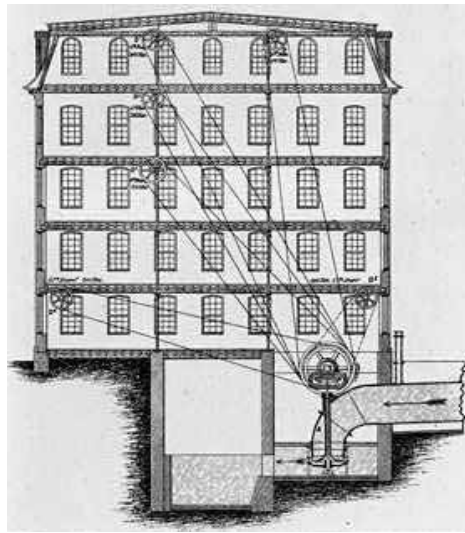


SELF GUIDED TOUR THE SCHENECTADY AND TROY RAILROAD

Tour 'A'



Spindle City Historic
Society

237-7999

www.spindlecity.net

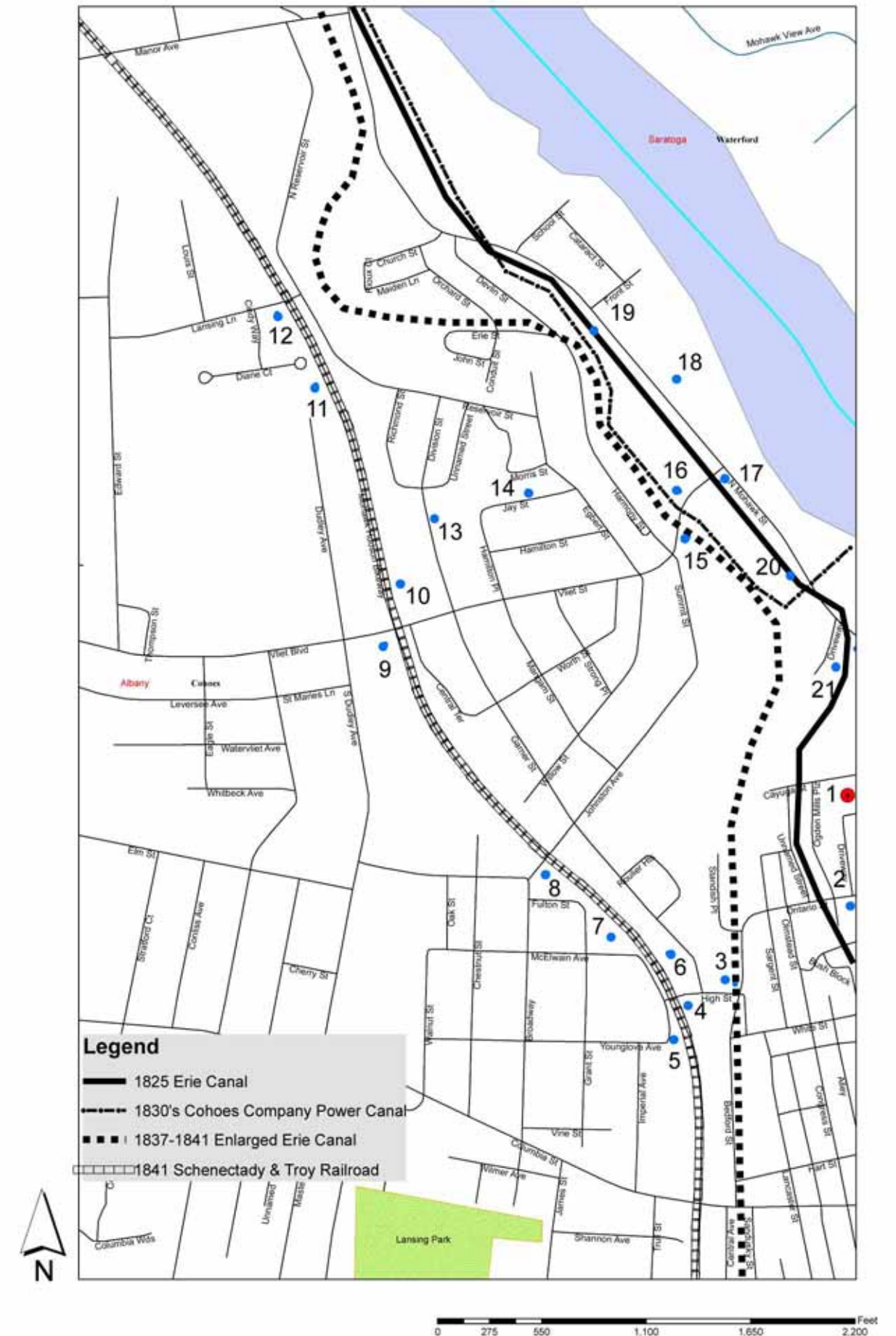
This is Tour "A", which begins and ends at the Cohoes Visitor's Center; a separate Tour "B" begins at Fonda Road & US Route 9 just north of Cohoes, follows the route of the S&T Railroad (now the Crescent Branch of the Mohawk Hudson Hike Bike Trail) south into Cohoes, and ends at the terminus of the trail at Alexander St. near the southern boundary of Cohoes.

