winter months. Horse teams and sleighs were also used to haul ice and equipment; farmers who worked with their own horse teams received \$1.00 a day for their labor in the 1890s.

Ice houses were located at the elevator for year-round storage of ice. Straw was used around the ice as insulation to keep it from melting. The ice was stacked in the icehouse, typically a double-walled structure, and covered with sawdust. Residual ice on the ice house floor had to be smoothed down to create an even surface for new ice. An ice shaver, a five-pointed instrument, was used for this purpose. During the hot summer months, home ice delivery from ice houses had to begin with the loading of wagons at 4 a.m. with 8 to 10 tons of ice. The driver of the route was in charge of cutting the ice cakes into smaller chunks of 25 to 100 pounds. Cutting was a skill that had to be practiced with expertise and care, lest the ice fragment into tiny pieces. Customers would display ice cards which indicated how much ice was to be left on the sidewalk in front of their houses. Ice was typically delivered to homes three times a week, at an average cost of about 50 cents per week in the early 1900s. Ice was delivered to apartment dwellers’ iceboxes, which sometimes entailed a climb of several flights of stairs with up to 100 pounds of ice. Almost every home customer wanted ice for food preservation, and on the hottest days of summer as many as 25 tons of ice were delivered in the morning hours between 6 and 8 a.m. Stores, breweries, and other small businesses requiring 100 to 300 pounds of ice at a time had the delivered ice carried manually, with workers hoisting the blocks of ice on their shoulders to iceboxes or other places where the ice was needed. Meat plants required significantly more ice, typically 75-100 tons, and refrigerator cars for rail transport had to be lined with ice seven or eight layers thick in order to keep their freight chilled.

Because of its proximity to both the Mohawk and Hudson Rivers, and convenient transport via both the canals and rail lines, Cohoes had numerous ice companies. Over the city’s history, there were scores of ice businesses, many in existence for only a brief period. Some, however, were long-lasting companies. Thomas Browne operated an ice business at

69 Olmstead St. from 1878 to 1892. The Hudson River Coal and Ice Company, located at Park Avenue near Ontario Street, was in business from 1904 to 1916. James Foreman opened his ice business in 1922 at 60 Central Avenue, remaining in business to 1945. Cyrille Bourgeois operated an ice business at 268 Vliet Street around the same time period, from 1923 to 1945. The Dotter family began its ice business in 1884 at Juncta, the site of the junction of the original Erie and Champlain canals. During the winter of 1885, the Dotters harvested 20 million pounds of ice from the rivers, shipping much of it to New York City. Members of the family later established their own ice businesses at various locations, but all in the same general area of the city. Solomon Dotter had a business at 25 Mechanic St. beginning in 1904. George Dotter started his business in 1897 at 34 Dyke Avenue. William Dotter's ice company was opened in 1900 at 25 Niver Street; it continued through 1933. The ice house for William Dotter's business burned in 1946. An even more spectacular ice house fire occurred on May 2, 1933 at the Arctic Ice Company on Delaware Avenue. The Arctic Ice Company was originally established in 1924 at 130 Remsen Street, moving to Delaware Avenue in 1926. The ice house had a 15,000 ton capacity, and the 1933 fire was so intense it threatened nearby structures, including the Van Schaick mansion. Following the fire, the Arctic Ice Company relocated to Niver Street, and closed in 1936. As the demand for natural ice diminished with the increasing availability of affordable electric refrigerators, surviving ice businesses operated as wholesalers.

Although many of these structures have been lost, some remnants of ice-harvesting history remain in the city. The Mohawk Ice Company operated at 23 Church Street from 1912 to 1926. The ice house, now converted to a residence, still stands half a block away.

*JC/staff*

*Sources for this article include an account of ice harvesting written by Larry Hart, and information provided by Warren Broderick.*



*An ice-harvesting crew on the Mohawk, with the tools of their trade.  
(photograph from the Dorothy Onderdonk Collection)*



## Off the Top...

My Funk & Wagnall's dictionary defines culture as "the training, improvement, and refinement of mind, morals, or taste" and "the sum total of the attainments and activities of any specific period, race, or people, including their implements, handicrafts, agriculture, economics, music, art, religious beliefs, traditions, language, and story." No individual or entity can be the culture for a people or an area.

