RIVER

OF

DREAMS
Hudson Valley Heritage

Robert F. Jones, series editor

1. Robert O. Binnewies, Palisades: 100,000 Acres in 100 Years.

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RIVER OF DREAMS
The Hudson Valley in Historic Postcards

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Preface

Cruising the River of Dreams

In addition to offering travelers extraordinary vistas of natural beauty, the Hudson River has inspired political, economic, and artistic revolutions and holds an unrivaled place in American history. But beyond the forces that made the Hudson “America’s River,” its valley has exerted a magnetic attraction that drew the most ambitious individuals to its shores and towns. The entire region became an arena in which the patroon, the plebe, and the plutocrat could fulfill their grandest dreams, a magical venue that encouraged even the most outlandish visions.

The historical images that follow take readers on a unique journey upriver. Many of the places shown no longer exist, while others have greatly changed. From New York Harbor to the Adirondack Mountains, the images create a slow passage through scenic wonders, historical sites, and diverse monuments to individual egos. There are thousands of postcards that show the life of the Hudson River, but our selection emphasizes its multifaceted personality. Allow these vivid images to transport you along the River of Dreams.
Folk wisdom tells us that we cannot step into the same river twice, and no American waterway proves the adage as well as the Hudson River. Only the seventy-first-longest river in the United States, the Hudson’s 315 miles transverse some of the loveliest land in the nation. Four centuries of history along its banks shaped American life and determined national development. Henry James, a somewhat unlikely product of its environment, described the stream with typical understatement as “perpetually interesting.” It remains a work in progress, a place of constant change, a river that has consistently helped to forge the American character.

Stretching from Lake Tear of the Clouds in the Adirondack Mountains to the unparalleled vistas of New York Bay, the Hudson is a natural wonder. Born 250 million years ago, its evolution can be read in rock strata, fossils, and the eight seismic fault lines that grind beneath its placid surface. However, the course of today’s Hudson was set a mere fifteen thousand years ago after the glaciers of the Wisconsin Ice Age receded and the solid mass of ice above what is now New York City melted. The immense volume of water created a lake that soon breached the gravel and stone debris left behind by the retreating glaciers. Water originating in the far Adirondacks once again flowed without opposition into the Hudson Submarine Canyon, a 9,000-foot gorge that extends for 150 miles beyond the continent.

The natural history of the Hudson plays only a peripheral role in our story. Our true subject is the abundant variety of human experience along “America’s River,” not the 206 species of fish that make it their home. Nor will we add to the immense volume of books that analyze the Hudson’s outlet to the sea, the immense world metropolis that surrounds the natural wonder of New York City’s harbor. Rather, our attention is devoted to the people and communities that grew up north of Manhattan and the Bronx, the miles of river that stretch from the Palisades to the slopes of Mount Marcy. Our entry into the fabric of their life will be through a rarely noticed but most valuable artifact of history, the Hudson Valley as it appears in a rich selection of historic picture postcards.
Practically everyone has mailed a postcard, which is a practical way to keep us in touch with friends and commemorate a vacation visit. But as historical documents, postcards can illuminate scenes and events of the past. They are not only beautiful and evocative, but they also provide a fascinating pathway into the past.

The postcard is little more than a century old. Before the 1890s, Americans who hoped to recapture a travel experience had to write a letter or send a message on a blank postal card available only through the government. The United States first authorized picture postcards to commemorate Chicago’s Columbian Exposition of 1893. The innovation proved such a success that Congress in 1898 permitted privately printed cards bearing other scenes to enter the mails, so long as they bore government stamps. Since almost any vista could adorn the cards, myriad subjects became available in only a few years, and collecting cards became a popular hobby. Views of American cities were a favorite subject, since most citizens had not yet traveled widely and Manhattan, the heart of the nation’s largest city, was a particularly popular subject. After 1900, Hudson Valley sites also provided desirable images. The earliest postcards are easy to spot, since until 1907 all personal messages were written on margins next to the picture. In that year postal authorities created the more familiar split-back card, holding message and address. The great New York Hudson and Fulton celebration (1909) was one of the first major events to lead to the new format, and full images of that event helped spread the mania for postcard collecting.

Postcard art covers the gamut of human activity, from national celebrations to the routines of daily life. Cards document a wide range of historical sites, local monuments, hotels, mansions, village greens, and scenic views. Far more than the places they depict, cards reflect what people thought was valuable and important. The brief messages on their backs convey happiness and concern, anticipation and anxiety, love and longing.

The images in this book are drawn from the archives of Fordham University and the collections of the New York State Museum and the State Library as well as from private collections. They have been selected to offer a chronicle of Hudson Valley life. Each card offers a frozen moment in time, but together they pulsate with the past life of the river. For almost four centuries the Hudson River was the primary pathway into North America, an arena for great events. This book seeks to illuminate the region’s pageantry, beauty, and importance.
Chapter 1

The Valley of History

Born of mountain springs located high on the face of Mt. Marcy, at 5,344 feet the tallest peak in New York State, the Hudson River flows from a small lake called Tear of the Clouds that is strangely without fish. Half of the entire length of the river consists of a slow meander through the timbered Adirondack Mountains north of Albany, and at the capital it widens and plunges southward to the Atlantic Ocean. During its run to the sea, the river passes forests and farmland, villages and vast estates, towns and cities, the state capital and the enormous metropolis that many consider the capital of the world. Its present course is the result of millions of years of evolution, time in which successive ice ages and the slow erosive power of water created its path.

Today’s Hudson River was carved by receding ice as the Wisconsin Ice Age ended some thirty thousand years ago. The most common representations of the Hudson often feature the magnificent Palisades, the contours of the Catskill Mountains, and the solid masses of Anthony’s Nose or Bear Mountain. But in reality, the course of the river is remarkably flat. The bed of the Hudson is below the level of the sea as far inland as the city of Newburgh, and the river is barely three feet above sea level until it reaches Albany. The Hudson is in fact a drowned river, an estuary where the influence of ocean tides are apparent even 153 miles upriver at Troy and where salt water reaches as far north as Poughkeepsie.

Indeed, the Hudson is a fjord whose three-mile-per-hour tidal flow north is constantly at odds with fresh water streaming south; so even is the
contest that it can take a free-floating log 125 days to complete the trip from Troy into New York Harbor. The beautiful Hudson is also a murky stream, full of the sediment it drains from an area of more than thirteen thousand square miles. The Mohawk River is the Hudson’s main tributary stream, entering above Albany, but the river valley also welcomes the flow of the Wal-lkill, Hoosic, Scandaga, and Croton rivers as well as waters from Sparkill, Esopus, Popolopen, Kinderhook, and Pocantico Creeks. Its depth varies from 216 feet near West Point to only twenty feet in the three-mile reach of Haverstraw Bay. Sunlight rarely finds its way to the bottom even in shallow parts of the notoriously opaque river. Dirt collects quickly in the river, and constant dredging operations are required to keep Albany an active seaport. Moreover, hidden rocks and reefs beneath its difficult currents make the Hudson a dangerous river to navigate.

Its special geology allows the river to host a world of unusual marine life, and Native American fishermen were the first to reap the river’s abundance. Recognizing the extraordinary nature of the river’s estuarine flow, they called it Muhheakantuck, “the river that runs two ways,” a source of wonder as well as the nurturer of their communal life. Their ancestors, members of several Paleolithic cultures, first peopled the Hudson’s banks. They were displaced about 5000 BC by Archaic and Woodland peoples. In the twelfth century the Iroquois and Algonquin took command of the river valley, introducing maize cultivation and developing methods of fishing still in use. Indian runners opened trading routes that later became corridors for rails and autos. As many as ten thousand Native Americans lived in the Hudson Valley into the seventeenth century, but European diseases and civilization would take a deadly toll on their cultures. The Indian presence is today primarily obvious only in place names such as Esopus, Nyack, Ossining, Poughkeepsie, Pocantico, Tappan, and Weehawken.

The Age of Exploration

In 1524, the Italian explorer Giovanni da Verrazano became the first European to enter the great harbor that the Hudson creates before it enters the Atlantic Ocean. He sailed far enough to see a “River of the Steep Hills,” the Palisades and the Lower Hudson. Then in January 1526 a Portuguese explorer sailing
for Spain, Esteban Gómez, seems to have sighted a stream he named after San Antonio, but he claimed neither land nor river for his employer.

