



Lofts at Harmony Mills.

The conversion of Mill No. 3 at Harmony Mills in Cohoes into a vibrant apartment complex is one of the most successful historic preservation and economic development projects in the Capital District. Harmony Mills, which was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1999, is a significant example of a large-scale, nineteenth century textile factory complex, and Mill No. 3 is the centerpiece of the property. The 1,100 foot long building was constructed in two stages between 1866 and 1872 when the factory was the nation's leading manufacturer of cotton fabric. Coincidentally, the factory-to-apartment conversion was undertaken in two phases as well. With the help of the federal preservation and New York State historic rehabilitation tax credit programs administered by the state Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, the entire project has been completed at a total cost of \$26.4 million. The first phase of the project created ninety-six apartments in the south end of the building and the second phase created 135 additional apartments in the north end. Almost every apartment was rented when the second phase opened.

The textile company was founded in 1836 by Peter Harmony, utilizing water diverted from the Cohoes Falls to power its operation. However, the first factory struggled to make a profit and was sold at auction in 1850 to New York City merchant Thomas Garner and Valatie mill owner Nathan Wild, who hired cotton manufacturing expert Robert Johnson to manage the Cohoes facility. When Mill No. 3 was built, it was considered one of the premier textile factories in the country, boasting 130,000 spindles and 2,700 looms capable of producing 100,000 yards of cloth every sixty hours. The building was not only exceptionally large (500,000 square feet), but also architecturally distinguished with a finely articulated exterior featuring mansard roofs and ornamental towers.

During the last half of the nineteenth century, the company prospered and rapidly grew into a sprawling industrial complex with massive manufacturing buildings fed by power canals, a large concentration of worker houses, and community buildings to serve employees. However, during the early twentieth century the company steadily declined due to increasing competition, the growing cost of labor, and technological advances. The operation shut down in the 1930s. The city of Cohoes flourished during Harmony Mills' heyday, but the community, like mill towns across the Northeast, suffered a devastating blow when the factory closed. While most company houses were purchased by former employees, for many years Mill No. 3 remained an underused white elephant in need of a compatible, long term use.

The mill was rehabilitated by Harmony Mills Riverview LLC and transformed into market rate apartments. While the machinery was removed years ago, the mill remains remarkably intact, including two original, rare surviving turbines in the basement that converted waterpower into mechanical energy to operate the factory's equipment. The building's heavy load bearing structural system and open, light filled interiors helped to facilitate its reuse as well as add special character to the individual apartments. In addition to the extensive work necessary to repair the building and adapt the raw industrial interiors into attractive living spaces, many original features were incorporated into the new design. Original wood floors and staircases were refinished, high ceilings were retained, and numerous decorative cast iron columns were refurbished and left exposed.

The Lofts at Harmony Mills, with its striking architecture, distinctive apartments, and dramatic views, has been a great success and a tremendous boon for the city of Cohoes. The project effectively demonstrates that the creative adaption of former industrial complexes helps to preserve and recycle existing resources as well as enhance the quality, character, and economic vitality of local communities.



Refurbished staircase.



The apartment complex's entertainment room.



Historic view of factory (below); interior before rehabilitation (above).



One of the new apartments.

