



Spindle City Historic Society

Volume 10 Issue 1

Spring 2007

HISTORIAN'S NOTEBOOK

Ice Skating in Cohoes

With so many options available today for winter recreation, few people realize how popular ice skating once was, and what an important role Cohoes and its ice rinks played in that history.

Cohoes became a center for recreational skating and competitive speedskating because of its miles of canals and Carlson's Ice Rink. Carlson's Ice Rink was run by Iver Carlson for 40 years starting in 1910, when he purchased the Cohoes Ice Rink. The Cohoes Ice Rink was originally established on Ship Street in 1892 by Thomas Wallace, who owned the *Cohoes Republican*, an early Cohoes newspaper. The first RPI hockey game, a contest against Williams College on January 25, 1902, was played at the Cohoes Ice Rink. Carlson's rink remained open until 1971, and was operated in its last two decades by Iver Carlson's son E. Iver Carlson.

Carlson's drew the city's children for skating in part because of the actions of Cohoes Mayor Daniel Cosgro. Cosgro was alarmed at the number of youngsters who lost their lives each winter skating on the canals, so he contracted with Mr. Carlson in the 1920s to provide free skating for schoolchildren each winter afternoon.

Skating for some was also a highly competitive sport, and speedskating in the region reached its peak of popularity in the era between the World Wars. Cohoes hosted numerous skating races from short distance sprints to marathons covering as much as 50 miles. The last skating marathon race, won by Ed Mitchell of Schenectady, was held in late 1941. Ed competed for many years, skating well into his 60s, and also won a 50-mile skating marathon from Albany to Coxsackie.

Because of the quality of its ice, Carlson's rink drew speed skaters from Troy, Watervliet, Albany, Schenectady, and as from as far away as Amsterdam. Among the other top skaters attracted to the well-groomed ice in Cohoes were Jack Ruping, Ed Forget and Alex, Bill, and Zony Sheremeta. A red balloon was hung to signify that the ice was ready, and local skaters quickly spread the word. The record for the number of days the ice was available for skating was set in the winter of 1939-1940, when the rink was open from two weeks before Christmas until Easter Sunday, a total of 101 days.

Daniele Cherniak

Thanks to Luke Sheremeta for information on the history of speedskating in the region.

DID YOU KNOW

....that on September 9, 2006, Saints Peter and Paul Ukrainian Church marked its 100th jubilee? The anniversary was celebrated with events throughout the year, and a book chronicling the history of the church will be published.

....that while Cohoes has often been called the "Spindle City" it was also deserving of the nickname "City of Bridges"? The city at one time had 15 bridges within its 3.3 square mile area to span the Hudson and Mohawk Rivers, railroad routes, the Erie and Champlain Canals, and its network of power canals. Many of these bridges have long ago been removed once canals were drained and filled and railroads ceased operation. Bridges once crossed the enlarged Erie Canal at Columbia St., High St., Vliet St. and Manor Avenue, and the Champlain Canal at Dyke Avenue, Ontario St. and Cedar Street. Bridges at the foot of Vliet St., Canvass St., Ontario St., North Mohawk St. and School St. spanned power canals. Viaducts on Vliet St. and Johnston Avenue passed over the tracks of the Troy and Schenectady Railroad, and another viaduct crossed the ravine on Garner St. Still in existence are the Reavy Bridge over the east branch of the Mohawk River, which connects Simmons Island to Van Schaick Island, the bridge just west of this on Ontario St. crossing the west branch of the Mohawk, the bridge on Bridge Avenue, the 112th St. Bridge between Cohoes and Lansingburgh, the Cohoes-Waterford bridge on Route 32, and the bridge on Delaware Avenue to Peebles Island.

....the cornerstone for the new Elks lodge was laid on June 14, 1922 at the corner of Oneida and Mohawk Sts.? A reception followed at the Van Schaick Island Country Club. The Cohoes Lodge was organized on September 22, 1914, with 49 charter members; by 1922 there were 855 members.