On September 4, 1609, Henry Hudson, an Englishman in the employ of the Dutch East India Company, carefully edged his 122-ton galleon *Half Moon* into what we now call Lower New York Bay. Hired to find the legendary Northwest Passage, Hudson had sailed from Amsterdam in April, traveling north, but his ship failed to penetrate the ice of the Arctic. He took the *Half Moon* south as far as Chesapeake Bay before turning north again; his course correction led him into the bay and the river that ensured his fame. Hudson perceived the wondrous potential of the anchorage, and his careful soundings revealed the movement of the tides toward the north. On September 11, a day that would prove fateful more than once in New York history, Hudson moved though the mile-wide opening later called The Narrows and approached the southern shore of an island the Indians called Manna-hatin. Following the trail of salt water, Hudson nosed the *Half Moon* gradually north into a broad river he named the Mauritius to honor a Dutch prince. He advanced to Yonkers by September 13 and reached the area of West Point the next day. By September 16 *Half Moon* was abreast of the headland that became the town of Hudson. Two days later Hudson reached the site of Albany. “Never have I beheld such a rich and pleasant land!” exclaimed Hudson, who found the local Indians to be “a very good people.” Yet his advance rowing parties soon brought the worst possible news: the river was increasingly shallow and made impassable by rapids. The water path into the American continent was only an arm of the sea, not the hoped for gateway to India and China. Nevertheless, his voyage provided the Netherlands with a legitimate claim to New World lands.

The same year Hudson entered New York waters, Samuel de Champlain moved south from Montreal into lands that French trappers had been familiar with for decades. The French explorer used Huron Indian guides as he entered territory held by their bitter rivals, the Iroquois. After crossing the lake that today bears his name, Champlain’s force clashed with a party of Mohawks near the site of future Fort Ticonderoga. The brief skirmish had a vast impact, for the Iroquois Confederation resented the French intrusion into its territory. Its leaders later chose to establish trading relations with Dutch merchants to the south and their historic anger toward the French
would play a vital role in the English conquest of North America. The wan-
derings of Hudson and Champlain came within a hundred miles of each other, but the two great explorers never met.

It was Hudson’s report of the abundant furs to be found in the river valley rather than its rich and fertile land that spurred Dutch settlement. In 1610 a ship left Amsterdam to collect beaver pelts along what the Dutch then called the Groote Rivier, or Great River, and by 1611 fur trading began at the Half Moon’s northernmost anchorage near Albany. The New Netherlands Company was created in 1614 and immediately claimed all trading rights in the lands east of the river Hudson had explored. Dutch pioneers built Fort Nassau on a small island in the river off Albany to manage the flow of furs, but the immensity of the New World demanded more than a casual response by a few traders. In 1621, the newly chartered Dutch West India Company was granted a twenty-four-year monopoly to develop the entire Western Hemisphere from Brazil to New Netherlands.

The Dutch in the Hudson Valley, 1624–1664

The merchants of the Dutch West India Company were more concerned with profits from furs than with establishing a settlement. Creating permanent communities proved frustrating, since ordinary Dutch people had little incentive to leave their prosperous land. Finding settlers was thus difficult, and only in 1623 did thirty Walloon families, French Protestant refugees, agree to settle in North America. Within a year eighteen families arrived near Albany to create a permanent settlement, Fort Orange, on the west bank of the river. Before the larger group moved upriver, a few members of this first immigration remained behind on Nut Island in the Upper Bay. They soon decided that Manhattan Island would make a better trading center and transfer point for beaver furs. They christened their settlement New Amsterdam.

New Amsterdam, and not Fort Orange, became the focus of Dutch settlement in North America, in part because northern commander Daniel Van Crieckenbeeck foolishly caused tension with the Iroquois Confederation. Manhattan proved safer for settlers after Peter Minuit, director of the Dutch West India Company, secured what he considered to be firm title to the island, purchasing the land from Chief Manhasset for sixty guilders. By the
end of 1626, more than thirty log cabins, a counting house, a mill, and a fort had been constructed at the mouth of the Hudson. Company employees dealt with the lucrative fur trade, and in the next six years furs valued at 454,000 guilders were processed by New Amsterdam.

The Dutch West India Company claimed all lands between the North (Hudson) and South (Delaware) Rivers. Its board realized that long-range success for its colonies would depend on effective settlement of what they called the North River valley and that farmers would be more effective than fur traders in holding the territory. In June 1629 the corporation approved a plan presented by Kiliaen Van Rensselaer to bring agricultural workers into the valley under a system of patroonships, large land grants to persons who agreed to bring fifty farmers into New Netherlands over four years. The company quickly named half a dozen patroons, granting them individual domains that extended almost sixteen miles along one shore of the river or half that distance on both banks. Van Rensselaer’s grant, a “perpetual fief of inheritance,” included most of the lands around Fort Orange and was the first of six patroonships approved. But despite Amsterdam’s high expectations only Rensselaerwyck proved successful, and the patroon system was abandoned by 1640.

Kiliaen Van Rensselaer never saw his New World property, a realm of over 700,000 acres and the future city of Albany. His overseer, Bastiaen Jansz Krol, ran cattle herds, a gristmill, lumber operations, and a brewery and collected tenant rent of one-third of all crops. The productive heart of Rensselaerwyck was located on the east side of the river, an area where the patroon’s authority was absolute. Krol’s attempts to extend his control over company soldiers in the west shore of village of Beverwyck led to tensions, and in 1652 Governor Peter Stuyvesant sailed north from New Amsterdam to mediate the jurisdictional issues personally. Stuyvesant imposed peace by having everyone swear a new oath of allegiance to the company and granted Beverwyck an independent municipal charter. When New York’s capital city grandly celebrated its 350th anniversary in 2002, it was Beverwyck’s founding that was commemorated. On returning to New Amsterdam, Stuyvesant granted it a similar charter, which took effect only in February 1653. Beverwyck was in reality a frontier town, but its flourishing fur trade supported a population of almost a thousand persons in 1660. Thriving New Amsterdam,
at the mouth of the river, had approximately the same number of inhabitants, but there were few settlers or towns between the two centers.

Transporting fur and grain was the task of Dutch trading sloops, and their sails were constantly present on the North River. But company plans to people areas along the central river were less successful. Independent farms were sparse owing to fear of the natives, and poor colonial administrators such as Willem Kieft caused sporadic battles with indigenous tribes, which did not help matters. In 1653, Stuyvesant authorized construction of a wall in New Amsterdam to protect people and livestock against both the Indians and the threat of English aggression. By the 1660s the corporate failure to people the colony effectively made its control increasingly tenuous.

Stuyvesant, who ruled New Netherland from 1647 to 1664, was the corporation’s finest appointee, but he commanded a colony with few residents and confronted constant pressure from populous New England. In 1650 Stuyvesant reluctantly agreed to limit Dutch settlement to a ten-mile strip east of the North River and cede eastern Long Island to Puritan settlers. He encouraged efforts by Jonas Bronck and Adriaen Van der Donck to cultivate lands in Westchester and made land grants designed to extend Dutch presence in the river valley. His vision of a fully settled, economically integrated valley accurately mirrored corporate hope. Van der Donck was a political foe of the imperious director, yet Stuyvesant encouraged the “young gentleman” (yonkher) to expand his settlement and sawmill on the Napperhan River. It is interesting that Van der Donck’s title and not his name became the name of a major New York city. Upstream, approximately midway between the primary Dutch settlements, on the west bank where Rondout Creek enters the North River, a fur trading post had been established. By 1652 the installation had sufficient settlers to form the town of Esopus. When Stuyvesant visited the community in 1658 he ordered that a wooden stockade be constructed on higher ground south of the original homes to protect the town.

Stuyvesant signed a peace treaty with the Esopus tribe in July 1660 that temporarily freed the area from danger. The respite allowed the creation of Nieuw Dorp (New Village), but the settlement was burned when hostilities resumed in 1663. Stuyvesant came north with troops, crushed the Indians, and gave Esopus a new name, Wiltwyck (Wild Place). After the English conquest, Esopus became Kingston, which maintains its Dutch Stockade
area as a tourist attraction and boasts of being the third-oldest settlement in the Hudson Valley. Nieuw Dorp was also reborn under English rule; rechristened Hurley in 1676, it soon boasted what is now the oldest surviving group of colonial stone houses in the Hudson Valley. Stuyvesant’s final treaty with the Indians, signed on May 16, 1664, accomplished his long-term goal of eliminating their threat to river settlement.