However, *Cohoes Revisited*, as well as our original book, *Cohoes*, can attempt to document the culture of Cohoes. *Cohoes* embraced those elements that make a city: Transportation, Industry, Business, Worship, Education, Public Service, Leisure, People and Street Views. *Cohoes Revisited* gives a voice to that story through a series of diary letters spanning 1890 – 1960. Both of these works include pictures that capture a moment in the culture that is unique to Cohoes. No where else could these particular moments in history have been preserved. These are the pictures and stories of Cohoes: the culture of Cohoes.

They range from the woman tending the home garden to powerful mill owner; the child on the first day of school to the couple celebrating a significant anniversary; from the house that still stands at the crest of a hill to a magnificent church that is only a fading memory. Without the woman, the mill owner, the child, the couple, the house or the church, the culture of what is Cohoes would have been completely different.

I would like to thank, on behalf of the Spindle City Historic Society, all the people who contributed so many different things to make *Cohoes Revisited* possible: the past and present residents who loaned or donated their photographs; the many library staff who were patient in our research; the members of Cohoes Senior Center for allowing us to do the slide show and adding to our captions; and, our family members for putting up with us during this whole process.

Personally, I would like to thank a fine group of workers who put forth their best effort and produced an outstanding book: Daniele Cherniak, June Cherniak, Walter Cherniak, Linda Christopher, Anne Marie Nadeau, Donna Riley, Dennis Rivage and Tor Shekerjian. I also have a question for them - when is our meeting for the next book?

For the next book, we need more pictures. So I leave it to our membership and the residents of Cohoes to provide them - what do you have that will let us document the culture that is Cohoes.

Paul D. Dunleavy  
President

## Profile of a Member of SCHS – Caroline Guresz

*In this issue, we begin a new feature introducing readers to members of the Spindle City Historic Society. Our organization has a diverse membership, with people possessing a broad range of talents, experience and interests. We hope you will enjoy these brief biographical sketches of the people who are the Spindle City Historic Society. Our inaugural profile is of Caroline Guresz, a judge, lawyer and teacher, who was instrumental in obtaining 501 (c)(3) status for SCHS.*



### What is your occupation and background?

I am an attorney in general practice with concentration in Elder Law. I was Cohoes City Court Judge sitting in the Criminal Part. I taught social studies, English, economics, and psychology.

### How did you learn about and become involved in SCHS?

I first learned about SCHS by reading a newsletter a friend gave me. Then I saw one of the publications for sale at Marra's. But what really hooked me was when June and Walter Cherniak called to ask if I would help the Society apply for 501(c)(3) status.

### What are your hobbies and other interests?

Reading and listening to music, trying to learn to play the piano, writing, some crafting, drawing and painting. Church activities.

### What aspects of Cohoes history most interest you?

The people who came to this City and made it what it was and the people who are now trying to make it great again. The mills and the people who owned them, ran them, and produced the goods. The type of products that were produced here. I'll bet none of us can name ALL the products that were made here. The political history of the city is fascinating to me, as well as the stories about mob activities.

### What SCHS activities and events do you enjoy the most?

Unfortunately, "the best laid plans...." I haven't taken advantage of programs and special events, such

as the lantern show one Christmas, the dedication of the signage along the canal and of the Silliman Park.

**Please include any other information about yourself you would like to share.**

My parents were immigrants. I was only the second in my family to be born in this country. I grew up on one of the three or four farms located within the Cohoes city limits during the 1940s and 1950s. The Cohoes City School system gave me the best basic education any person could ask for. That education helped me become a teacher, a lawyer, and a judge. Also, before completing college and between various careers, the one year of typing and shorthand at Cohoes High School helped me earn a good living for a good number of years. I have been blessed.



**Celebrating the Publication of *Cohoes Revisited***

On the evening of March 4, we celebrated the publication of our second book, *Cohoes Revisited*. *Cohoes Revisited* shows people, places, and events in Cohoes in photographs from the late 1800s to the 1970s, and gives glimpses of the city's past through a series of letters written in the voice of Helen Dickey to her sister, the famed dancer and vaudeville star Adelaide Dickey. Many of the photographs used in the book were contributed to the Spindle City Historic Society by local residents, making this a true community effort.



SCHS member Bob Clark writes of the book: "I have recently read *Cohoes Revisited*. It is great! The idea for having the warm and human "letters" from Helen to Adelaide was an inspired one, as they gave added depth and insight into our wonderful city, and they served to transition the photos through the stated time period. Of course, Cohoes is a "keeper", and *Cohoes Revisited* will take its honored place alongside of it in my bookcase, to be referred to often. Thanks for publishing it, and to all those involved."

