



Spindle City Historic Society

Volume 14 Issue 4

Winter 2011

HISTORIAN'S NOTEBOOK

DID YOU KNOW

When Millard Fillmore Heard the Cohoes Band Play

While researching the life and times of Samuel and Thomas Schuyler, owners of the first steam towboat company on the Hudson River, I chanced on a Cohoes connection while exploring a website of New York state newspapers that Paul Dunleavy mentioned a couple of issues back, www.fultonhistory.com/fultonhtml.

On June 28, 1856, New York State native son and former President Millard Fillmore was making a campaign trip up the Hudson River. This time he was not running as candidate for the old conservative "Whig" Party but for the new conservative "Know-Nothings." He drew great crowds for his speeches in New York City, Newburgh and Hudson. Now the sidewheel steamboat *Alida*, one of the largest and newest passenger boats connecting New York and Albany, was carrying him to the state capital. One can imagine the crowds on board, the yards of bunting, the 31-star flag snapping in the breeze.

The Know-Nothing Party platform was anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic. The Irish potato famine filled the ports of the east coast with poor illiterate citizens of "Erin," most of whom had no work skills beyond digging a ditch. The women had few domestic abilities, so the growing middle class was reluctant to employ them in their homes. The Midwest was being populated by hundreds of tenant farmers coming from German-speaking territories in Europe. They had been driven out by landowners taking so many of their crops in land rent that they themselves were near starvation. In some newly-settled frontier towns, it was rumored that a speaker of English was nonexistent. These people would populate the territories, and when the critical number of 30,000 had been reached, these areas could apply for statehood. This would upset the balance of power between north and south, east and west, which was so much a part of the politics of the pre-Civil War period.

In America at this time, the Democratic Party was the strongest, but a rising party of "American Republicans" was seeking a voice. However, they were being drowned out by a loud squawk from the "Know-Nothings". In an attempt to draw in the Whig vote, they chose Fillmore as their candidate. A hand had been extended to a young Midwesterner by the name of Abraham Lincoln, but with no interest from him. Commenting in an 1855 letter, he wrote that if Know-Nothings get elected, our Declaration of Independence would be amended to state that all men are created equal except "negroes, foreigners, and Catholics."

The Know-Nothing Party's popularity was strongest in the northern states, which were dealing with rapid changes in demographics. People were becoming less rural and more
(continued on p.6)

...that the Cohoes Business College opened in the Adams Block on January 5, 1897, offering two daily sessions, one in the daytime and another in the evening? There were 104 scholars enrolled, and three teachers at the college.

.... that on January 14, 1898 the Central Skating Rink, located at the head of White St., hosted a two mile race at 7:15 p.m. between skaters Mr. Connors and Mr. Monton, followed by a carnival and tunes by the Cohoes City Band?

....that on February 26, 1898, Cohoes adventurers left to seek their fortunes in the Klondike, following the Hope Family, who had met with success and had a town named for them called Hope City?

.... that on May 30, 1897, the first commencement of the Cohoes Evening College was held at the YWCA?

....that on August 24, 1898, prospector Napoleon Piche returned from the Klondike richer in experience, but poorer in money?

....that on September 10, 1894, Cohoes City drinking water was found to have nests of snakes and worms, and therefore not desirable to drink?

....that on August 14, 1899, prospectors George Guilbeault and Thomas Hillibrant returned to Cohoes from the Klondike after one and a half years with experience but no wealth?

.... that on May 30, 1897, a proposed new sewer system for the city of Cohoes was estimated to have a cost of about \$150,000?

....that on February 17, 1897, a report was given at a meeting of the Cohoes Common Council that 981 bodies were removed from the old cemetery (located in what is now West End Park) and reinterred as follows: 949 in the Union Cemetery in Crescent, 13 in Oakwood Cemetery, 12 in Waterford Rural Cemetery and 7 in Albany Rural Cemetery, at a cost of \$2,044.75, which did not include payments to lot owners? Three bodies were still in the cemetery due to objections to removal by the lot owners.