....that in 1886, Cohoes had a rowing club whose boathouse was located on the Hudson River at the foot of Ontario St.? Their club rooms were located in North's Building on Mohawk Street.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

The Spindle City Historic Society welcomes new members *Mary Anne Boyer, Jeff Bradt, Lois Comley, Anthony Guresz, Holy Trinity Outreach Office, Earl Liberty, Linda Palmieri, Jude Pingslaski, Gloria Pratt, Philip Sweeney, and the Wright Family.*

Gramma Ran a Boarding House

excerpts from a memoir by Suzanne Marden Borst

Part 2: The Roomers and Boarders

The boarding house was an age-old institution that dates back to our Colonial times, and to Europe before that. Inns were expensive and afforded little privacy, often having a communal bedroom. If you wanted to live someplace for an extended period of time, you usually rented a room in a boarding house. Those of you who have visited Williamsburg, Virginia have seen the boarding houses that our founding fathers lived in. It was a very respectable, if not overly lucrative, business and it brought in a living wage and a very nice extra income. Maiden ladies and bachelors usually lived in boarding houses, as did men working in an area for a limited time. Families who might have been a little down on their luck found that boarding houses were a less expensive way to live rather than maintaining their own residences. Although the houses did afford the opportunity for a little, shall we say, visiting, this was rarely the case, at least in the respectable homes. If it had happened at their places, I'm sure the Brouillette ladies would have ushered the offenders out - FAST. I remember hearing a story - and I'm not saying it happened at Mim's or Addie's - about a lady finding herself "in the family way." She insisted that it happened because she took a bath after a man. I wonder if she really thought she got away with that one!

The large rooms rented for \$5 per week and the smaller ones for \$3. Dinners were 50 cents and suppers were 35 cents. I seem to remember Gramma saying \$2.00 and \$1.50. Addie sold her rooming house in 1938, and Josie ran the rooming house a few years longer, probably until some time in the early 1940s. I really don't know the rates for sure, but looking at the years they were in business it was when men earning \$15 per week was the norm.

The large meal was served at noon. The Hewitt girls would come home from school for lunch and they were the waitresses. Once of the men used to give Shirley 50 cents and her Mom would use it for Keveny tuition, or if that wasn't due, all for herself. He was probably paying his dinner check and not giving her a tip. The girls must have worked fast because they had to have their own lunch, serve the boarders, and get back to school in one hour. The four older ones went up on "the hill" to the new high school (now Cohoes Middle School). I have walked that route many times when I attended Cohoes High and it was quite a hike. Shirley attended Keveny so she didn't have far to go.

I can remember as a very young child sticking my head into the dining room to see what was going on and to look at all those people in there eating. It was kind of nice, since the ladies and gentlemen always made fuss over me, calling me "Black Eyed Susan." Once in a blue moon, after my hands were scrubbed, I was allowed to carry something in for them to eat. I was probably already the family klutz at that young age. I don't imagine most of them knew many little girls, unless they were one of the teachers. So, I guess I was a novelty.

The meals rivaled any great restaurant. There may not have been the choices available but no one could complain about the fare. As proud of their French heritage as the Brouillettes were, their meals were strictly delicious American style meals - apple pie, corn on the cob, coffee and brewed tea. The only French food I remember hearing Addie refer to was ragout, which is good old stew. I don't care what you call it, she made a delicious stew. She and her mother made fantastic meals and the demand for seats at her table was rampant in the city of Cohoes. It was the same at Mim's. If there were leftovers from a previous meal, there would be a choice of meat or any other delicious morsel. Gramma always had a choice of desserts and pudding - she specialized in tapioca, rice, and of course vanilla and chocolate - with REAL whipped cream. And her pies were fantastic. When I was young, Mim used to make doughnuts - and give us the holes!!

The table was set beautifully, with cloth napkins, napkin rings, and white tablecloths. And everyone had a glass of ice water, served in pink glasses. The bread was served on pretty bread plates that were metal. It could have been silver, but I am not sure. There was always a dish of crackers on the table before the boarders arrived. Addie always had homemade soup as the first course. Wow, could my Gramma make soup! And so could the rest of the Brouillettes. They had to have learned it from Mim. After I married, I watched her carefully and I think I have picked up her recipe for vegetable beef soup and pea soup. My chicken soup is passable. Gramma never ever used a cookbook! Who needed those? These ladies cooked by instinct.