But time was running out on the Dutch. Although New Netherlands was gradually making the transition from fur trading to farming and settlement, its physical control over most Hudson Valley land was slight. Greater security encouraged the production of staples such as corn and rye and fruits such as peaches and apples. All sorts of vegetable crops were grown on regional farms (bouweries), especially on Manhattan Island. River and bay provided an amazing variety of fish for the tables of the burghers. Whales and seals were still commonly seen in New Amsterdam’s harbor, while shad, sturgeon, cod, and oysters were part of the common diet. Despite such plenty, New Netherlands was simply not growing fast enough to protect its borders.

The short half-century of Dutch control made enormous contributions to the history and culture of the Hudson Valley. The patroon system failed, but the Dutch influence on our language remains evident in words such as boss and dope, sleigh and stoop, booze and waffle, cruller and coleslaw. Nor should we slight the figures of Sinter Klaus and Rip van Winkle. The Dutch architectural heritage may even be stronger, for traditional Dutch brickwork, high gables, low doors, and “half-moon” shutters endure in the valley. When Franklin Roosevelt built a separate cottage for his wife in the early twentieth century, its facade was Dutch; Eleanor’s own Val-Kill residence presented a very similar appearance to the world. The Dutch named every creek (Fishkill, Peekskill) that ran into the main stream of the Hudson river, as well as the towns (Staatsburg, Kinderhook) and mountains (Dunderberg, Catskill) along its shoreline. The North River trade was conducted in locally constructed Dutch sloops, the primary mode of river traffic for two centuries. Generations of mariners benefited from the mastery of Dutch sailors who first sailed from Buttermilk Channel in New York Harbor to the falls at Troy. Sloops ascended the river from New Amsterdam to Beverwyck in a series of “reaches,” rarely more than a mariner’s eye could see on a clear day. These point-to-point stations, where uniform sailing conditions could be expected,
remain part of Hudson lore. The first “reach” was along the barrier wall of the Palisades, a “Great Chip” of almost eighteen miles that ended at Sparkill Creek south of Piermont. Sailing the Tappan, Haverstraw, Sailmakers, and Crescent reaches brought the ship to the Hudson Highlands. The High Reach was followed by the dangerous Martyr’s Reach, where changeable winds off surrounding mountains and swift currents caused many wrecks. Then it was clear sailing to the Fishers, Long, Vaste, Claverack, Backerack, Playsier, and Hunters reaches. The Groote Rivier of the Dutch Era was domesticated by the captains of a seafaring nation.

**English Control of the Hudson, 1664–1675**

Despite years of fearful anticipation, Peter Stuyvesant was unprepared when England came to take his colony. He may never have known that King Charles II in 1664 granted vast New World lands to his brother, James, Duke of York and Albany. James’s royal charter encompassed all of New England and New Netherlands, and the duke was determined to seize his fraternal bounty. James commissioned a fleet, put Colonel Richard Nicolls in command, and sent it forth to conquer. Arriving on August 18, 1664, Nicolls had New Amsterdam totally at his mercy. Yet Stuyvesant prepared to fight. Only after the town burghers pieced together the generous peace offer their director had torn apart and after Nicolls’s ships blocked the river against reinforcements did Stuyvesant accept reality. Forced to cede New Amsterdam “without a blow or a tear,” he surrendered at his farm along the East River. Fort Orange also surrendered to English forces without firing a shot. After Britain occupied the colony, “Old Silver Leg” (he had lost a leg in battle) stayed on as a resident of the city he had ruled for so long.

The English takeover was easily accomplished. Although it stretched from Connecticut to the Delaware River, New Netherlands numbered fewer than nine thousand settlers and its wealth was still more potential than real. Nicolls promulgated measures that guaranteed Dutch property rights, the independence of the Reformed Church, and trade with the Netherlands; his program won cooperation from Manhattan’s merchants. English rule did not mean the end of Dutch culture. Although major towns were renamed Albany, New York, and Kingston, Dutch continued as the lingua franca of Albany until 1800 and persisted in parts of the Hudson Valley for decades more. In
1673 the Dutch temporarily recaptured their lost colony—for fifteen months Albany was Williamstadt—but in February 1674, Amsterdam renounced all claims to New Netherlands. Thereafter the North River became the Hudson, and King Charles’s law extended to his brother’s entire colony.

Administering the duke’s domain, peopling his lands, and collecting his rent was the primary task of the administrators James dispatched to the New World. Governor Francis Lovelace began the slow process of granting land to supporters of the duke, and in 1671 he approved creation of the Manor of Fordham north of Manhattan. In 1674 Governor Edmund Andros arrived, intending to refocus Hudson Valley farming into wheat for export rather than corn for survival. Pursuing that goal, in 1677 a dozen French Huguenot families were transported from Mannheim to the Hudson Valley and allowed to purchase forty thousand acres of land from the Esopus Indians. The settlers named their new community in honor of the German principality that had first given them refuge, the Palatinate (die Pfalz), which was Anglicized into New Paltz. Today their village on the Wallkill River still boasts of its Huguenot Street, the oldest continuously inhabited European-built road in the United States, with six houses, a reconstructed church, and the DuBois house-fort (1705). All repairs in the “virtually undisturbed pre-Revolutionary” community are performed using seventeenth-century methods, including “perfectly imperfect” bricks and tiles for walls and roofs. Successful from the start, New Paltz encouraged England to bring ten shiploads of land-hungry Germans to settle Rhinebeck and Dutchess County lands across the Hudson. Bolting flour from valley wheat became one of Manhattan’s primary industries until the Revolution.

Thomas Dongan served as New York’s governor from 1683 to 1688, granting the colony a Charter of Liberties and allowing an elected assembly. Dongan gave the growing colony an administrative structure of ten counties, five in the New York City area and five others—Albany, Dutchess, Orange, Ulster, and Westchester—covering the Hudson Valley. His reorganization somewhat alienated Albany by channeling all its fur exports through New York City merchants, but Albany was still a frontier town threatened by Indians or French aggression. Amazingly, though Albany was often the target of military campaigns, its guns at Fort Frederick would never be fired in anger. Dongan did recognize the strategic importance of Albany and rewarded its loyalty to James with the first English municipal charter in 1686. Dongan also
decree an end to Van Rensselaer feudal claims on the west bank, but he secured their loyalty by confirming family holdings across the Hudson.

English governors recognized the need to fill the Hudson Valley with people and confirmed other Dutch land grants. New settlement was encouraged, and in 1672 Frederich Philipse (1626–1702) purchased more than seven thousand acres of Westchester land from heirs of Adriaen van der Donck, who had not appreciably expanded the sawmill that the “young gentleman” had built in 1646. Philipse, who began life as a carpenter, systematically expanded his holdings and built a manor house where the Napperhan runs into the Hudson. His home, still used as the Hudson River Museum, provides tangible proof of the role Yonkers played in development of the Hudson. Philipse also built the King’s Bridge over the Harlem River, greatly facilitating communication between Manhattan, New England and river valley towns. Ultimately, some 525,000 acres between Spuyten Duyvil and the Croton River would come into the Philipse family’s possession, including large flour milling operations constructed along the Pocantico River.

Dongan also approved a grant of 160,000 acres of Dutchess County land to New York merchant Robert Livingston (1654–1728), largess that made him a manor lord. Livingston was married to a Van Rensselaer, a union of two great New York families that created a Hudson Valley dynasty. Regarding the Livingston clan, the New York Times contends, there “is no more of an old-money, blue blood family in the United States”; over the course of ten generations the dynasty produced at least sixty Robert Livingstons, one of whom almost became Speaker of the House of Representatives in 1998. When Columbia County was created in 1786, the Livingstons held claim to a third of its land and were already building distinctive homes along the Hudson.