An exhibit of images from the book, accompanied by excerpts from the letters that introduce each book chapter, was mounted for the evening in the Visitor's Center and remains on display through late March.

The Spindle City Historic Society's *Cohoes Revisited* authors – Daniele Cherniak, June Cherniak, Walter Cherniak, Linda Christopher, Paul Dunleavy, Anne Marie Nadeau, Donna Riley, Dennis Rivage and Tor Shekerjian – were on hand to autograph books and celebrate a job well done.



*A copy of the book was presented to Mayor John McDonald by SCHS President Paul Dunleavy.*

If you missed the reception and would like to purchase copies of *Cohoes Revisited*, see page 8 of this issue for further details.

**Winter Trustees Meeting**



On January 6, SCHS trustees gathered for their winter meeting at the home of June and Walter Cherniak. The trustees held discussions of the society's upcoming events, ongoing projects, and goals for the future. If you'd like to become a trustee, let us know. SCHS is always looking for additional members who wish to become more active in the organization and serve as trustees.

## The Polish National Alliance in Cohoes

The Cohoes chapter of the Polish National Alliance (PNA) was formed on November 8, 1905, when a small group met to establish a social and mutual aid organization. The organization, originally the St. Joseph Society, was affiliated with the Church of St. Michael. Its first president was Stefan Moniewski. The organization became a chapter of the Polish National Alliance on February 3, 1914, as Lodge 1684. It had 28 charter members, and elected Theodore Rynasko president. The lodge grew in membership, and in 1930 acquired a building at 81 Mohawk Street (formerly the Odd Fellows Temple) for use as their headquarters. The first meeting at the new site was held on September 21, 1930. The organization played an important role in the lives of Polish immigrants in Cohoes, assisting them in adjusting to life in America. They would continue this mission, later sponsoring displaced persons from Poland following World War II.

The Cohoes chapter of the PNA sponsored many social and recreational activities, including a baseball team. The team played in a league consisting of members of PNA chapters from Albany, Amsterdam, Hudson and Schenectady. In 1932 the Cohoesiers, led by Vincent Guzek and manager Louis Gorski, were the undefeated champions of Northeastern New York. A massive Polish-American Scouting movement, known as Harcestwo, was established by the National PNA in order to promote an appreciation of Polish heritage among young people. In 1935, a scouting group was formed in Cohoes under the direction of Wanda Slupska Kryjak. She also participated in the organization on a national level, representing U.S. Polish scouts at a convention held in Poland in 1936. The organization was dissolved in 1939 when Poland was invaded prior to World War II.

In 1937, an all-girls drum and bugle corps was formed by Cohoes PNA members. They wore uniforms created by women members of the lodge, and participated in parades and competitions. The group won numerous awards in competition, including those for best-drilled and best-dressed corps. Scouting leader Wanda Slupska Kryjak was also first drum majorette of the Drum and bugle corps; she held the post until 1941. In 1943, the corps sponsored a competition in Cohoes, inviting 11 drum and bugle corps to participate. The next year, the PNA Drum and Bugle corps became affiliated with the



Mohawk Valley Drum and Bugle Corps Association, and participated in contests sponsored by this organization. Throughout its existence, the corps played an important role in St. Michael's church events, leading processions and performing on special occasions.

The PNA has played an important role in education and preservation of Polish heritage by sponsoring Polish language classes, initially conducted by the Rev. Zbigniew Pastuszak, pastor of the Polish National Catholic Church of the Good Shepherd in Amsterdam. The first classes were held in 1980, with 55 students of all ages, and continued to be offered until 1994. Classes for Polish immigrants for English as a second language were sponsored by the PNA and taught by Leona Kimball.

Also important to Polish tradition is music and dance. In 1981, the Polka Dolls and Guys Dance Group was formed by the Cohoes PNA, under the direction of Patricia Hakso and Virginia Guyette. The dancers ranged in age from 5 to 17, and performed traditional, modern, and newly choreographed dances while

wearing colorful authentic Polish costumes. The group performed at nursing homes, telethons and other events for non-profit organizations, and made appearances around the state and throughout the northeast. They were the only dance group invited to the Mid-West Polka-Fest in Frankenmuth, Michigan, which featured some of the most popular polka bands. The dancers were also invited to participate in the "Heritage of Faith" services at Auriesville in August 1985 in honor of John Cardinal Krol, sponsored by the Polish American Congress. The dance group disbanded in 2000.

