

Cohoes has been shaped by waves of immigrants, with Dutch and English settlers arriving in the 18th and early 19th centuries, Irish and French-Canadians during the mid- to late 19th century, and Eastern and Southern Europeans during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This diversity is evident in the churches built by these ethnic and cultural groups. For them, their churches were the center of social life and helped them to maintain cultural traditions, language and customs.

Many of these congregations had humble beginnings, meeting in private homes, shops, and other locations. The German Baptist Church held its services at the Scandinavian Pilgrim Church and the Jewish faithful met at a home at 76 Newark Street until Beth Jacob Synagogue was established at 294 Remsen Street. The first services for the congregation of the Dutch Reformed church were held in the seaming room of the Egbert and Bailey woolen mill.

In this “city of churches,” a broad range of denominations were represented. In 1958, nineteen congregations had churches in Cohoes. Over the years, philanthropists endowed and built a number of churches, including beautiful structures such as St. John’s Episcopal Church, St. Agnes Church and the Silliman Memorial Church. Unfortunately, some of these churches were lost, others merged because of declines in attendance, and some took on new functions. St. John’s on Mohawk Street became the Cohoes Public Library, in a fine example of adaptive re-use. Others are still churches, but now house different religious denominations.

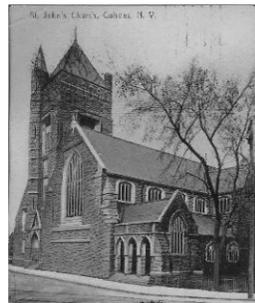
1. St. Joseph’s Catholic Church – 65 Congress Street



The first French-speaking immigrants came to Cohoes in the early 1830s. Many of them attended St. Bernard’s Church, as it was the first Catholic Church established in Cohoes, but they wished to form a church in which services were conducted in the French language and their customs preserved. St. Joseph’s parish was incorporated on June 18, 1868 as St. Joseph’s French Catholic Church of Cohoes. Father Joseph Saugon, originally from France, was the church’s first pastor. The cornerstone for St. Joseph’s church was laid on October 9, 1868; the church, a brick

structure, was dedicated on December 12, 1869. Unfortunately, the structure was soon found to be unsafe – it was feared that the weight of the steeple would collapse the church, so it was removed. The entire church was later demolished, and the cornerstone for the present church was laid in 1874 and the church completed by Easter 1875. A school for the parish children was opened in 1880. A pipe organ was installed in the church in 1888 and, in 1892, a Meneely bell weighing 5,205 pounds was hoisted into the tower. St. Joseph was for many years the only parish in the region that still carried on many of its French traditions, including the singing of French hymns and Christmas carols. At least once a year, a French Mass was celebrated for the feast of St. John the Baptist. Closed in 2009, the church is currently awaiting re-use.

2. St. John’s Episcopal Church (Cohoes Public Library) – Mohawk Street



St. John’s was organized in 1831. The congregation met for a year in a tiny schoolhouse until a small wooden church was built. In 1868, a site at Canvass and Mohawk Streets was chosen for a new church. One of the best church architects of the day, Richard Morris Upjohn, was hired and in April 1870 ground was broken. The first services were held in June 1871. The church was destroyed by fire in September 1894. In June 1895, the cornerstone for the third St. John’s Church was laid. By the 1960s, due to loss of population, the congregation of St. John’s could no longer maintain the church, so a new structure was built on Vliet Boulevard. The St. John’s Church on Mohawk Street now houses the Cohoes Public Library. It has been nationally recognized as a model of adaptive re-use.

3. United Church of Cohoes – 123 Mohawk Street

The Dutch Reformed Church of Cohoes was organized in 1837 by groups of Dutch, Swiss, Scotch and English ancestry. These early citizens of Cohoes were primarily farmers, blacksmiths, carpenters and factory employees. The cornerstone of the first church was laid in 1838. Prior to that time, services were held in the seaming room of the Egbert and Bailey Woolen Mill, located on the corner of White and Remsen Streets. In April of 1859, the first church was torn down to make room for a new church, which was dedicated on April 11, 1860. The organ in the church was donated by Cohoes



industrialists Egbert Egberts, David J. Johnston, and John V.S. Lansing. More information on Cohoes industrialists can be found in the Spindle City Historic Society’s Harmony Mills Historic District and Worker Housing tour brochures, and on the interpretive signs in Power Canal Park. The Dutch Reformed Church joined with the congregation of the Silliman Memorial Presbyterian Church in 1969 to form the United Church of Cohoes. The Silliman Memorial Church, which once stood on the corner of Ontario and Mohawk Streets, was constructed by Cohoes philanthropist and industrialist Horace Brinsmade Silliman. He dedicated the church in memory of his parents, Levi and Clarissa, who were instrumental in founding the Presbyterian congregation in Cohoes. This site is now Silliman Park, and contains an interpretive sign with more about the life and legacy of Horace B. Silliman.