From 1670 to 1710, English governors distributed Hudson Valley lands with abandon as they sought to guarantee royal control of a vital communication corridor. Loyal manor lords and internationally minded merchants would tie colonial wealth and ambition to the purposes of the Crown. Governors granted manors in Pelham and Morrisania, gave large estates to the Van Cortlandts, Tappans, Beekmans, Bayards, and Schuylers, and approved the Nine Partner’s Patent and the Rumbout Tract. The land-grant program won support for the Crown and populated an empty colony. By 1710 almost two mil-
lion acres of land—most of it east of the river—were distributed to thirty families, who in turn leased it to tenants. Despite the political turmoil of the Glorious Revolution in England (1688), its colonial reflection was Leisler’s Rebellion (1689–91). New York’s European population doubled to some twenty thousand by 1700, and the Hudson Valley was integrated into the larger colonial structure.

But wealth demands protection, and security for Albany was in doubt so long as the Indian threat remained. Dongan, fully aware of the Iroquois role in fur trade, attempted to forge an alliance with the tribes of the Five Nations, who themselves were in constant conflict with the French and Canadian Indians. He formally placed the Iroquois under British protection in 1687, just before the events of the Glorious Revolution led to his replacement. When England and France went to war in 1689, Indian relations and protection over the Upper Valley fell by default to Peter Schuyler, the first mayor of Albany. Schuyler failed to prevent an attack launched by Canada’s Governor Louis Frontenac in February 1690 in a joint raid by French and Indians south against Schenectady and the massacre of sixty of its residents. For a decade, as British efforts were directed elsewhere, the sole protection for the upper Hudson came from the Albany forces led by Schuyler. Manhattan was isolated, and, fearing a French sea invasion, its leaders positioned ninety-two guns at the southern tip of the island. The site has been called The Battery ever since.

King William’s War (1689–97) was the first of five conflicts France and England fought over more than a century. New York became a favorite refitting port for privateers such as Captain William Kidd, who supposedly buried part of his treasure somewhere in the Hudson Valley. By 1700 New Yorkers understood that control of the Hudson Valley was becoming a vital issue between France and England. Since France appeared stronger on the ground, Albany’s fearful merchants traveled to Montreal in 1701 to pledge neutrality in the event of another war. During Queen Anne’s War (1702–13) they supplied arms to France’s Huron allies.

Perhaps because of such realpolitik, the Hudson Valley continued to grow. Another major town was born in 1708 when Lutheran minister Joshua Kocherthal led German Palatines to found a town on the west shore; when Scots became dominant, they changed the name of the community to honor Newburgh on the Tay River. The rich valley farmland drew ambitious
yeomen from Connecticut who added New England virtue to the valley’s population mix. By the 1740s a small group of free black farmers established themselves west of the Hudson in Skunk Hollow, near Sparkill Creek at the north end of the Palisades. Settlers in the eighteenth century tended to farm west of the Hudson since the colonial manor system remained strong on its east bank. Robert Livingston did cooperate with London’s efforts to increase settlement, and many German Palatines immigrated to his lands. Later, however, many of these farmers moved westward toward free land in Pennsylvania. In order to keep farmland occupied, both the Livingstone and Rensselaer dynasties reluctantly offered tenants “durable” freehold estates in perpetuity in return for annual rents. The manorial system characteristic of the eastern side of the river was ultimately discarded as paternalistic, feudal, and un-American, but the Hudson Valley’s colonial heritage was not overturned until three generations after the Revolution.

**War in the Hudson Valley, 1730–1783**

The Appalachian Mountains stretch from Georgia to Maine, a 1,200-mile-long “fold” in the Earth’s surface featuring heights from the North Georgia Mountains to the White Mountains of Maine. To eighteenth-century Englishmen they presented an almost insurmountable barrier to westward expansion; only the colony of New York possessed an easy way through the mountains. Across geological eons the ceaseless pressure of the Hudson River had cut a path through the rugged ridges of the Hudson Highlands, leaving not only marvelous scenery but also an access route into the interior of the country. Whoever controlled that route could dominate the development of the North American continent.

From the first settlement of New Netherlands, Dutch mariners recognized the perils of the North River. They cursed Dunderberg Mountain as the source of violent squalls and considered the narrow Highlands reach, which featured the river’s deepest levels and its trickiest currents, to be immensely dangerous. It took mastery of sails, tacking ability, and great tidal knowledge to traverse what Dutch captains called the “Devil’s Horse Race.” But they and the English captains who succeeded them also realized that passage through the Hudson Highlands opened access to western lands through the Mohawk
Valley as well as the possibility of an easy trip to Montreal and Quebec. North of Albany the Hudson soon became impassable, but east of the river a short portage brought traders to the inviting waters of Lake George. From its shore, the direct route north to Canada via Lake Champlain and the Richelieu River was obvious. What the traders understood was also clear to every military mind. The Hudson Valley provided a north-south invasion route, while every land traveler leaving New England had to cross the river. Control of the Hudson implied command of the northeastern colonies as well as providing the only access to the interior of the continent. Queen Anne’s War finally ended in 1713—one major clause of the Utrecht Treaty was French recognition of England’s authority over the Iroquois—but it was only a prelude to a century of warfare whose purpose was control of the Hudson Valley.

Above Albany, the wilderness of New York remained disputed territory between Paris and London. In 1731 a small French construction crew built Fort St. Frederic in the strategic land between Lake George (called Lac du Saint Sacrement by the French) and Lake Champlain, fortifications quite meager but indicative of France’s intention to remain present in lands that still produced many furs. In the 1740s, Sir William Johnson (1715–74) defended London’s interests in northern New York, maintaining excellent relations with the Iroquois Six Nations and preserving a tenuous frontier peace. But in 1745 French raiders destroyed the small hamlet of Saratoga and killed a hundred-odd people, and dazed survivors took refuge in Albany to avoid further assaults. The major battles of King George’s War were fought elsewhere in North America, which was fortunate since relations between Johnson and provincial Governor George Clinton were abysmal. The frustrated Indian agent resigned his post in 1751 and his de facto alliance with the Iroquois, which had protected the Hudson Valley for a generation, was threatened.

The deterioration of English-Iroquois cooperation led to the Albany Congress, which met in the city Stadt Huys in June and July of 1754. American historians, anticipating our future Revolution, often place undue emphasis on the Plan of Union that Benjamin Franklin presented at Albany, a scheme for an assembly of colonies from Georgia to Nova Scotia. Although the plan was quickly rejected by legislatures on both sides of the Atlantic, its genesis lay in the vital need of Hudson security. Franklin firmly rejected British suspicions that the conference contemplated independence—”no such idea was
ever entertained by Americans”—but goodwill between the Six Nations and New York colony was essential. The Albany Congress confirmed Johnson’s control of Indian relations in the face of French incursions, and the Six Nations remained England’s sworn allies after their chiefs were promised fair payment for land transactions and given thirty wagons of trade goods.

The worldwide conflict between France and Great Britain led to the Seven Years War, called the French and Indian War in North America. Predictably, in New York the battles were primarily over control of the Hudson Valley invasion route. In 1755 William Johnson rafted men north on the Hudson, constructed a log road over the portage route to Lake George, and built primitive defenses, which he christened Fort William Henry. At the same time French forces moved south from Fort Frederic, now called Crown Point, and built a new fort named Carillon, a name selected to echo the musical rapids that ran into the north end of Lake George. In September 1755, Baron Ludwig August Dieskau led an elite force south against Johnson; though wounded, Johnson successfully repulsed the first French effort to control the lake passage. When winter put an end to the year’s hostilities, Johnson resigned his command and traveled to London to receive a knighthood.

The years 1756 and 1757 saw substantial improvement of the French position in North America as General Louis Joseph de Montcalm swept English forces from Lake Ontario and probed against New England. In 1757, Montcalm moved south from Carillon, battered the small British garrison at William Henry into submission, and forced it to surrender. Ignoring the truce terms, Montcalm’s Indian allies killed some wounded soldiers and attacked a retreating British column. The massacres became the centerpiece of James Fenimore Cooper’s *Last of the Mohicans* (1826), a historical novel that educated American readers about the saga of the Hudson Valley. The fictional rocky refuge near Glens Falls where the intrepid scout Hawkeye sheltered survivors became an almost sacred nineteenth-century tourist destination. Regardless of their literary merit, Cooper’s tales of upstate adventure and the Revolution in New York became staples of American culture, chronicles of an empire in crisis and a nation taking shape. Today a restored Fort William Henry, not historically accurate yet exciting for children, still welcomes tourists.