....that on November 16, 1899, another Klondiker returned home to Cohoes? Theodore Boudreau returned rich in stories but not in gold.

.... that on May 30, 1894, a pleasure boat trip on the "City Of Schenectady" left the White St. Bridge at 1 p.m. on Memorial Day, and returned to the head of the locks at a "reasonable hour"? The trip cost 25 cents.

...that on April 21, 1898, due to bad economic times, the Golden Ball dry goods store, long a shopping mecca in Cohoes, was forced to close its doors?

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

The Spindle City Historic Society welcomes new members *Jane Bartis, Patricia Brock, Mary Jo Cutty, Cathy Roylance and Donald Whitbeck.*

Congregation Beth Jacob in Cohoes – Gone and Almost Forgotten

by Miriam Newell Biskin



The home of Congregation Beth Jacob on Remsen Street.

The earliest minutes of Congregation Beth Jacob dated March 3, 1895 list Mr. Raphael Allen and Chairman, Mr. Rosenblatt as Treasurer, and Mr. Goldstein as Secretary, with dues of \$3 per annum plus \$5 for cemetery care. At the time, there were about fifty Orthodox families in membership, ready to support a *shul*. The Cohoes City directory lists several who were probably members of these groups: Herman Kahn, fancy goods, 131 Remsen St.; Harris Goldstone, peddler, 17 Strong Place; Abram Rosenblatt, clothing, 81 Oneida St., Morris Rosenblatt, bookkeeper, 108 Remsen St., Ellis Rosenblatt, peddler, 37 Lancaster St.; Abraham Newell, laborer, 123 Lancaster St., David and Morris Rudnick, peddlers, Dyke Avenue, corner of Euclid; Jacob Weiss, peddler, 10 Dyke Avenue; A. Plotke, clothing, 172 Remsen St., August Abraham, shoes, 120 Remsen St., Emanuel Jacob, Louis and Sarah Jacob, dry goods, 111 Remsen St.; Jacob Blum, jeweler; David Rosenthal, shoddy manufacturer, Mohawk St.; Jacob Bunavitsky, umbrella maker; Abe Marcus, dry goods, Willow St., among others.

The first Jewish settlers had migrated to the

United States over 100 years ago and many came to Cohoes in the late 1800s, with the greatest influx from 1900 to 1924. The dry goods peddlers became store owners, the junk peddlers became scrap dealers, and their children would become doctors, lawyers, dentists, pharmacists and teachers. The first Jewish person admitted to Albany Law School was Henry Kahn, who later became a judge. The business section of Cohoes ran down Remsen Street from Cayuga (Factory) Street to Columbia Street, and included Goldberg Tailor and Furrier, Weinstein Furriers, Deitcher's Tailor Shop, the Army-Navy Store, Mr. R's 10 Cent Store, Smith Electric Company, Newell's Tire and Electric Store. Cramer's Army and Navy Store and Weiss's Newsroom were on Mohawk Street, just east of Remsen Street. Frank and Eli Newell had junk businesses on Saratoga St., while their mother, Mary Newell, had a junk business on Dyke Avenue with sons John and Charles and daughter Kate. Also listed in the junk business were the Berkman, Tolkins, Architzels, and Kelmans. The Carrs, Rosenblooms, and Cutlers were in the meat business and the Weiss family in the grocery business.



Mrs. Bessie (Eli) Newell in 1917



The Newell family. Back row (left to right): Susan, Frank, Eli. Center row: Abraham (Peyse), Mary (Maite), Lena, Kate (child in Mary's lap). Front row: John, Fanny, Charles.

At first, the congregation met in rented spaces, like Larkin Hall at the corner of Mohawk and Oneida Streets, and then at a home at 76 Newark St., until a property at 294 Remsen St. was purchased on November 25, 1913 and converted from a residence into a synagogue. The first floor became the sanctuary, with rows of dark mahogany benches filling the room. The benches had been offered to the congregation by St. Rita's parish, which was replacing their church's pews when remodeling the church. Carpentry work done by Crandall Lumber of Saratoga Street included some cosmetic recarving on the benches, replacing the engraved crosses at the ends of the pews with stars of David.

