The Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus organized on June 26, 1887 was the fifth Catholic Church built in Cohoes. The initial congregation of the newly erected Sacred Heart Parish consisted of 50 families who would assemble in a recreation hall on Jackson Avenue. The parishioners paid for music and hall rental for all religious services. Shortly thereafter, a modest chapel was built on the ground purchased by Father Rey. The building later served as the school. In 1889, a brick building, to replace the wooden building, was built and the congregation took possession and occupied it until 1892. During these years, a school was operated under the direction of Mrs. C. Jervais, Miss C. Paquette and Miss J. Berthelot.

In 1887 Father Rey left the parish to become Pastor of St. Paul’s in Hudson Falls. On the first Sunday of November 1897, Bishop Thomas Burke, Bishop of Albany, called on Father L.A. Lavigne to come from Schuylerville to succeed Father Rey. Under his direction, the church was completed on July 2, 1899. Bishop Burke blessed the church, the church bells and administered the Sacrament of Confirmation. The homily was given by Rev. Cyrille Beaudry, C.S.V, Superior of the Grand Seminary of Joliette, Province of Quebec, Canada.

The former chapel became the school under the direction of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Parmee, France, for the following three years. The house and two adjoining lots next to the school had been purchased to accommodate the sisters.

On the 28th of June 1903 the organ was installed and inaugurated with a grand concert under the direction of the organist Mrs. Arthur Thouin; the program consisted of Dubois’ “The Seven Last Words of Christ.” The stained glass windows were purchased in 1904 in memory of parishioners, church societies and priests. In 1907 the pews and the altars completed the decorations. In 1909 the wooden porch was replaced by one made of cement blocks.

As the parish grew and the children became more numerous, it became imperative to replace the school with a larger structure. Mr. Arthur Granger was the architect and Mr. Alfred Sarrault was the general contractor. The cornerstone was laid on the 26th of June 1910 and the school was blessed on February 12, 1911. The sisters of the Holy Name of Jesus and Mary of Montreal assumed responsibility of the education of the students. The school was named “The Academy of the Sacred Heart of Jesus”. It was affiliated with the New York State University and received all the privileges accorded that institution.

The church organizations at that time were: The Union of Prayer, the Ladies of Ste. Anne, the Altar Society, Apostleship of Prayer and the Young Men’s Society.

On November 10, 1912, under the pastorate of Rev. L.A. Lavigne, the parish celebrated its 25th anniversary of foundation with the participation of Thomas M.A. Burke, Bishop of Albany. The celebration included among other things, the presentation of a sacred drama “St. Cecilia”.

The activities of the parish and life of the Christian Community continued to grow. A typical Sunday would embrace three masses: 7 am, 9 am (the children’s mass) and a High Mass at 10:30 am. Vespers were held at 2:30 pm with Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament and the recitation of the Litanies. Once a month at 7:30 pm the Children of Mary held their devotion.
The leadership of the pastors was, according to the time, paternal but firm. Father Jules Burrick, who succeeded Father Lavigne in 1915, started the Corpus Christi outdoor procession with benediction at beautiful altars erected on porches along the way. On December 9, 1916, the original church, a wooden building on Adams Avenue was sold to Roulier and Chamberland. On June 22, 1924, the Grotto was dedicated by Edmond F. Gibbons, Bishop of Albany. The first novena began on June 23, 1924.

Father Raymond Robert died on July 12, 1962 after having served the parish for 29 years. He established the Holy Name Society, the Catholic War Veterans, the St. Vincent DePaul Society, the Nocturnal Adoration Society, the Mothers’ Club and the Catholic Youth Organization.

Father Robert was followed by Father Lionel Guillaume who served as Administrator until 1963 when he was succeeded by Father Harvey Desautels, who began the drive and directed the building of the new convent for the sisters on Adams Avenue.

In 1967 Father Nellis Tremblay became pastor. He was the first to implement the liturgical changes, began the Parish Council, the Folk Mass, the Teen Scene, converted the church basement into a church hall and started bingo.

Father Edward Leroux was pastor from 1970 to 1975. He saw to the further beautification of the church: the installation of the church carpeting, the new kneeling benches and the dedication of the new pipe organ in 1974, a gift of Mrs. Alma Chamberland to her church.