In 1758, Prime Minister William Pitt dispatched General James Aber-
cromby to New York to lead a British-colonial expedition against Montcalm. British officer Richard Schuckberg, a guest of the Van Rensselaers, scornfully observed the ragtag American recruits as the joint force assembled at Albany and parodied their untidy appearance to the tune of the tavern song “Lydia Fisher’s Jig.” The result was “Yankee Doodle,” and modern tourists in the capital area are told its story at the Fort Craillo Historic Site. Whether they wore a “feather in their cap” or not, the Americans swelled Abercromby’s force to fifteen thousand and gave him a four-to-one advantage against Montcalm’s force in Carillon.

On July 8, 1758, the British commander recklessly chose to rely upon the bravery of his soldiers rather than use artillery against the French breastworks. The result was total disaster and a rapid British retreat. Montcalm failed to advance into the Hudson Valley itself only because of William Johnson’s victories farther west.

Lord Jeffrey Amherst was sent to replace Abercromby, and in 1759 he methodically destroyed all French positions in New York. His siege weapons destroyed Carillon’s defenses, and retreating French forces burned it along with Crown Point. Amherst rebuilt Carillon as Fort Ticonderoga, and before the year was over his forces held full control of Lake Champlain. The French were expelled from northern New York, and in 1760 Amherst, ably assisted by James Wolfe, conquered Canada. French power in North America was ended, and the Treaty of Paris brought England a worldwide empire. But, as Winston Churchill wrote, it was “an empire they could not control and with debts they could not pay.” London’s imperial age began triumphantly, but the question remained whether its statesmen could successfully incorporate the American colonies.

Britain’s unchallenged control of the Hudson Valley meant that land-hungry American settlers could advance north and west across the river. King George’s imperial proclamation of 1763 was designed to keep all American settlements east of the Appalachians, but the Hudson River corridor offered too tempting a pathway through the mountain barrier. In the 1760s, London consistently ignored colonial realities; the Board of Trade alienated Albany merchants when it decreed that furs gathered in western New York be sent to Montreal. Shipping to the St. Lawrence River made sense in imperial terms, but not to Albanians. Local merchants such as the Schuyler family, rich
enough to build the elegant “Pastures” mansion in 1762, were angered by such threats to their prosperity. The gambrel roof and Chippendale ornamentation of the Pastures’ façade housed a wealthy family whose economic priorities were not those of the mother country. In reality, the fur business was fading. Farming, milling and lumbering soon became potent sources of wealth for Albany’s leadership, but anger at decisions made by a distant Parliament increased throughout the Hudson Valley.

Albany, the largest community in the valley in the 1760s, remained a “mostly Dutch” town whose merchant elite was consumed with “profit and gain, which necessarily made them live retired and frugal.” In the prerevolutionary era it was Manhattan that led opposition to British acts; it hosted the Stamp Act Congress, which won repeal of duties imposed by London in 1765–66. Unlike the turmoil of New York City, decorum and aristocratic order was the preferred style in the upper valley.

But forces of change affected even tradition-bound Rensellaerwyck and Livingston Manor when east-bank tenant farmers, encouraged by Massachusetts land speculators, claimed ownership of lands they had purchased from local Indian tribes. When the courts, dominated by the river aristocrats, rejected the tenant farmers’ claims, they united behind the leadership of William Prendergast to challenge the customary arrangement. Violent incidents ensued, and New York Governor Henry Moore ordered military intervention to crush the tenant insurrection. Prendergast was sentenced to death, and only dramatic pleadings by his wife prevented the execution. But the tenants of the great estates had long memories. During the Revolution, many supported Britain only because valley landlords embraced the patriot cause.

Despite such local unpleasantness, valley people generally were more concerned with settling unresolved border claims by militia groups in the area that later became Vermont. The Green Mountain Boys, led by Ethan Allen and his brothers, organized the Onion River Company to dispute New York’s sovereignty over the contested lands. Allen’s actions were so successful that he was condemned to death by the New York Assembly. Settlement of the land issue was important, but the Hudson Valley was also seeing the first stirrings of heavy industry as iron foundries were established at Ancram in Livingston Manor and at Sterling Forge in the hills of Orange County. Peaceful
development of such businesses seemed unlikely because of bitter confrontations with the motherland. Manhattan “Sons of Liberty” led riots against the Crown and even staged a “Tea Party” in 1774. Given aristocratic domination of the valley, it is not surprising that Philip Schuyler and Robert Livingston represented the area at the Second Continental Congress in 1775. What is surprising is that both men supported the patriot cause.

The American Revolution began with the skirmishes at Lexington and Concord in 1775, and Manhattan radicals rejoiced when Boston was encircled. But few expected that the first major victory for revolutionary forces would occur in the Hudson Valley. In May, troops led by Ethan Allen and Benedict Arnold seized Fort Ticonderoga “in the name of the Great Jehovah and the Continental Congress,” and two days later New England troops captured the small British garrison at Crown Point. Acting without the sanction of Congress, fighters who understood the strategic importance of the Hudson Valley secured the invasion route from Canada. Equally impressive was the ringing proclamation of 225 Coxsakie citizens issued on May 17: Americans “would not consent to be ruled, save by themselves” and would continue to oppose the “oppressive acts” of Parliament. The Hudson Valley was indeed ready for war.

Late in August 1775, General Richard Montgomery, a Dublin-born soldier of fortune who had married a Livingston heiress, led an American army of 1,200 men out of Ticonderoga to invade Canada. After capturing Montreal, Montgomery linked up with New Englanders led by Arnold and attempted to capture Quebec. On December 31, as a snowstorm engulfed the heights of the British bastion, a gallant charge failed, and Montgomery was killed. His death gave the Hudson Valley its first great hero but cost the colonies their ablest young commander. New York State would later name a county in his honor, and years later his widow would build one of the Hudson Valley’s first great mansions alongside the river; Montgomery Place still draws many tourists to Annandale-on-Hudson in Dutchess County. But in 1776 the American invasion failed. Arnold and Anthony Wayne led remnants of Montgomery’s force back to Ticonderoga, and the strategic initiative passed over to Britain.

From 1775 to 1783, New York was the focal point of the revolution and endured the destruction of battle, the cruelties of civil war, and the secret intrigue of spies. Fully a third of all revolutionary battles took place in the state,
a reflection of its importance as colonial economic leader and its position as military highway through the continent. Although fledgling American forces won preliminary rounds against a surprised enemy, it was inevitable that England’s riposte would target the Hudson conduit. London understood that half of all colonists still lived east of the Hudson in 1776; British control of the river would divide America and the rebellion might simply collapse. Britain’s continuous efforts to win the Hudson Valley, and the desperate American countermoves to prevent this, are the key to understanding the course of the American Revolution.

Even as Britain prepared major initiatives against colonial resistance, there occurred an epic of Hudson Valley lore—an achievement often overlooked in histories of the Revolution. The captured heavy guns of Fort Ticonderoga were useless where they were, but if they could be moved to Boston, George Washington could expel British forces from the city. Henry Knox, a bookseller by trade, arrived at Ticonderoga on December 5, 1775, having been charged with the “impossible” task of transporting fifty-nine pieces of artillery over three hundred miles. Knox loaded the guns, weighing more than 119,000 pounds, onto three barges and floated them south down Lake George. Transferred to oxen-pulled sledges, the artillery arrived at Albany on January 4. The scholarly bibliophile then led a long caravan across the frozen Hudson to Kinderhook, Claverack, and then points east over a route now designated the Knox Trail. At least twice, submerged guns had to be reclaimed from under the ice of streams. It took the proverbial forty days, but the men of the Hudson Valley delivered the precious guns to Boston. George Washington used the firepower to force General William Howe’s evacuation of the city in March.

Washington recognized that Howe—carefully refitting his troops in Canada—would direct his future efforts against New York, and the American commander left Boston to prepare Manhattan against attack. At the same time, at Lake Champlain, Benedict Arnold was ordered to fortify the Crown Point area to repel the certain British move southward. Military commanders at both ends of the long Hudson corridor recognized that the inevitable British counterstrokes would focus on both the city and the valley. When General Sir William Howe’s invasion force came to Staten Island in June, its arrival surprised no one. Howe’s army gradually increased to 34,000 men,
the largest expeditionary force in British history. Even as the Second Continental Congress was debating the Declaration of Independence, the Revolution faced Armageddon in New York Harbor. Although the New York Provisional Congress in White Plains gave a ringing endorsement to the new Declaration on July 9, 1776, prospects for the new nation were bleak.

