

Spindle City Historic Society

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HISTORIAN'S NOTEBOOK

DID YOU KNOW

Sketches of Cohoes History

- The Mohawk Indians were the first Cohoes settlers, living in stockade villages along the river. They cultivated grains, and hunted and fished for their food, but making war was among the chief pursuits of Mohawk men. The Mohawks were known as the "Tribe of the Flint," since stone was the principal material used in their implements and weapons. Their garments were made of animal skins and furs, and for currency they used strings of shells called wampum, with white shells signifying peace, and purple for mourning and war. The Mohawks migrated from Canada and settled along the shores of the Mohawk River, thus the origin of their name. They were a branch of an Adirondack tribe and received their knowledge of warmaking and husbandry from this group, but were driven from the Adirondacks to the shores of the Mohawk River when the groups disputed. The correct name for the Mohawks was Agmegac, or Gagemegue, meaning "She Bear." The Algonquins called them Mahaquas, which the French translated into Moquis or Mohocks. Following the Revolutionary War, the tribe returned to Canada.
- Cohoes finds mention in European history as early as 1642, when Rev. Johannes Megapolensis wrote to his friends about a river out of the Mahakas country with "a falls whose height equals that of my church." In 1656 Adrian Von Der Donck visited the river called the Magnas Kill which had a waterfall the Indians named Cahoos. He wrote that the Indians came as far as the Falls, where they landed and carried their bark canoes to a place below the Falls to continue their journey on the river.
- In 1647, the "Cahoos" of the Iroquois was a place name meaning "Beyond the Falls." The roar of the mighty cataract could be heard for miles, so great was the volume of water over the waterfall.
- The land comprising the present city of Cohoes came into the possession of the Dutch shortly after the discovery of the Hudson River by Henry Hudson in 1609. The Dutch West India Company was incorporated in 1621 for the purpose of opening up the newly discovered land and in engaging in the fur trade. In 1629, the Dutch West India Company opened up the lands to anyone who agreed to establish a colony of fifty adults there within four years. In 1630, Killian Van Rensselaer was one of the first to ask for a grant and charter. This was the start of the patroon system, and by 1637 Van Rensselaer had increased his domain to an area twenty miles long and forty-eight miles wide, known as the Manor of Rensselaerwyck, including the land that is now Cohoes. The patroon had authority in all civil and military affairs, and furnished the settlers with stock, seeds, and implements; the settlers' land rent was
(continued on p.2)

....that on April 27, 1897, Cohoes participants at the Grant Day Celebration and Dedication of Grant's Tomb in New York City were Charles S. Prest, E.H.Foster and Allen Van Olinda?

.... that on August 20, 1894, Eva Tanguay, the "youngest star on the American stage," severed her connection with the Joshua Simpkins Co. and came to Cohoes to rest before going on the road for herself?

....that on February 1, 1897, two hundred men from the Page Rolling Mills received a cut in wages due to a lack of orders and a backlog of \$100,000 worth of stock.?

.... that on September 14, 1894, Eva Tanguay opened the theatrical season at the City Theater with a successful performance of *Reddy the Way*? Her career started when she was seven years old and improved as she matured. She received two bouquets and a gold pin from "those who love you" which she promised to wear for every stage performance thereafter.

.... that on February 19, 1897, following a meeting of Cohoes' leading citizens, an entertainment was proposed as a fund raiser to relieve the want and suffering in the city? While many mills did not open at all, some workers who could return to work were given a 10% reduction in wages.

....that on October 23, 1897, James J. Corbett, the well-known pugilist, appeared at the Opera House?

.... that on November 6, 1897, state engineers surveyed the river and channels for establishing a new canal to replace the old Erie Canal running through the city? Ultimately, a route was chosen through Waterford instead of Cohoes for the Barge Canal, completed in the early 20th century.

....that on May 30, 1899, Sousa's famous Band performed a magnificent concert at the Cohoes Theater?

....that on June 9, 1899, Pawnee Bill's Wild West Show opened on the old show grounds on Adams Island (Van Schaick Island) with daily street parades?

....that on March 15, 1898, a fire damaged the Victor Mills Co., the largest knit goods mill in the city, putting 900 people out of work and causing a city-wide financial disaster?

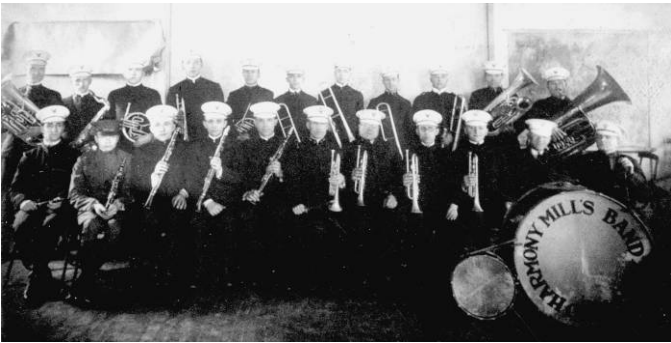
.... that on March 10, 1897, the entertainment provided by local talent for the benefit of the city's poor was a huge success?

.... that on September 10, 1898, the new Victor Mills plant was completed, and was said to be the largest in the world devoted to the manufacture of knit goods?

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

The Spindle City Historic Society welcomes new members
Darrell Dessingue and Julia Fogarty.

Bands and Drum Corps of Cohoes



In the “good old days,” nearly every town had a band (or more than one) that played at all community events, and Cohoes was no exception. Most of these groups used brass instruments, and some of the bands of Cohoes in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were Tillie’s Band, the Harmony Mills Band, and the Cohoes Band. Various ethnic groups and fraternal organizations, including the Polish National Alliance (PNA), also formed bands.