I think the boarders' plates were fixed in the kitchen and whichever daughter was on duty that day waited on tables. Wady, actually Adelaide #2, was the clown of the family. I remember Marge, Vi and Bea calling her "Mama's pet and Papa's darling." But she was pretty enough to get away with whatever devilry she got into. Most young girls had some stage or screen star that they wanted to be just like. I had my Aunt Wady. She was beautiful, had millions of boyfriends, luncheon dates, tea dates, formal dance dates, swimming dates, taffy pulls - she was the Belle of Cohoes. I can still remember watching her get ready to go to what to me seemed like a glamorous dance. I realize now it was probably at the Cohoes High School gym. But there was also the Edgewood after the dance, or the Circle Inn, or Dinty Moores. I couldn't talk about the boarders without including Wady because she made their life fun. They didn't come in and just sit and eat. They were drawn into the family. One April Fools day, we all sat in the kitchen waiting for the comments or laughter. Wady had sewn all of their silverware to the tablecloth.

Tess Bulger was a maiden lady of middle age who rented one of the small front rooms. I don't know what she did for a living, but she probably worked at the mills as did most Cohoesers of that era. Wady used to hide under the stairs and scare the poor woman half out of her skin by jumping out at her. Tess's reaction was great. She was a nice lady, and I have fond memories of her. When I was very young, I felt a little sad and deprived because I didn't have a statue of Jesus. Since I came from the Protestant branch of the family we didn't have statues, although we certainly loved Jesus. But I didn't know why we didn't have statues. My cousins and aunts and all the girls in Cohoes had them and I didn't and I felt very unprotected, and I guess I must have been voicing my dismay near the boarders. The next Saturday when Mom brought me to Gramma Addie's while she did the cleaning, there was Tess at the noontime dinner, presenting me with a Jesus all my own!

Sam the grocer was another roomer and boarder. He ran a small grocery store on Oneida Street across from the Elks Club. I can remember going to his store to get things once in a while, but Addie did most of her shopping at the Grand Union, A & P and Andre's Meat Market. Andre used to deliver, and if you went there, all the clerks and Andre wore straw hats and there was sawdust on the floor. That was the custom for meat markets in those days. Sam had the other small front room. On her Saturdays I would help Mom empty the baskets and Sam always had an empty bottle or two of Listerine in his. To my young mind, it was very mysterious. It smelled medicinal, but who would take that much medicine?

Some of the roomers and boarders made a great impression on me and some are just names out of my childhood. It didn't seem unusual to me that my grandparents had all those people eating and living in their house. I guess I thought all grandparents did that. There were two teachers who lived there, Grace Stewart and Miss Coons. Miss Stewart made an impression on me, Miss Coons didn't. Miss Stewart took an interest in the children of the family. She was a very dignified looking lady -- my impression now is of a very tall lady with her hair pulled back in a bun. I'm probably all wrong -- I'm so short and Mom and Gramma were shorter! I don't know where she taught, except it wasn't the high school. Teaching was among the most honorable professions for an unmarried lady in those days, as were being a seamstress and working in a store. Most teachers weren't married because in the early 20th century they weren't allowed to be married and stay at work. If they got married, they had to quit. They might get pregnant and the children would see them!!! That was changing when the Depression hit because of the need for money since so many men were "laid off." Miss Stewart turned up later in my life after my Dad died and Mom and I started to attend the Silliman Memorial Presbyterian Church on Mohawk Street. Miss Stewart was a loyal member of the congregation. I can remember her being very complimentary when I had a part to read in a Christmas pageant. She was so proud of me because I spoke up and could be heard in the back of the church. And it was a very big church. I like to tell people that my voice just carries. Actually, I think I am just loud. With a family as big as ours, if you want to be heard, you learned to speak up.

I remember the name Archie La Flemme, but I can't put a face with him. I also remember Mr. Archangeault, but I think he lived at Mim's. There was Mrs. Flagstaff and her daughters. I sure do remember Bert and Bob. They shared a large room and were from Plattsburgh. They worked for either Niagara Mohawk or the telephone company and were working in the Cohoes area for a while. They were really nice men, and quite young. I think one of them was married and the other kind of liked Wady. One of them broke an arm and used to sit in a chair and listen to the radio and join in the family fun. They were the two I remember really joining the family.