Conquering New York City proved embarrassingly easy for General Howe’s forces. After transferring a landing force to Brooklyn, his army easily flanked the opposing Americans and defeated them at the Battle of Long Island (August 26–27). Washington’s retreat to Brooklyn Heights and a brilliantly executed evacuation to Manhattan itself provided only temporary salvation for his battered troops. When subsequent peace negotiations on Staten Island proved futile, Howe moved again to the attack. On September 15 his naval forces bypassed Washington’s fortifications at the Battery, landed troops at Kip’s Bay on the East River, and thrust directly across Manhattan to cut off Washington’s retreat. City lore affirms that Mrs. Robert Murray entertained General Howe at a leisurely tea and allowed the Americans to escape Howe’s trap. The next day, at Harlem Heights, the Americans repulsed their pursuers in a battle that restored their morale.

The struggle for Manhattan demonstrated how Howe’s naval supremacy provided him with superior mobility; some historians believe that he could have aborted the Revolution had he immediately seized control of the Hudson. As early as July 12, the British vessels Rose and Phoenix ran the gauntlet of the American guns at Fort Washington, located on the highest point of Manhattan’s west bank on the Hudson, and Fort Constitution atop the Palisades. England’s ships advanced as far as the Tappan Zee, where they harassed American shore installations. In August a makeshift American flotilla led by the Lady Washington engaged British vessels in the Tappan Zee, the only naval battle ever fought in the Hudson River. After the indecisive clash, King George’s ships sailed down the river fully confident that they could return whenever necessary. If British ships had transported some of Howe’s expeditionary force north of Manhattan, Washington’s army might have been destroyed in 1776.

In another demonstration of his power, Howe used his naval supremacy to shift the battlefront in October. He landed troops at Pelham Manor in the Bronx and forced Washington to withdraw the bulk of his
forces from Manhattan toward Westchester. The retreat threatened American construction of a cheval de frise, a log barrier across the Hudson at Fort Washington designed to prevent British access to the upper river. When Washington’s main force was defeated at White Plains on October 28, the American strong points on the Hudson were isolated and the barrier became useless. When an overconfident General Nathaniel Greene delayed in ordering Colonel Robert Magaw to withdraw his fighters from Manhattan, Fort Washington became Howe’s next target. The Phoenix and the Roebuck successfully closed the river to any possible reinforcement from the north, and on November 16 Hessian mercenaries enveloped the fort. Some 2,800 American soldiers, their arms and supplies were surrendered. The loss of Fort Washington was one of the worst, and most inexplicable, defeats of the entire Revolution.

Fort Lee on the New Jersey Palisades now stood alone, and Washington came down the Hudson to assess the situation. Howe entrusted the capture of the complex to Lord Cornwallis, who on the evening of November 19 landed six thousand men north of the fortress. His force scaled the high cliffs and occupied Fort Lee the next day, almost capturing Washington. Howe had totally outmaneuvered his American opponents to win control of Manhattan, a city Britain would occupy for seven years. With the plug at the end of the Hudson firmly in British hands, the battleground shifted northward. Westchester County became a contested middle ground where “Skinners” fought “Cowboys” in internecine warfare between patriot and loyalist irregulars. Tory forces led by Beverly Robinson and Oliver De Lancey benefited from the support of sixteen thousand British troops in Manhattan. The bitter struggles and personal betrayals involved in the long battle for control of the riverside county provided the background for Cooper’s The Spy (1821).

Defending the northern end of the Hudson corridor against invasion from Canada was now imperative. Responsibility fell into the willing hands of Benedict Arnold, even though his aide Anthony Wayne believed the task of defending the area between Lakes George and Champlain to be almost impossible. Wayne considered the land “the last part of the world that God made and I have good reason to believe it was finished in the dark.” Nevertheless, the team soon restored Fort Ticonderoga and built additional fortifications, christened Fort Independence, on Rattlesnake Hill a quarter-mile
across the lake. Efforts intensified when the defenders learned that English forces were advancing southward from Montreal.

General Arnold had also been entrusted with the command of American naval forces on the Lakes George and Champlain, an empty honor since none existed. Acting with the manic energy he always displayed, Arnold hastily created a lake “fleet” consisting of two schooners, a sloop, four row-galleys, and nine gunboats to oppose the approach of General Guy Carleton. The more powerful British force was led by the heavy guns of the *Inflexible* and moved down Champlain in early October. Arnold positioned his meager forces behind Valcour Island on the lake’s western shore and on October 11 engaged the British. After sustaining severe damage, the Americans withdrew, escaping through the enemy force at midnight by muffling their oars with greased rags. Despite his losses, Arnold attacked once more on October 13, and his last ships were destroyed. In 1935 naval archeologists raised the *Philadelphia*, Arnold’s sunken flagship, and it has been on exhibition in the Smithsonian since 1965. Since New York State has designated the bottom of Lake Champlain one of four Submerged Heritage Preserves, it is possible for modern divers to visit the nautical resting place of America’s first navy.

But Arnold’s brave action at Valcour Bay delayed Carleton’s advance. When the general arrived at the foot of Champlain, he faced newly positioned guns and determined American forces. Rather than test his men against the redoubtable Arnold, Carleton retreated to Canada with the intention of returning the next year; his decision guaranteed that the American nation would not be split in 1776. As long as the Hudson remained in America’s possession, the Revolution was tenable. Intercolonial communication with New England was assured, and supplies could still flow across the river to Washington’s embattled army in New Jersey. But Lord Howe spent the winter in Manhattan secure in his belief that British strength would prevail in 1777. Not even Washington’s winter victories at Trenton and Princeton shook his confidence.

During the winter of 1776–77, attention shifted from military to political affairs in the Hudson Valley. Discussion of a state constitution that separated executive, legislative, and judicial power had begun at White Plains in July, but the tides of lost battles forced the Convention of the Representatives
of the State of New York upriver to Poughkeepsie. The slow drafting process took nine months, but ultimately John Jay’s text was approved and it governed the state without alteration until 1821. Never submitted to the people for ratification, the constitution was proclaimed in Kingston on April 20, 1777. George Clinton, a native of Ulster County and a newly commissioned general of militia forces, was named governor and immediately began the first of his seven terms; no man has ever served longer as leader of New York. Sworn in on July 30, Clinton proved a strong leader despite the restrictions that the new constitution placed on executive authority. Elections were immediately held, and in September the first meeting of the State Senate took place in the stone home Wessel van Broeck had constructed in Kingston in 1676. The Senate House is proudly maintained in Kingston, which claims it to be the oldest public-meeting building in the nation.

General Washington, American military strategists, and Governor Clinton understood that the Hudson Valley corridor would be targeted by new British invasion forces in 1777. James Clinton and Christopher Tappan were ordered to survey the entire river and prepare its defenses. Although their survey identified the great S, the Devil’s Horse Race where the river snaked though the Highlands, as an inherently strong position, they decided not to fortify its west point, where land protruded into the river. Instead, they recommended that twin forts be constructed along Popolopen Creek farther to the south. Moreover, a “great chain” must be forged to span the river from their proposed Fort Montgomery to the Anthony’s Nose landing on the east bank, a barrier that would prevent British ships from advancing into the Highlands. The task of building the chain was entrusted to Robert Erskine, Washington’s chief surveyor, and he mobilized workers at the Ringwood foundry to begin the effort. Even as Fort Montgomery and Fort Clinton were hurried into shape, military attention turned once again to the northern approach to the river, where the advance elements of General “Gentleman Johnny” Burgoyne’s army were advancing.