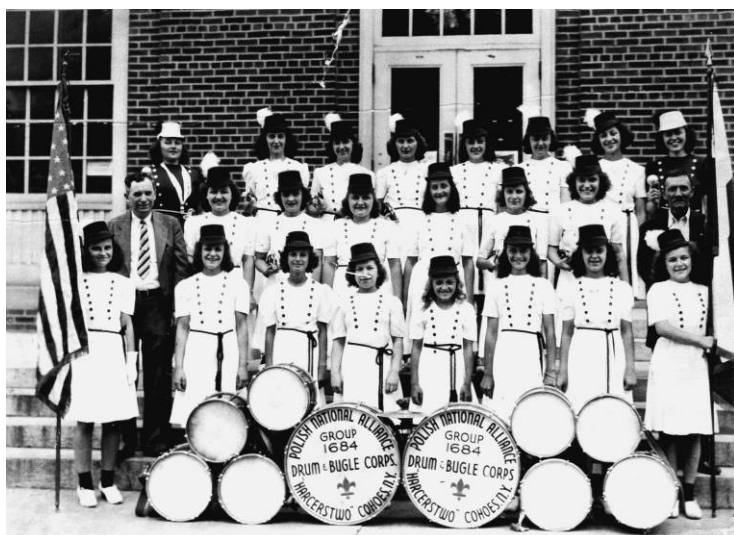
After WWI, youth drum and bugle corps began forming around the state. In the 1930s Cohoes had an outstanding group called The Boy Rangers Drum and Bugle Corps, which were the junior corps of the E.T. Ruane American Legion Post. Among the members of the Boy Rangers was Monica Amyot (later Bourgeois); girls were a rarity in these groups.

With the onset of WWII, many of those involved in the bands went off to war and several of the area’s groups disbanded. After the war, a group of WWII veterans and former Albany area junior drum corps members united to form the Empire State Grenadiers and affiliated with the E.T. Ruane American Legion Post in Cohoes. The group performed to great acclaim for several years, and eventually the Grenadiers left Cohoes and the E.T. Ruane American Legion Post to affiliate with the Rensselaer County American Legion.

In the fall of 1958, The Empire State Grenadiers merged with the Berkshire Marauders to form the Interstatesmen, sponsored by the Berkshire County, Massachusetts, and Rensselaer County, New York Councils of the American Legion. Their distinctive red and black uniforms were a combination the colors previously worn by the two groups. The Interstatesmen competed in the Northeast drum corps Circuit from 1959 to 1967.



The Boy Rangers Drum and Bugle Corps in front of the Cohoes Post Office in the late 1930s. Monica Bourgeois is in the front row on the right.



The Polish National Alliance (PNA) Drum and Bugle Corps in 1939, also in front of the Cohoes Post Office.

The merger of the groups was initiated by drill master Vinnie Ratford. The original director of the Interstatesmen was Walter Wood, followed by Lionel “Canal” Deschamps and then Al Richards. The group, with soloist Ron Ghetti, once performed in Carnegie Hall in “An Evening with The Corps.” They were the first senior drum corps to perform there.

In 1960 the Interstatesmen won both the Massachusetts American Legion and Connecticut American Legion State Open Class Championships. They achieved five consecutive first places in competition in July and August of 1960. The group performed under the capable hands of Hugo Evarelli, Drill Instructor, Dominic Del Ray, Horn Instructor and Bob Peterson directing the Drums. Support was provided by Attorney Robert Manuel, Chairman and Walter Wood, Business Manager.

Among the well-known performers in the group were Ron Ghetti, a soprano saxophone soloist, a lyric player with “a sound so sweet to hear it made you cry,” Artie Nelson, a snare drummer who, in the early

1960s, began to teach the Junior Corps in the area; he demanded a high level of focus from his students, resulting in "big payoffs" in performances. His part writing was ahead of its time, and he taught several of the corps in both upstate New York and Massachusetts from 1960s to the mid 1970s. He and Ron Ghetti both helped to develop the next generation of drum corps members in the Albany-Pittsfield area. Artie, through his relationship with a Swiss drummer, was one of the first American percussionists to use Swiss Rudiments in American drum corps, and his knowledge made him a Chief Percussion Judge in charge of training new percussion judges in the All-American Association. Another notable member was Mr. Zabek, who graduated from Keveny Memorial Academy in Cohoes in 1964. He served in the Vietnam War, where he received a Purple Heart; following his return from the war he was active with the Interstatesmen in Troy and Pittsfield. He was founding member of the Avant Garde Drum and Bugle Corps, a junior corps in Saratoga County.

The "I"men, as the Interstatesmen became known, were the first corps to utilize Whaley Royce manufactured "mellophone" bugles, an introduction that spurred their use by many other bands. In 1964 they joined other senior groups to form the "Drum Corps Associates," to promote self-governance of drum corps activities. They were also members of the Alumni Drum and Bugle Corps. Four Interstatesmen have been inducted into The World Drum Corps Hall Of Fame: Richard "Butch" Anderson, Dominic DelRay, Alan Smyth, Walter Wood, as well as junior corps member Jeff Perkins.

The Interstatesmen disbanded in 1967, but their years of outstanding performances and those of their predecessors will always be remembered.



A 1953 photo of the Empire State Grenadiers on parade in Cohoes.

Spindle City Historic Society Membership Application

www.spindlecity.net

President - Paul Dunleavy

First Vice President - Daniele Cherniak

Second Vice President - Tor Shekerjian

Secretary - Linda C. Christophers

Treasurer - June Cherniak

Individual Membership \$10.00

Institutional Membership \$25.00

Senior Citizen Membership \$ 5.00

Contributing Membership \$35.00

Student Membership \$ 5.00

Sustaining Membership \$50.00

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