The Tour follows each numbered site in order. You will jump back and forth in time, between 1825 when the Original Erie Canal was constructed and 1981, when the Estate of the former Penn Central Railroad sold the S&T right of way to the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, which transferred it to Albany County for construction of the Crescent Branch of the Mohawk-Hudson Hike-Bike Trail.

The Troy and Schenectady Railroad was established in 1842 by the businessmen of the City of Troy. Troy was beginning its rapid industrialization and needed to move finished products, including stoves and knit goods, quickly to markets to the west. Schenectady was considered the best destination, as it would avoid the time that was lost while negotiating the flight of locks on the Erie Canal at Cohoes.

When the Erie Canal was completed in 1825, the cost of transportation dropped by 90% or more. The City of Albany was the Hudson River terminus of the Erie Canal. The City of Troy had seen great increases in its traffic as well, and viewed itself in competition with Albany to become the larger terminal city for the Erie Canal. It took a day for passengers arriving in Albany by packet boats from New York City to traverse the distance between Albany and Schenectady by the original canal, mainly because of the locks in Cohoes. In 1831, the Mohawk and Hudson Railway was built between Albany and Schenectady to shorten travel times between the two cities; the S&T, between Troy and Schenectady, followed a decade later.. When the S&T opened for business in November 1842, it was the first steam railroad in the nation built and owned by a city. Unlike the M&H, which was constructed using iron strap rail on longitudinal wooden stringers attached to granite blocks, the S&T was the first railroad in what became the New York Central System to be constructed with iron "T" rail on wooden crossties using 6-1/2" railroad spikes. The line, despite its less steep grade to Schenectady and its superior construction, never became profitable, partly because of its reverse connection in Schenectady to the Utica & Schenectady as compared to the direct connection to the Mohawk & Hudson Railroad. In 1852, the City of Troy sold the S&T to Edwin D. Morgan, President of the Hudson River Railroad Company. One year later, the line was incorporated into the newly-created New York Central Railroad.

Schenectady & Troy Railroad - City of Cohoes



1. Cohoes Visitor’s Center – Cohoes Music Hall building, 58 Remsen St. Start of the tour and home of the Spindle City Historic Society.

2. Egberts and Bailey Mill: The year is 1832. You are standing on the route of the Original 1825 Erie Canal. To the right, you can see what is now the Erie Power Canal Park, and to the left, you can see down Main Street (originally called Canal Street); these were both sections of the original canal. In 1832 Egberts & Bailey built the first mill in Cohoes (and in the country) expressly for knitting purposes using water-powered knitting machinery. Two historical markers are near this site. If you look east to 302 Ontario St., you can see the ghostly outline of the mill’s roofline. By 1843, the Enlarged Erie Canal had been constructed further uphill on land once owned by the Cohoes Company; when the canal was enlarged the Cohoes Company swapped this land with New York State for sections of the original Erie Canal, which the Cohoes Company converted to power canals. In 1843, Egberts & Bailey constructed their new mill on Ontario Street.