Burgoyne, both a member of Parliament and a playwright, had used his political influence to wrest command of Canadian forces away from Carleton, who would remain in Canada while the task of securing the Hudson and winning the war by separating the colonies was entrusted to Burgoyne. Burgoyne planned a three-way British thrust against the Hudson Valley, and he
predicted easy victory. The epic story of the Saratoga campaign, available in many monographs, began when Burgoyne achieved tactical surprise with his unexpectedly rapid advance against Ticonderoga. By July 5 he forced the Americans to abandon their defensive positions there and stood atop Mount Independence. Yet, in Manhattan, Howe, lacking orders to cooperate with Burgoyne, decided to leave the city and conquer Philadelphia. Only after Howe left did General Henry Clinton belatedly receive specific orders explaining the upriver phase of the British invasion. By August, Burgoyne’s triumphal march stalled in the hard terrain of the Half-Way Break south of Lake George, where militia forces under Philip Schuyler impeded his advance with fallen timbers, flooded roads, and skirmishers. Instead of rapid movement, the British army and its impressive artillery train of 138 cannon moved forward at barely a mile a day. Schuyler’s tactics slowed Burgoyne so impressively that it took British forces a month to traverse the twenty-three miles to Fort Edward. Schuyler’s bitter reward for his efforts was displacement by General Horatio Gates, but his effective military work was not forgotten. Daniel Webster later asserted that Schuyler’s contributions to independence were “second only to Washington.” Burgoyne’s troops were exhausted when he hunkered down to await news of the two other British forces he expected.

As Burgoyne regrouped, American forces gradually filled the vacuum behind his army. Militia in Burgoyne’s rear threatened his long supply line, and a suddenly concerned general was forced to dispatch Hessian troops to seize supplies, horses, and food from Vermont farms. New Hampshire militia and Green Mountain boys under the command of John Stark, a man who would “never do what told to do but who did excellently what he decided to do,” opposed Colonel Friedrich Baum’s along the Walloomsac River. Stark’s woodsmen, enraged by the recent scalping of colonial settler Jane McCrea by Burgoyne’s Indian allies, destroyed Baum’s force and tore into the reinforcements sent to save the column; Stark described his August 16 victory as “one continuous clap of thunder.” The Bennington Battle Monument rises in present-day Vermont, but this crucial victory actually took place in New York. Baum’s crushing defeat, along with the British reversals at Oriskany (August 6) and Fort Stanwick (August 22), intensified Burgoyne’s predicament, for the reinforcements he expected from the south and west were delayed. Moreover, he learned that Continental General Thaddeus Kosciusko was fortifying
Peebles Island north of Albany and that the American high command, located in Cohoes at the old Van Schaick mansion (1737), was preparing an attack. Confident in the power of his men and guns, and still expecting support from Manhattan, the beleaguered British commander crossed the Hudson on September 13 and advanced toward Saratoga.

One of history’s most decisive battles was now joined. Burgoyne soon encountered fortifications constructed by Kosciusko and defended by troops commanded by manor lords Philip van Cortlandt (2nd New York) and Philip Livingston (4th New York). At Freeman’s Farm on September 19, the Americans repulsed the British, who escaped total disaster only because Gates hesitated to reinforce Benedict Arnold’s advancing force. Entrenched behind strong positions, Burgoyne awaited help from the south that never came. The weather grew frigid, and inadequate food caused British desertions. Burgoyne’s October 7 attack against Bemis Heights failed to break Arnold’s inspired defense. Although it took another ten days to negotiate terms of surrender, during which time British raiders burned General Schuyler’s country estate, Burgoyne’s situation was hopeless. His army was isolated and far from any support. When the American officers sent to finalize the surrender convention arrived, Burgoyne angered them by discussing the Hudson’s marvelous fall colors rather than negotiating. Nevertheless, on October 17, on the Field of Grounded Arms (near present Schuylerville), the British surrendered. Burgoyne went immediately to Albany, where he endured a series of dinners; at the Pastures he formally apologized to Schuyler for destroying the family’s summer home. Albany’s leading citizen grandly responded that rebuilding would be a simple matter.

Military buffs still debate Clinton’s failure to aid his beleaguered friend. Lord Howe, conqueror of Philadelphia, was never ordered to join with Burgoyne at Albany, and his deputy clearly lacked a sense of urgency. Only after Clinton received reinforcements from England did he move north. His four thousand advancing troops were cheered by news of Washington’s latest defeat at the battle of Germantown (October 4) and undeterred by signal fires along the river that heralded their coming. Henry Clinton’s target was the “twin forts of the Popolopen” named to honor General Montgomery and Governor Clinton. British naval forces landed first on the Hudson’s east shore at Verplanck’s Point, spared the mansion at Mt.
Guilian, and crossed the Hudson on October 6. Marching around the bulk of Dunderberg Mountain, they attacked the two forts. American forces fought well despite substantial losses, but British troops soon removed Erskine’s chain across the Hudson; the submerged spikes of the cheval de frise were reeled in after only a perfunctory struggle with American ships. A day later Clinton’s regulars seized American defenses on Constitution Island opposite an undefended West Point bluff. But Clinton’s victories in the Lower Hudson proved militarily meaningless, because Arnold held Bemis Heights and Burgoyne was doomed.

Unaware of the disaster looming to the north, Clinton dispatched General John Vaughan to sortie against the rebel government in Kingston. Vaughan failed to capture American leaders, but he burned the small town so completely that only one of its three hundred structures survived. Even as Burgoyne was surrendering and his rear guard was destroying Fort Ticonderoga and Crown Point, Kingston was turned into a smoldering wilderness. War stalked the Hudson Valley, and Vaughan’s marauders ravaged Livingston estates on the east shore of the Hudson after they learned of Gentleman Johnny’s disaster. But Clinton could do no more. On October 26 he recalled Vaughan from his position near Saugerties, led his reunited forces out of the Highlands, and bitterly blamed Howe for the British debacle. Although the British fully expected to return in triumph, they would never again threaten the Hudson above West Point. The military campaigns of 1777 were over, leaving a heritage of valor that is now part of America’s national epic.

Saratoga marked the turning point of the Revolution. After the battle, France recognized the new American nation and entered into formal alliance, while Spain and the Netherlands increased their aid. Nineteenth-century Americans revered the miraculous victory in the New York wilderness, and the Saratoga battlefield became a place of pilgrimage. Today a 155-foot-tall monument, formally dedicated on October 18, 1912, but open since 1883, marks the site where Burgoyne surrendered his 5,700 men. The Saratoga Battle Monument features four niches honoring American commanders. Schuyler’s statue faces east and Gates’s north, while the Virginian Daniel Morgan looks to the west. But visitor attention inevitably focuses on the southern niche, which holds only a granite model of a left leg and boot. The statue honors the valor-
ous acts and the wound suffered by Benedict Arnold, but no mention is made of the hero who would soon turn traitor. Franklin Roosevelt added Saratoga to the national park system in 1938, and in 2002, during year-long celebrations of the 225th anniversary of the battle, the restored monument was reopened. In October 2002, New York Governor George Pataki also dedicated the reconstructed Fort Montgomery Historic Site and opened a pedestrian bridge connecting the sites destroyed by the British in 1777.

The winter of 1777 was perhaps the low point for the American revolutionary cause. Washington’s battered forces suffered in winter quarters at Valley Forge in Pennsylvania while New York struggled to deny the Hudson to British raiders. Battles in the no-man’s-land of Westchester were particularly brutal. Washington’s directives recognized that control of the Hudson’s course through the Highlands, that stretch of deep and treacherous water the Dutch labeled “World’s End,” was paramount. Loss of the river would doom the colonial cause. On January 25, 1778, Washington ordered General Israel Putnam to put all Highland defenses into “a respectable state before the spring.” French engineer Louis de la Radière recommended reconstruction of Fort Clinton and Fort Montgomery (January 2), but a five-man commission led by Governor Clinton decided that the West Point peninsula offered stronger possibilities. General Samuel Parsons, who took command of the high ground on February 14, found “everything in confusion” but soon created order. His regiment called the plateau “Point Purgatory” because of the bitter cold, but his men effectively erected gun emplacements and fortifications. Kosciusko soon arrived to build Fort Arnold (later Fort Clinton) at the lip of the wide plateau, and Fort Putnam, Fort Webb, and Fort Wyllis quickly followed. West Point was occupied by Continental forces early in 1778 and is today the oldest operating military post in the United States.

It is noteworthy that the Hudson River victories of 1777 were won by civilian soldiers, a reality that confirmed the Revolutionary generation’s bias against a standing, professional army. After the Constitution won approval in 1788 not even the prestige of President George Washington could convince Congress that a military school located at West Point was needed. The United States Military Academy, perhaps the most renowned of all Hudson venues, was not authorized until March 16, 1802. West Point accepted its first class of ten cadets that July, the beginning of the “long gray line” of officers
who have contributed so much to the nation.