The beds were changed once a week on Saturday when the cleaning was done. As tight as they made the beds, no wrinkles would have dared appear. All of the single bed sheets had a seam down the middle. It took me a while to figure out that Addie made single sheets out of worn out double ones. The middle was cut out and the two sides were sewn together with a very flat flat-felled seam. What happened to the single sheets when they wore out?? They became pillowslips—I know you call them cases, but they were slips in those days. Addie had the biggest Hoover vacuum I have ever seen. It was a hotel model with a headlight and tools that you plugged into the side - remember, this was the 1930s. That Hoover hummed away for hours every Saturday. Its dusting brush went up and down the baseboards and around the ceilings and up and down the stairs. While Marge was cleaning, Addie was washing.

In 1938, Addie and Art must have decided that they had enough. Art was working steadily now that the Depression was waning. Shirley says the doctor told her to either get rid of the boarding house or have a stroke. They sold their boarding house, boarders, roomers and all to Addie's cousin Rhetha Provost and bought a house in Latham. Addie was going to retire. It took her the rest of her life to stop cooking for an army. There were five of us in the house and she still made about two gallons of soup. She enjoyed her retirement, and taking care of her grandchildren and great grandchildren must have seemed like a breeze.

That house had seemed so huge to me. Years later, the Brouillettes' cousin Nora Gratton was living in what was Art and Addie's huge bedroom in the old boarding house. Shirley, Mom and I went down to see her. The house had shrunk---the rooms didn't seem quite so big and imposing to me anymore. I thought it would be nice to see it again, but I was a little disappointed. That visit has faded now and I remember the house as it was when I was a kid.

Many thanks to Sue Marden Borst for sharing this memoir



Off the Top...

I sat down to write this issue's President's message and drew a blank. I Googled "Cohoes History" and found a few interesting things, but nothing towards which to direct this message. Then I thought about the direction my recent personal research on La Petite Adelaide and the William J. Dickey House has taken me and I Googled "sharing" and came upon the following (wordnet.princeton.edu/perl/webwn):

- having in common
- using or enjoying something jointly with others
- communion: sharing thoughts and feelings
- sharing equally with another or others
- a distribution in shares
- unselfishly willing to share with others

Recently I won on Ebay a turn of the century edition of *Vanity Fair* magazine that had an early picture of Adelaide and a brief caption about changes in her career. But that is not the important part; another person who had bid, but lost, contacted me and asked if I would be willing to share a copy of a picture of another young actress that was in the same issue. That actress was this person's grandmother. I responded that I would and she was most grateful. When I received the magazine, I scanned the photo and sent it off. I quickly received the most gracious reply. She was thrilled; this was the earliest picture she had seen. She couldn't wait to share it with her 85 year old father as all the family photos and other memorabilia had been lost in a fire years earlier. I e-mailed back that she should do a search on the New York Public Library web site of the on-line collection of photographs. She did and there were many more photograph of this actress (her grandmother) that they didn't know existed. Again, she was thrilled.

About three weeks ago (like I do occasionally), I Googled "Adelaide Hughes vaudeville" and was not expecting to find anything I had not seen before. However, this time there was something new, a family history that included some information about Adelaide's maternal branch of the family; what an interesting story. I'll be sharing it in a future issue of the newsletter. Not only did I piece together more of Adelaide's family tree, but I was able to share some information with the woman who originally posted it who was looking for more information about her own family.

The point of this President's Message: SHARE! As time goes on we are losing a lot of the history of Cohoes because people are too busy or they don't think anyone really cares. The Spindle Historic Society cares and we can give a forum to share your piece of Cohoes history. We can file it so it can be shared with others in the future; we can publish it either in this newsletter or in future books that we have planned; or, we can end up making a program or tour out of the information that is shared with us. Please contact us in person, by mail, or electronically, but contact us and share your piece of Cohoes' history.

Paul D. Dunleavy
President

Profile of an SCHS Member – Linda C. Christopher



The profile in this issue of the newsletter features Linda C. Christopher, a founding member of SCHS. Linda was President of SCHS from 1995-2001, and is currently the Society's Secretary.