4. First Baptist Church – 147 Mohawk Street



The First Baptist Church was established in Cohoes in 1839. The first meeting house was built in 1840 at the northwest corner of Remsen and Factory (Cayuga) Streets. Many members were mill workers, and church membership varied with the success of the mills. In 1850, a church was constructed on a permanent site on the southern end of Mohawk Street. It was enlarged in 1872 and renovated again in 1911. After discovery of structural problems, the church was rebuilt in 1922-1923 and a center dome removed, giving the building the appearance that it has today.

5. St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church - 67 Saratoga Street

The parish of St. Nicholas was formed in 1913 through the uniting of three societies of Russian immigrants. The first liturgy was celebrated in January 1914 in the hall of the Manufacturers’ Bank on Remsen Street. Later that year, the parish purchased property on Saratoga Street and constructed a church in 1915. In 1941, this church was dismantled and the church that stands today was built. While the church was under construction, services were held at the G&G Potato Chip Company on the corner of Ontario and Saratoga Streets.



6. First United Methodist Church (Vineyard Community Church) – 121 Remsen Street

The First Methodist Episcopal Society was organized in 1839. In 1840, work was started on construction of a church, located on the west side of Remsen Street. The church was completed and dedicated in 1841, sitting almost directly opposite the present church, which was built in 1869. By 1848, due to the industrial growth of Cohoes and an increased congregation, a larger structure was built on the east side of Remsen Street at the site of the present church. In 1859, the Trustees voted to dismantle the existing church and erect a larger one to accommodate further growth in membership. In 1860, the church that stands today was dedicated. The building is now home to the Vineyard Community Church.

7. Sts. Peter and Paul Ukrainian Catholic Church – 198 Ontario Street

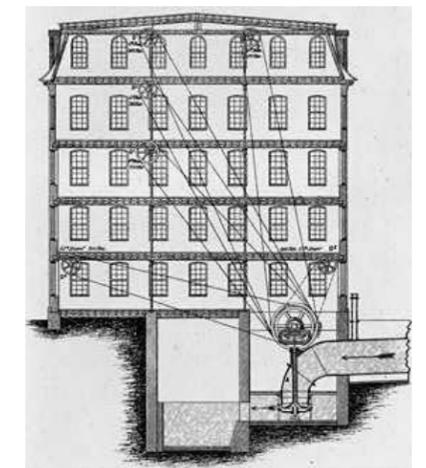
Sts. Peter and Paul Church was officially incorporated on December 12, 1906. The founders were Ukrainian immigrants who lived in the eastern end of Cohoes along Ontario and Saratoga Streets. Construction of the church began in early July 1907 and was completed in late August of that year; the first mass was celebrated in the church on the second Sunday in September, with the church’s pastor, Rev. Theodore Dwulita, officiating. The church was renovated and its interior murals were created in 1942.



8. St. Agnes Church (Good Ground Family Church) – 49 Johnston Avenue

St. Agnes parish was founded in 1878. Its first pastor was Father John F. Lowery. The first St. Agnes Church was a wooden structure, which was used until December 3, 1883, when it was destroyed by fire. The present church was built to replace it. The building is one of the finest examples of Gothic architecture in the area, if not the State, and is a city landmark that can be seen for miles around because of its soaring steeple and location in the Hill section of the city. The steeple housed a nine-bell carillon which was played every Sunday well into the 1950s. The parish initially merged with St. Patrick’s, and later with St. Marie’s to form Holy Trinity. Since 2001, the church building has been home to the congregation of the Good Ground Family Church.

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9. St. Bernard's Church – 250 Ontario Street

On November 18, 1847, Bishop John McCloskey, the First Bishop of Albany, laid the cornerstone for St. Bernard's, the first Catholic Church in Cohoes. Father Keveny, the third pastor of the parish, bought the land on which the present St. Bernard's Church is located; the rectory and church building which stand today were built during his tenure. Construction of this church was begun in 1863 and it was dedicated in 1868. The church's steeple was destroyed in a severe storm during the winter of 1876. The present appearance of the steeple dates from 1956-57, when the church was renovated. During the renovations, the tower was lowered in height by twenty feet and a new granite Celtic cross was put in place. The church is currently in private ownership.

10. St. Patrick's Catholic Church (Calvary Grace Church) – 228 North Mohawk Street

St. Patrick's parish was founded in 1886, and the church was erected in 1895. The parish originally served residents of the "Orchard" section of the city, who were primarily workers in the Harmony Mills. The "Orchard" is so named because the land was once the site of the Lansing family's orchard. In 1975, St. Patrick's merged with St. Agnes. The parish of St. Patrick's/St. Agnes would merge with St. Marie's in 1998 to form Holy Trinity parish. The building is now used by the congregation of the Calvary Grace Church.