In 1975, Sacred Heart Church came under the pastoral care of the priests of St. Rita’s. The Pallottine Fathers were in a position at that time to provide an additional priest. On July 1, 1975, Rev. Fausto Stamiglia, S.A.C. was the first Pallottine to become pastor of the newly formed parish of St. Rita-Sacred Heart. Father Fausto was directed first of all to extinguish the parish debt by selling the rectory, the school and the vacant lot opposite the church. The rectory was sold in 1975 to the Apostolate of the Suffering Marian Center, Inc., which after three years sold it to a private family. The former convent had already been taken over in 1972 by the Chancery and made into the Sacred Heart Residence, a home for retired priests and served this purpose until the fall of 1986 when the last priest left and the Daughters of Charity came to live in it.

During Father Fausto’s pastorate, Sacred Heart Church celebrated its 90th anniversary on August 27, 1977 with the participation of Howard J. Hubbard, Bishop of Albany and the Rt. Rev. Dominic J. Pistella, S.A.C., Provincial Superior of the Pallottine Fathers.

Rev. Mario Pucini, S.A.C. was appointed pastor of St. Rita and Sacred Heart on September 5, 1977. Under Father Pucini’s pastorate, the parish family of St. Rita and Sacred Heart started a complete renovation program to ready Sacred Heart to enter its second century of service to the people of Van Schaick Island. In 1979 the former school building was sold and with the income, the church front porch and stairs renovated and the parish debt was finally extinguished. A Reconciliation Room was built in accord with the Vatican II directives and a Chapel for winter liturgies was prepared. The parish hall was expanded and renovated. The church roof was equipped with snow guards and new furniture was bought by St. Ann’s Society for the sacristy. New altar paraments, priests’ vestments and altar vessels were donated by parishioners for the
100th anniversary celebration. The Grotto of Lourdes was completely restored thanks to the generous efforts of parishioners headed by Mrs. Agnes Galarneau and rededicated on May 6, 1984.

In 1981, Rev. Carlo Obei, S.A.C. was appointed Associate Pastor, becoming the third Pallottine Father beside Father Mario Pucini and Father John Facci to serve the church. Father Carlo was the moderator of St. Anne Society and served faithfully until his untimely death on July 22, 1986 at age 62.

In 1986, the pipe works of the organ donated by Mrs. Chamberland was finally moved to the choir loft according to the original blueprints, thanks to the efforts of the former organist Mr. Donald Hartshorn and his club of organ restorers, therefore providing a proper setting for the Baptismal Font. The interior of Sacred Heart Church was completely renovated and restored to its original splendor under the direction of RPI Professor Walter Kroner of the Albany Diocese Architectural Commission. The work was executed by squads of inmates from Mt. McGregor Minimum Correctional Facility in Wilton, NY between January and March 1986, supervised by Mr. Robert Gagnon and with the technical assistance of Mr. Rudy Gagnon of Cohoes, NY.

The renovations of Sacred Heart Church were only the outward sign of the deeper spiritual renovation which included a very active joined parish council, church societies and more than 20 standing committees, which planned and executed all parish functions: from the Children’s Masses to the Confirmation Program which organized Confrimants’ Masses, to the Sick Committee, Liturgy, Stewardship, Knights of the Altar, Bingo, Bazaar, etc.

The Living Stations of the Cross under the direction of Father John Facci, executed by the youth of the parish, made the church known throughout the Diocese during the Lenten period by giving representations. Children’s parties at Christmas, Valentine’s Day, Family Picnic and many other spiritual and social affairs made the parish life joyful.

Sacred Heart Church, built by French-Canadian people for the French-Canadian immigrants, was a beacon of hope and faith to countless immigrants from Canada and to many more Catholic immigrants from many ethnic backgrounds who have settled on Van Schaick Island and came to love Sacred Heart Church as their home parish. This transformed Sacred Heart Church into the ‘church on the island’, from where the Sacred Heart of Jesus extends its protective hand on all those to come to live and worship on Van Schaick Island.

Sacred Heart Parish has been also a fertile ground for vocations. Throughout its existence there have been many of its parishioners who have answered the call of Jesus to serve in the priesthood and in religious life. Among them were Rev. Camille Houle, Rev. George Gagne, Rev. J.B.P. Lefevre, Rev. H. Levesque, Rev. Raymond Mosseau, Rev. George Fontaine and Rev. Charles Gendron.

On June 5, 2009 the last mass at Sacred Heart was celebrated. Called To Be Church closed St. Rita-Sacred Heart Parish, along with St. Joseph’s and St. Bernard’s, leaving only St. Michael’s and the Church of the Holy Trinity as Catholic churches in Cohoes.