At the front of the sanctuary was the ark (the *aron kodesh*), the cabinet holding the Holy Scrolls (the word "ark" coming from the initials of the Hebrew word). The cabinet doors as well as an inner curtain would be closed or opened at various points in the service by members who could customarily bid (pledge a financial contribution) for this honor. Slightly above the ark was the *neir tamid*, the Eternal Light, commanded to be kept burning. Above that was a plaque dedicated to my paternal grandparents, Abraham and

Mary Newell (anglicized from Maite and Peyse).

In the center there was a podium (the *bimah*) where the leader could stand to conduct services. Since the *shul* was Orthodox, the women were seated in the back section, separated from the men by a curtain (a *mechitzah*), removing any distractions from the praying gentlemen. This gold damask separation, hung on a horizontal rod, complete with gold rings, was constructed by Mrs. Bessie (Eli) Newell. In the Orthodox *shul* in Troy, there was an upstairs balcony for the women, while in the Conservative and Reform temples in Troy and Albany, there was no such separation.

According to Jewish law, religious services are conducted twice daily, morning and evening, and may be conducted only if there is a quorum (*minyan*) of ten adult males present; boys who had reached their 13th birthdays (*bar mitzvah*) were included among the adults.

As a child, sitting with my mother, I would peek through the curtains, and watch the shawl-covered backs of the men, my father among them, swaying as they prayed. In those days, the men wore hats since *yarmulkas* (skull caps) were not yet the fashion. On *Yom Kippur* (the Day of Atonement) I read the English side of the prayer book, which lists the sins for repentance, and if I

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Off the Top...

Last week, during the beginning of the holiday rush, I sat down to watch *Meet Me in St. Louis* in order to get started

with the holiday spirit. The movie covers all the seasons, but ends with Christmas. If you don't know the movie, a family is upset by the father's plans to move to New York City for a promotion, leaving behind their house and friends in St. Louis just before the World's Fair opens in their hometown. In a scene set just after the Christmas Eve ball, Judy Garland's character sings "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas" to comfort her little sister who is upset about the move to New York.

The song now is a holiday staple, sung by many different performers. Originally, however, when the first lyrics were presented to the cast and crew it was criticized as depressing. The words were as follows:

*Have yourself a merry little Christmas, it may be your last,
Next year we may all be living in the past
Have yourself a merry little Christmas, pop that champagne cork,
Next year we will all be living in New York.*

*No good times like the olden days, happy golden days of yore,
Faithful friends who were dear to us, will be near to us no more.*

*But at least we all will be together, if the Fates allow,
From now on we'll have to muddle through somehow.
So have yourself a merry little Christmas now.*

How many lines of the current rendition do you remember? Did you catch that "*It may be your last / Next year we may all be living in the past*" became "*Let your heart be light / Next year all our troubles will be out of sight*"?

Many things can change in a year, but remember that the Spindle City Historic Society works year round to document the "*happy golden days of yore*" in Cohoes. Join us for a meeting, share some artifacts, or write an article for the quarterly newsletter. But, most of all, have yourself a merry little Christmas.

Paul D. Dunleavy

President

The Capital District's Role in the Civil War – A Look Inside the NYS Military Museum's Online and On-site Collections



On September 28, Michael Aikey, Director of the New York State Military Museum and Veterans Research Center, gave an overview of the Museum's on-site and online

collections. His presentation focused on the materials in the collection related to the Civil War, which includes a large collection of battle flags (the Museum has the largest collection of state Civil War battle flags in the country), as well as uniforms (including the uniform worn by Union officer Colonel Elmer Ellsworth when he met his death), photographs (over 2300 Civil War era photographs) and weapons.