The Cohoes PNA lodge has also been active in providing aid to people and organizations in Poland. They donated funds to the Solidarity (Solidarnosc) movement, and participated in shoe and clothing drives for the people of Poland sponsored by the Polish American Congress. In 1981, the lodge sponsored several families who fled Poland for Austria, providing assistance with housing, translation and interpreting, employment, adult education and primary education for children. The group supports education closer to home, frequently donating funds to assist St. Michael's School during its existence, and providing scholarships to graduating high school seniors who are members of the PNA.

The PNA chapter has participated in the Cohoes Heritage Day Festivals, selling traditional Polish foods and offering music and dance performances. They are involved in other community activities, including the Cohoes Memorial Day parade and various city fund-raising events. They regularly sponsor a booth at St Michael's bazaar, and annually host a Communion Brunch on Palm Sunday at the Parish Hall at St. Michael's Church. Other events include New Years Eve celebrations, the traditional Christmas Wiligia dinners, and an annual Christmas party for children. In 2002, the lodge on Mohawk Street was sold; the organization currently meets at St. Michael's parish hall.

The Polish National Alliance is the largest national ethnic fraternal organization in the United States, with a local membership of 400 people. In celebrating its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary last fall, the Cohoes PNA Lodge 1684 looks forward to continuing its mission to preserve and perpetuate Polish heritage and traditions, while simultaneously facilitating the assimilation of Polish immigrants into life in America.

*Many thanks to Marion Janoska Jaffarian and Mary Szozda Sala for their comprehensive history of the Polish National Alliance in Cohoes, from which material for this article was excerpted.*

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## ***Spindle City Historic Society Membership Application***

[www.timesunion.com/communities/spindlecity](http://www.timesunion.com/communities/spindlecity)

[www.spindlecity.org](http://www.spindlecity.org)

President - Paul Dunleavy

First Vice President - Daniele Cherniak      Second Vice President - Tor Shekerjian

Secretary - Linda C. Christophers      Treasurer - June Cherniak

<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		

*We have great things planned in our home in the Cohoes Visitor's Center!*

*Please help if you can with an additional donation to support our upcoming programs:*

\$5.00     \$10.00     other

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

## ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPCOMING EVENTS

***Cohoes Revisited*** – The Spindle City Historic Society’s new book, *Cohoes Revisited*, has been published. If you’d like to purchase copies, please call us at 518-237-5618 or e-mail us at [cherniak@nycap.rr.com](mailto:cherniak@nycap.rr.com). We can also mail books (for an additional charge) for those who cannot pick them up. Please purchase your books directly from SCHS. Doing so provides over 40% of the cover price to SCHS in support of our exhibits, programming, and other activities, as well as this newsletter.



**Thursday, March 23** – Photo exhibit honoring Colonel Robert Craner, opening on “Robert Craner Day.” Noon to 5 p.m., Cohoes Visitor's Center. The exhibit will be up through April.

**Wednesday, March 29** - Spindle City Historic Society meeting. 7 p.m., Cohoes Visitor's Center.

**Wednesday, April 26** - Spindle City Historic Society meeting. 7 p.m., Cohoes Visitor's Center.

**Saturday, May 6** – Opening reception for the Fourth Annual Cohoes High School Art Show, 5 p.m., Cohoes Visitor's Center. This exhibit of work by Cohoes High School students will include drawings, paintings in watercolor, acrylic and oil, photographs, computer graphics, and sculptures. The exhibit will be up through May.

**Saturday, May 20** – Rededication of Col. Robert R. Craner Veterans Memorial Park. The events will include an unveiling of a new interpretive sign in the park honoring Colonel Craner. Sponsored by Cohoes Remembers Vets Committee.

**Wednesday, May 31**- Spindle City Historic Society meeting. 7 p.m., Cohoes Visitor's Center.

**Wednesday, June 28** - Spindle City Historic Society meeting. 7 p.m., Cohoes Visitor's Center.

**Saturday, July 15** – Tour of Albany Rural Cemetery, 10 a.m. The tour will feature stops at the gravesites of noted Cohoesians and others with Cohoes connections, along with the cemetery’s magnificent statuary and monuments to numerous notables from around the region. A picnic will follow the tour.

*Photo credits this issue: Walter Cherniak, Tor Shekerjian*

~ SCHS Newsletter Staff ~

Daniele Cherniak ~ June Cherniak ~ Linda Christopher ~ Walter Lipka ~ Dennis Rivage  
Editorial Assistance: Tor Shekerjian

Spindle City Historic Society

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