3. Enlarged Erie Canal and Lock 13: In 1837, New York State began a project to enlarge the canal by making it wider (70’ vs. 40’), deeper (7’ vs. 4’), and replacing the single chamber locks with double chamber locks to permit two-way traffic at each lock. The Original Erie Canal had 19 locks in Cohoes; the Enlarged Erie Canal reduced this to 10 locks. Of those locks (from Lock 9 near Alexander St. to Lock 18 on North Mohawk St.), portions of all remain visible except Lock 13. From the corner of Bedford and High Streets, Lock 13, now buried, was to the south, between Bedford Street on the right and Sandusky Street on the left. Lock 14 is to the north behind the bowling alley. High Street once crossed over the Canal on an iron bridge, where it connected to Sandusky Street.

4. Early Passenger Railroad Station: By 1902, the Schenectady & Troy Railroad had been absorbed into the New York Central and Hudson River Railroad Company. Where the bridge is today was once a very dangerous highway/railroad grade crossing. The earlier passenger station was to the left, east of the tracks and on the south side of High Street. There were 3 or 4 tracks crossing at highway grade. Younglove and McElwain Avenues came down the hill, and crossed the first couple of tracks, then came together at High Street, which crossed the other two tracks. In 1903, a joint grade crossing elimination project between the City, the Harmony Company, and the NYC&HRRR resulted in the bridge seen today.

5. High Street Station: An interpretive sign marks the site of the station. You are now on the right-of-way (ROW) of the S&T Railroad. This bridge is located at Mile Post (MP) 17.94. The miles are marked from Schenectady, with MP 0.0 at today’s Amtrak Schenectady Passenger Station. This was where the S&T connected with the Utica & Schenectady (which ran to Utica) and the Mohawk & Hudson (which ran to Albany). At about MP 21, the S&T connected to the Rensselaer & Saratoga Railroad’s bridge at Green Island to cross the Hudson River into Troy. This bridge was located where the Troy-Green Island roadway bridge stands today. West of High Street Station, there were 3 tracks in 1910. The portion of the line between Green Island and US Route 9 in Colonie was abandoned in May 1977.

6. Freight House: As a result of the crossing elimination project, a new NYC&HRRR freight house was constructed to the right along Garner Street (near the location of the convenience store) and reached by a siding track off the northernmost of the three tracks over the High Street Bridge.

7. Commercial Storage Company: This industry was served by a trailing point switch westbound. The switch was about 300 feet east of the Johnston Ave. Bridge. The 40 foot spacing of the overhead doors on the storage company’s platform accommodated the 40’ standard boxcar length of the time. Note the remnants of the retaining wall, which had been constructed with old rails driven vertically into the ground and timbers placed behind the rails.

8. Johnston Ave. Bridge over the S&T: This is MP 17.54 as measured from Schenectady. About 700 feet west of the bridge was a facing point eastbound switch starting a passing siding track on the north side of the Main Track, which continued east past the High Street Station. In 1917, the bridge over the tracks was a three span deck plate girder bridge, with a brick paved roadway. Under the bridge was a switch in the siding leading to several tracks to the north side of the passing siding. The freight house was here, and there was stone block paving adjacent to the northernmost side of the tracks.

9. Vliet Street Bridge over the S&T: This is MP 17.26. In 1917, the ROW at Vliet Street was about 145’ wide. A single track electric street railway crossed over the center of the bridge. The roadway on the bridge was paved with macadam. There were 4 bridge piers, and 4 deck plate girder spans of 30’ each; the center span over the track was 40’-9” in length. There was only single track under this bridge, as the switch from the siding came back into the single track about halfway between the Johnston Ave. and Vliet St. bridges.

10. Wye Track to Harmony Mills Storehouse #7: In 1910, there was a switch here for a passing siding which ran three quarters of the way towards Lansing Lane. Off the siding was a “wye” track (named for its resemblance to an upside down “Y”) with the tail of the wye track leading to Harmony Mills Storehouse Number 7. Some of the ties still remain. Storehouse #7 was on Jay St., with the siding track behind it. A steel girder bridge connected Division St. with Garner St., and the tail of the wye track ran under it. This bridge also carried a single electric trolley track. The wye track was also used to turn steam engines around, so they would be heading back towards the direction they came. Note the remnants of a retaining wall to the right, similar to that adjacent to the sidetrack for the Commercial Storage Company building.