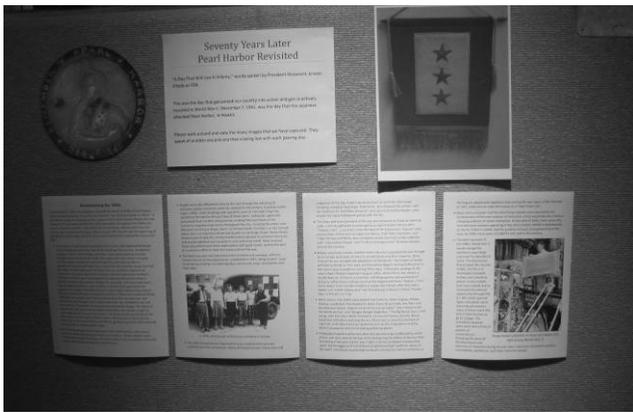
He also described the museum's extensive online collection of documents and photographs (located at the Museum's website <http://dmna.state.ny.us/historic/mil-hist.htm>). Among available materials are histories of military units in the Civil War, searchable by county and unit type, rosters of military volunteers, reports from the Bureau of Military Statistics, newspaper clippings documenting activities of New York State military units during the war, information about geographic areas from which each NYS regiment recruited personnel, and, a Civil War timeline.

The Museum, located at a former armory building at 61 Lake Avenue in Saratoga Springs, also houses artifacts, photographs and documents from other U.S. wars, a 2000-volume library of military and New York State history, and provides a range of online resources and other research materials. The Veterans Research Center coordinates the NYS Veterans Oral History Program, collecting the experiences of veterans of all eras and branches of service.

Collecting Images of Cohoes

If you have historic Cohoes postcards, trade cards, photos, or other items you would like to share for the Spindle City Historic Society's upcoming book, please contact us at cohoes90@nycap.rr.com or at 518-237-5618. These items will be scanned and returned to their owners unless they wish to donate them to SCHS.

“Remembering Pearl Harbor Day” Exhibit



In commemoration of the 70th anniversary of Pearl Harbor Day, SCHS opened an exhibit in late November in the Visitor’s Center. The exhibit features memorabilia and memoirs from those who served in World War II, recollections of the time from local residents, and photographs, posters and newspaper articles of the period.

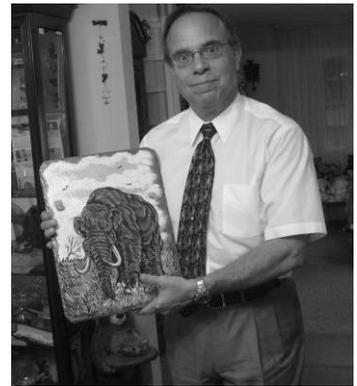


The exhibit will be up through late February and can be viewed during regular Visitor’s Center hours – Tuesday through Friday, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., or when the Visitor’s Center is open for Spindle City Historic Society meetings or events.



SCHS Annual Raffle

The winner of the SCHS annual raffle is Tor Shekerjian. This year’s raffle item was a painting of a mastodon on a 12”x16” slate tile, painted by artist Pam McGivern. The slate was originally used on the roof of a house that once stood on Bedford Street in Cohoes.



The raffle drawing was held at the annual Christmas tree lighting in Cohoes on the Saturday after Thanksgiving.

Thanks to SCHS raffle coordinator Lorraine Okeson, and to all who participated in the raffle. Look for upcoming announcements of the 2012 raffle item.

Wanted: Your Stories for the SCHS Newsletter

If you have a story about people, places, or events in Cohoes history, the Spindle City Historic Society wants to hear from you. The Society is seeking articles for its quarterly newsletter. The newsletter staff welcomes written articles, as well as recollections of the past and information that can be used in newsletter articles or in the newsletter’s “Did You Know” section. Contributors will be acknowledged. Please contact us by calling 518-237-5618 or by e-mailing us at cherniak@nycap.rr.com.