11. St. Marie's Church (Holy Trinity Church) – 122 Vliet Street



In the late 19th century, the people living on the "Hill" section of Cohoes, mostly French-speaking families of workers at the Harmony Mills, attended St. Joseph's

Church and sent their children to the parish school. In June of 1899, following an extremely difficult winter when children had to negotiate the primitive roads to get downtown to St. Joseph's School, a committee was formed to request financial assistance from the pastor of St. Joseph's to establish a school on "the Hill." The school was built in 1900 at 145 Vliet Street. The next year an addition was built on the western side of the school building. It would be used as a chapel. Ste-Marie's Chapel was dedicated on Christmas day 1902. As the population grew on the Hill, residents sought to establish a parish of their own. The new parish of Ste-Marie (later anglicized to St. Marie) was incorporated on July 16, 1906. In 1920, a building fund for a new church was started and construction began in 1926. The Gothic-influenced brick

and limestone structure was completed in 1927, and the first service was midnight mass on Christmas Eve of that year. Interior decoration of the church, delayed by the Depression and wartime, began in the late 1940s, and was completed by 1951. Changes to the sacristy, completed in 1972, included removal of the communion rail. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the church's pipe organ and stained glass windows were restored, and the heating system upgraded. St. Marie's church was merged with churches of St. Agnes and St. Patrick, becoming Holy Trinity parish. Masses are still held in the St. Marie's Church building.

12. St. Rita's Church (Heritage Baptist Church) – 50 St. Rita's Lane

The first Italian immigrants arrived in Cohoes in the 1880s to work on the railroad. The Italians of Cohoes missed having services in their native language, but seldom were able to travel to other communities for mass because of the long hours required by their work. In 1913, work began to form a congregation among the Italian residents in Cohoes. On June 26, 1914, St. Rita's Catholic Church in Cohoes was incorporated. Masses were celebrated from 1914 to January 1916 in the basement of St. Joseph's Church on Congress Street. In 1916, a two-story building at 153 Main Street, on the corner of Newark Street, was purchased by the church and renovations were begun. In 1930 Father Matellus A. Galanti, then pastor of St. Rita's, proposed building a larger church and purchased land from the old Penrose and McEniry brewery for this purpose. The Depression caused delay, and the purchase was not completed until 1935. Construction began soon after, using the first two floors and foundation of the brewery building for the new structure. On Thanksgiving Day 1940, after additional renovations, including the installation of stained glass windows, the new church of St. Rita was dedicated. A grotto to honor our Lady of Peace was constructed in 1946. It was built against a wall of Lock 11 of the enlarged Erie Canal. In the late 1940s, the church was refurbished with new flooring, new lights, and a new organ. In 1961, the Bishop recommended construction of a new church because of the development of cracks in the church's massive walls. The church bell, pews, and Stations of the Cross were saved from the old church. In 1975, St. Rita's and Sacred Heart Church on Van Schaick Island merged their resources to form a single parish. The St. Rita's Italian-American Historical Society was created to keep the Italian church traditions alive. In 2003, St. Rita's undertook several projects, including repainting and restoration of the statues inside the church, and refurbishing of the Pieta statue and grotto outdoors. St. Rita's was closed in 2009, and the building now houses the Heritage Baptist Church.

13. St. Michael's Church – Ontario Street

St. Michael's Church was founded by Polish and Slovak immigrants arriving in Cohoes in the late 1800s. Rev. Valentine Gierlacki came to Cohoes in December of 1903 for the sole purpose of organizing a Polish parish. Services were held in the basement of St. Joseph's Church and before that in the old St. Bernard's School. A site on Page Avenue was selected for the new church. The parish planned to build a two story brick building, with a school on the lower floor and the church on the upper floor. Work began the day after Labor Day 1903, and parishioners volunteered to dig the foundation to save money for the parish. The cornerstone of the Church was laid on October 2, 1904, with over 1500 in attendance. In 1907 the land on both sides of Page Avenue was acquired and a rectory was built. In December 26, 1924, a fire greatly damaged the church. A new church, with a 26 foot addition, new altars, statues, and other furnishings, was dedicated on Sunday, November 29, 1925. Thirteen additional stained glass windows have been added to the church over the years, and twelve murals painted on canvas adorn the ceiling. In the 1950s, a new church entrance was constructed with a Rose Memorial window donated by the Rosary Society, and the sanctuary and vestries were renovated. The rededication of the church was on September 10, 1961. The 1980s brought a new lighting system and pipe organ. An elevator was installed in 1995. In 2003 the interior of the church, including altars, statues, and Stations of the Cross, was restored to its original appearance.

14. Sacred Heart Church – 175 Park Avenue

Sacred Heart parish was originally a mission of St. Joseph's parish, and became an independent parish in June 1887. The first church services were held in an amusement hall on Jackson Avenue. The parishioners paid for the music and hall rental. In 1888, the church's first pastor, Eugene Rey, was named and the parish built a wooden chapel. The present brick church was completed in 1899 under the direction of Father Lavigne. On June 28, 1903, a new organ was installed in the church and inaugurated with a concert. Stained glass windows were purchased in 1904 and pews and altars were installed in 1907. The church basement was converted into a parish hall in the 1960s. Like St. Joseph, the parish built a school to assure the survival of the French language and culture. The first classes were held in the wooden chapel when the present church was built; a new school was completed in 1911. Sacred Heart merged with St. Rita's parish in 1975.