11. Stone Culvert: Note the stone abutments and the used rails forming the deck over the stream, on which the track was built. This is a typical design of the era. The siding, from which the wye track connected, rejoined the single main track just east of this culvert.

12. Lansing Lane Crossing: What is now Lansing Lane was identified in 1917 as a “Farm Crossing.” The next crossing to the west is Manor Ave. Between Lansing and Manor, Murray’s Brick Kiln was located north of the track. In 1910, this was identified as the Murray & Riberdy Brick Yard. One track served the brick kiln, a long building parallel to Reservoir St., and a second track went west of the kiln to serve a coal shed, which was behind Public School #1 on Manor Ave. West of Manor, the Cary Brick Co. kiln was located north of the track.

13. Site of former bridge connecting Division Street and Garner Street. This is the location of the former steel girder bridge over the tail track of the wye, leading to Harmony Mills Storehouse #7 on Jay Street., To the east, remnants of the retaining wall along which the tail track ran behind Storehouse #7 are visible. To the west is the Mohawk-Hudson Bike-Hike Trail, on the path of the former S&T Railroad.

14. Harmony Mills Storehouse #7: The storehouse was along the north side of Jay Street. The track ran along a platform behind the building and adjacent to the retaining wall. The first Cohoes reservoir was located at the top of the embankment above the retaining wall. Directly across from the storehouse was a lumber yard.

15. Enlarged Erie Canal: At one time, three canals crossed Vliet Street in succession from west to east. First is the Enlarged Erie Canal. To the left is Lock 16; Lock 15 is to the right. Longview, the Italianate mansion built for Harmony Mills superintendent David J. Johnston, is at the top of Summit Street.

16. Cohoes Company Power Canal Level 1: This power canal provided water power to turn the water wheels and then the water turbines which provided the mechanical power to operate the machinery in the cotton mills. From here you can see the original Harmony Manufacturing Company built by Peter Harmony in 1837; the marble stone in its central tower facing the power canal has the name and year of construction. Harmony Mills North extension was added in 1853; the Harmony Mills Office and Sunday School building at the corner of Vliet and North Mohawk Streets was built in 1853. To the right is the site of the former Mill #2, constructed between 1856 and 1866.

17. A section of the original Erie Canal became Power Canal Level 2 after 1837, when the State of New York built the Enlarged Erie Canal. Water flowed from Power Canal Level 1 through the waterwheels/turbines of Mill #1, #1 Extension, and Mill #2 into Power Canal Level #2. The water then flowed through the turbines of Mill #3 into the next lower Power Canal level, and so forth. This portion of the power canal was converted into a park in 2004.

18. Harmony Mill #3 and Extension: This was known as the “Mastodon Mill”, as a mastodon skeleton was found in 1866 during excavation for the Mill. There is a historic marker at the north end of the building. The extension was constructed in 1872. At the time, Harmony Mill #3 was the largest cotton mill in the world. Two original 800 horsepower Boyden turbines (c.1872) remain in their original location in the lower basement at the south end of the 1872 addition. The statue in the niche in the central tower is that of Thomas Garner, who purchased the Harmony Company in 1853.

19. Site known as “Two locks”: Two locks (Locks 37 and 38) from the original 1825 Erie Canal were used as foundations for these buildings, which were the Picker House and a Storehouse for the Harmony Mills.

20. Site known as “Three Locks”: Three locks from the original 1825 Erie Canal were located here. In 1862-1864, the Van Benthuisen paper mill was constructed here. In 1872, this became Harmony Mill #4, used to manufacture jute and cotton bags. Note the remnants dated 1909 of the power canal.

21. Original Canal Bed: Curving to the right and leading behind the Ogden Mill is the bed of the original Erie Canal. To the right is a brick building which may be among the oldest in Cohoes. A 1911 map shows the building as the machine shop for Harmony Mills.