In Memoriam

Anne Marie Nadeau, a trustee of the Spindle City Historic Society since 2005, passed away in October 2011. She taught French in the Albany City School District for 27 years, retiring in 1994. Anne Marie was an active member of the Spindle City Historic Society, participating in many programs and events and sharing her enthusiasm for Cohoes history, especially its rich French-Canadian heritage. She was a valued member of the SCHS newsletter staff, bringing to these pages her sense of humor, *joie de vivre*, and indefatigable approach to historical research. She was also a volunteer at the Cohoes Library, a gardener, and an avid and knowledgeable genealogical researcher. The Spindle City Historic Society extends sincere condolences to Anne Marie’s family and friends. She is greatly missed.

Historian's Notebook (continued from p.1):

Urban, society was becoming more technological and industrial and less agricultural, and many people no longer endured a hand to mouth subsistence, but instead worked for a better standard of living for themselves and a brighter future for their children. The Know-Nothing Party candidate proclaiming these values drew crowds.

Copied by the new "magnetic telegraph" from an Albany paper, the Auburn (NY) *Daily American* reported, in a long account of the day's activities:

Approaching Albany---

It had been arranged that a steamer should leave Albany to meet the *Alida* some miles below the city. When the *Alida* was within six or eight miles of the city, the steamer *Young America* hove in sight. Her decks were alive with people; there was scarcely room for another to stand. She was gaily decked out with numerous flags and a party from Cohoes, with their fine band of music carried a number of banners. Long before the two steamers met, salutes from guns on board of each were exchanged and when they came along side each other and Mr. Fillmore made his appearance on the deck of the *Alida*, the enthusiasm was unbounded. The excitement was at the highest pitch. For miles as the two steamers came up the river abreast, the cheering was unceasing, while along the riverside, the people came down to join in the general welcome.

Young America was a relatively new sidewheel wooden "helper boat" belonging to the Schuyler Towboat Line. At only about 140 feet, it was built for two jobs. One was to pull barges from the shore to the "stake boat" which was firmly moored a short distance out in the river. Here, the barges and canal boats, loaded to the brim with timber, crates of iron goods, waterproofed crates of textiles, barrels of produce, flour, and grains, would be lashed into a tow and taken down the river to New York City twenty or thirty at a time.

The second job was to accompany the tow down the river in case the tow lines should break, and the barges would have to be pushed back together again. At full steam, the towboat, usually an older converted passenger sidewheeler, would take from 30 to 36 hours to make the trip. On any other day, *Young America* would be building a tow to leave at five o'clock, but today all the boats had a holiday. The paper estimated that 20,000 people lined the shores and filled the decks of every available craft afloat.

Standing in the prow of *Young America*, the heads on the band's bass drums advertised that they were from the hardworking village of Cohoes, New York. As the newspaper reports, they carried banners. Perhaps one or more of them read "*Cohoes Clothes America,*" or "*America Wears Cohoes*", proclaiming their American pride in their textile industry. We'll never know, until one is discovered in a dusty trunk someday.

We can imagine the band members who worked at Harmony Mills talking over their lunch pails about going down from Lansingburgh on *Young America* to welcome the candidate. Immigrants themselves, they were of varied skills and abilities. Many were Catholic and Irish, but this did not stop them from getting a pay packet each week, and making lives for themselves in America.



Not the group that played in Millard Fillmore's day, but another of the many Cohoes bands that existed over the city's history.

The Know-Nothings won 21.6% percent of the electoral vote, with the American Republicans' candidate, John C. Fremont, getting 33%, and Buchanan 45%. Fillmore won only 8 electoral votes. Had Fillmore not been a candidate, Fremont would have likely won, and the next chapter in the history of the United States would have been written by someone other than Abraham Lincoln. The only state the Know-Nothings carried was Maryland, populated by a supermajority of Irish Catholics!

Tom Allison

Tom Allison is currently working on a book about the Schuylers and their steamboat ventures. He has given a presentation based on this research, "A Steamboat World", to various audiences throughout the region this fall.