What is your occupation and background?

I have been a Secretary at the Field Services Bureau of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (NYSOPRHP) for the past 15 years. Prior to that time, I was a legal secretary, working at various law firms in the area.

How did you learn about and become involved in SCHS?

I am a co-founder of SCHS. I became involved when former Cohoes Mayor Robert Signoracci proposed the demolition of the Silliman Memorial Church. A group of us got together and formed Friends of Historic Cohoes to try to stop the demolition. Unfortunately, we lost that battle, but because of that fight SCHS was born.

What are your hobbies and other interests?

Reading, going to the movies, traveling, and of course doing historical research, whether it be on the history of Cohoes or my own family tree.

What aspects of Cohoes history most interest you?

The aspects of Cohoes history that interest me the most are its people – their stories of how and why they came to live in Cohoes, and of course, what it was like to live in Cohoes from the earliest times.

What SCHS activities and events do you enjoy the most?

I enjoy all SCHS activities and events. There is tremendous variety, and they are very interesting, informative and educational.

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

One thing I would like to mention is how my interest in historic preservation started. I did not really appreciate and understand historic preservation until I began working at NYSOPRHP, and later when I got involved in trying to save the Silliman church. Before that, I thought historic preservation was mainly associated with famous historical houses, and places like Colonial Williamsburg. I now realize that historic preservation is much more than that – it's about our own communities, their history and their people, and what we preserve to tell those stories.

Remembering World War II – at War and at Home



Bob Van Buskirk of the Cohoes Remembers Veterans Committee begins the program.



World War II veteran Raymond LaMora shows a Japanese flag to the students and other event participants including Barbara and John McDonald.

On December 7, 2006, the 65th anniversary of Pearl Harbor Day, an exhibit commemorating the service of Cohoes World War II veterans opened at the Visitor Center. The exhibit was also accompanied by programs to acquaint local students with the history of the World War II era. The events were co-sponsored by the Cohoes Remembers Veterans Committee.



Groups of Cohoes High School students visited the exhibit, which included newspaper articles of the period, photographs, letters and personal memories of the war, copies of documents and posters, and other memorabilia. The students also had the opportunity to hear first-person accounts of the war from some of the city's World War II veterans, and descriptions of what it was like growing up in Cohoes during wartime. The exhibit was up through January.

Cohoes – The Past is Present The Artwork of Edward T. Braley



Mary DeRose talks with artist Ed Braley.

February 17 was the opening reception for a show of artwork by Cohoes artist Edward T. Braley. The work shown includes paintings and photographs, focusing on the natural beauty and historic architecture of Cohoes. The show will be up in Visitor Center through March.



Photographs and notecards of the city's landscapes and architectural features.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPCOMING EVENTS

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

Wednesday, April 25 - Spindle City Historic Society meeting. 7 p.m., Cohoes Visitor's Center.

Sunday, April 29 - Tour of historic churches in Cohoes. 1 p.m. Visit four of the city's historic churches and learn about their architecture, history, and the people who built the parishes and worshiped there. Meet at St. Joseph's Church, Congress Street.

Saturday, May 5 - Opening reception for the Fifth Annual Cohoes High School Art Show. 7 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.

Wednesday, May 30 - Spindle City Historic Society meeting. 7 p.m., Cohoes Visitor's Center.

Wednesday, June 27 - Spindle City Historic Society meeting. 7 p.m., Cohoes Visitor's Center.

Wednesday, July 25 - Spindle City Historic Society meeting. 6 p.m., Cohoes Visitor's Center. Note 6 p.m. meeting time for July and August only.



Thanks to Alice Habura for her generous support of the Spindle City Historic Society



Join our e-mail list! The Spindle City Historic Society sends out e-mail notices of upcoming events and other news. If you or someone you know would like to be on the list for regular mailings, please send your e-mail address to us at cherniak@nycap.rr.com.

WANTED - Items for the Newsletter Do you have a story about people, places or events in Cohoes history you'd like to share, or an amusing or unusual item for a "Did you know"? We are always looking for contributions from our members and other readers to publish in the newsletter.

Photo credits this issue: Walter Cherniak, Tom Donnelly

| SCHS Newsletter Staff m

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