Congregation Beth Jacob (continued from p.3):

asked the definition of some infraction not in my vocabulary, I was hushed by my mother as she continued to *daven* (pray). The service was long, and I dozed as the congregation asked forgiveness for all past, present and future sins. In that same Yom Kippur *machzor* (prayer book), there is a beautiful prayer invoking twenty-two blessings for the new year: twenty-two requests; the same as the numbers in the Hebrew alphabet, one blessing for each letter of the *alef-beit*, in order:

MAY THE YEAR 5772 BE FOR EACH OF YOU: a year of Awesome Accomplishment ...of Boundless Blessing...of Constructive Creativity...of Daily Delight...of Effervescent Energy...of Fantastic Friendships...of Great Gladness...of Hearty Health... of Insight and Inspiration... of Jewish Joy...of Kindness and Caring...of Many Mitzvot...of Noteworthy New Horizons...of Outstanding Offspring...Plenty of Prosperity...of Quality and Quantity.. of Real Redemption...of Super Success...of Total Tranquility... of Ultimate Unity among nations... of Verifiable Visions...of a time Without Wars...of Exhilarating Experiences...of Youthful Exuberance...of Zest and Zeal... for you, your friends and your family.

In 1968, Beth Jacob synagogue merged with Beth Tephiloh synagogue in Troy, with the four Torah scrolls transferred to a new spiritual home. The building which housed the *shul* on Remsen Street in Cohoes is once more a private residence, with only a few neighbors who remember its existence. The stained glass transom window over the entrance, which featured a star of David, and the plaque dedicated to my grandparents, have disappeared. At the last meetings of the Sisterhood Executive Board, a majority of the members, Clara Siegal, Edith Ringer, and Libby Waldman, agreed to forward all remaining funds of the group directly to Golda Meir.

Miriam Newell Biskin taught Social Studies and English for many years in the Cohoes City schools, and at other educational institutions in the region. She is a writer, and has authored children's stories, poems, plays, essays and full-length works, including her memoir My Life Among the Gentiles.

Spindle City Historic Society Membership Application

www.spindlecitcity.net

President - Paul Dunleavy

First Vice President - Daniele Cherniak

Second Vice President - Tor Shekerjian

Secretary - Linda C. Christopher

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 gift membership

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

Electronic Option for Delivery of the SCHS Newsletter

The Spindle City Historic Society now offers its members electronic mailing of the newsletter. This assures faster receipt of your newsletter. To sign up for electronic delivery, please send your e-mail request to: cherniak@nycap.rr.com and provide the e-mail address for receipt of your newsletter. Otherwise, you will continue to receive the newsletter through regular mail.

e-mail Notifications of SCHS News and Events

If you would like to receive timely e-mail notices of upcoming Spindle City Historic Society events and other news, please e-mail us at cherniak@nycap.rr.com.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Exhibit - A Commemoration of Pearl Harbor Day – An exhibit to commemorate the 70th anniversary of Pearl Harbor Day, featuring photos, memorabilia, recollections and accounts of those at war and at home during World War II. Cohoes Visitor's Center. The exhibit opened in late November and will remain up through February 2012. It can be viewed during regular Visitor's Center hours of Tuesday through Friday 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., or at times the Visitor's Center is open for a Spindle City Historic Society meeting or event.

Wednesday, January 25, 2012 – A virtual tour and history of the Harmony Mills District – a presentation by Walter Lipka. 7 p.m., Harmony Mills Lofts meeting room, 100 North Mohawk St. The Spindle City Historic Society's regular monthly meeting will follow the presentation.

Wednesday, February 29 – Spindle City Historic Society meeting. 7 p.m., Cohoes Visitor's Center.

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.

Friday and Saturday, May 18 and 19 – Cohoes Heritage Days. A citywide series of events celebrating the rich heritage of Cohoes. Events will include tours, performances, and exhibits.

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

Photo credits this issue – Miriam Biskin, Walter Cherniak, NYS Military Museum

☞ SCHS Newsletter Staff ☜

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Spindle City Historic Society

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