West Point recently celebrated its two hundredth anniversary and is one of America's most revered institutions. Contemporary visitors can reflect on the graves of Revolutionary soldiers, visit the quarters from which Major Sylvanus Thayer created a core curriculum and established an Honor Code, worship in the Cadet Chapel (1836), or marvel at the world's finest military museum (1854) and at the Battle Monument (1897) that looks out over the Hudson. There are few sights more stirring than the corps of cadets on parade, and more than 4,000 young men and women are today dedicated to living up to the Academy ideal of “duty, honor, country.” But in 1778 the USMA's record of glorious service was still far in the future. It was civilian soldiers and engineers who finally achieved the American goal of closing the Hudson to British ships of war.

Previous attempts to install cross-river chains at Fort Washington and Anthony's Nose had failed, with parts of the latter ultimately used to close Gibraltar's harbor. The third American attempt at closure proved the charm. Israel Putnam led the effort that on April 30 installed an iron chain between West Point and Constitution Island. Forged at Sterling Furnace and the Ringwood Ironworks in the Ramapo Mountains, each link in the chain was two feet long and weighed 140 pounds; floating logs kept the heavy barrier in place. When combined with the guns newly installed at West Point, the great chain effectively closed the S of the Hudson to British raiders. Forged in a mere three months, the Hudson River chain was the most successful United States industrial project of the eighteenth century. Because of the chain, the vast American storage depots at Fishkill were secure and continually supplied Washington's forces. Moreover, the State Legislature, often forced to meet in Poughkeepsie where it ratified the Articles of Confederation (March 28, 1778), could safely convene in Newburgh. Links of the famous Hudson chain are still displayed at Trophy Point, a site where modern visitors to the military academy can both contemplate a beautiful view of the river and conjure up brave times.

During the summer of 1778, after Sir Henry Clinton withdrew from Philadelphia fighting the Battle of Monmouth with Washington, the American army once again circled north to control the river. Its commander, as legend would have it, actually did sleep at many places in the protected Hudson Val-
In 1779 Washington established his headquarters at West Point, a place he now called the “key to the continent.” Baron Frederick von Steuben, who at Valley Forge transformed Americans into disciplined soldiers, was the resident drillmaster there, and he changed raw recruits into troops of the Continental line. His protégés were first sent west to secure the New York frontier against Indian attacks, and many later traveled south to win the Battle of Yorktown. The incessant military activity around West Point fostered a last British effort to advance up the Hudson against the resilient Americans. In May Clinton again sailed upriver, occupied the Verplanck peninsula, and built an “impregnable” position at Stony Point across the Hudson. Ferry service between the two bases was established, and British gunboats led by the Vulture dared the rebels to challenge them. West Point appeared to be impregnable, but Clinton sent raiders east into Connecticut while his rear guard pillaged Westchester.

Washington decided that General Anthony Wayne and his elite corps of light infantry would be given the task of dislodging the invaders from Stony Point. Wayne promised Washington that his men would “storm hell if you will only plan it,” and on the evening of July 15 he led 1,300 men south from Fort Montgomery. The assault group carried no ammunition, but its daring bayonet attack surprised the British, and in a thirty-minute engagement the entire garrison was taken. The guns of British warships made it impossible to hold the position, and after three days Wayne withdrew, taking substantial supplies and artillery pieces. Wayne’s victory was the last major engagement in both the Hudson Valley and the entire north. It provided a tremendous boost to American morale, and ever afterward Wayne was “Mad Anthony” to his adoring public. In October, Clinton withdrew British forces from both sides of the river, returned to Manhattan, and never threatened the Hudson corridor again. In 1897, Stony Point, the only Revolutionary War battlefield in Rockland County, became a State Historic Park.

The Benedict Arnold Affair

Perhaps the most dramatic episode of Hudson lore took place in 1780. Benedict Arnold, recovered from the wounds he suffered at Saratoga, assumed command of Philadelphia when the British abandoned that city in 1778. There he successfully pursued a Tory heiress named Peggy Shippen, a ro-
mance somewhat tainted since historians have discovered that he used recycled love letters in his wooing. Arnold seethed with resentment, believing the laurels due him from Saratoga had been awarded to others. His new wife convinced him to contact the British, and as early as May 1779 he was providing information to Sir Henry Clinton. Arnold neglected his administrative duties so badly that he was court-martialed and officially reprimanded in April 1780. Only personal appeals to Washington salvaged his career, and he convinced his sympathetic commander to put him in command at West Point.

When Arnold arrived at the Hudson on August 5, treason was uppermost in his mind. He had alerted Clinton of his new posting, and on July 12 Arnold informed Major John André, Clinton’s adjutant, that “disposal” of West Point was on the table. Once in command of the vital post, he secretly arranged to meet André on the shore of Haverstraw Bay and betray the citadel. André, who came ashore from the Vulture, ignored a specific order from Clinton and exchanged his uniform for civilian clothing. Plans of the West Point forts and their vulnerabilities were delivered and carefully placed inside Andre’s boot before he left to return to his ship. But American gunners commanded by Colonel James Livingston had fired on the Vulture and forced it downriver, so a stranded André, now in mufti, crossed the Hudson, heading for the British lines in Westchester. Three American militiamen captured him in Tarrytown on September 23, and the plot to betray West Point quickly unraveled.

On September 25, news of André’s capture reached Arnold. He immediately fled West Point. Promising two gallons of rum to his rowers, who were arrested for their exertions, Arnold and his wife took refuge on the returned Vulture. He accepted a British commission and fought against America, but his name became synonymous with dishonor. André was taken in chains across the Hudson to Tappan, where Washington had established headquarters in the DeWitt House. Briefly imprisoned in Joshua Smith’s home in Tappan, Andre was tried as a spy in Tappan’s Dutch Reformed Church and executed on October 2. His body was later exchanged for that of General Richard Montgomery and ultimately found rest in Westminster Abbey.

The Arnold affair marked the last major British effort to win control of the Hudson, but additional elements complete the story. American military campaigns in 1779 had greatly reduced the power of the Iroquois Confedera-
tion, but English subsidies funded a new series of Mohawk raids late in 1780. At the same time, a large British reconnaissance party from Montreal occupied the site of Ticonderoga, a ruined fortress abandoned since 1777. Had the Arnold conspiracy been successful, these seemingly disparate actions could have finally broken the American hold on the Hudson corridor. Arnold’s flight and his replacement by General Wayne negated any chance of British success in the Hudson Valley.

**The Close of the Revolution**

In October 1781, Washington’s military victory at Yorktown guaranteed the success of the American Revolution. Expectation of a settlement brought real peace to the Hudson Valley, and in March 1782 Washington established residence in the house of Jonathan Hasbrouck in Newburgh, a dozen miles north of West Point. His headquarters remained there for seventeen months, the longest he stayed anywhere during the conflict. But political drama replaced military action. At Newburgh, Washington defused an attempted military coup, refused the offer of a crown, and created the Badge of Military Merit, which evolved into the Purple Heart Medal. Newburgh was such an important site that the New York Legislature made it the first public historic place in the nation in 1850; in 1883, on the centenary of the Treaty of Paris, the city unveiled its Tower of Victory. Contemporary Newburgh still maintains a 445-acre East End Historic District, the single largest in New York State.

The final campsites of the Revolutionary Army were located in the fields south of Newburgh. During the winter of 1782–83 more than ten thousand troops bivouacked around New Windsor and Vail’s Gate, awaiting the result of diplomacy and feasting on the riches of the Hudson granary. The American army was in better physical condition at war’s end than at any time during the conflict. The concentration of military force extended to the east bank of the Hudson, and at Verplanck’s Point on October 1, 1782, Washington reviewed French troops who had helped to win the Battle of Yorktown. French staff officers in turn reviewed Continental forces the next day. General Knox coordinated training, supply, and hospital facilities from the reconstructed Verplanck mansion at Mount Gulian, and it was there on May 13,
1783, that the hereditary Society of the Cincinnati was formed, a group some Americans feared as an aristocratic, military caste. When formal arrangements were made to return New York City to American control, Guy Carleton and Washington met at Tappan, where Carleton greeted his foe with the seventeen-gun salute befitting a victor. From the Hasbrouck House Washington left for a tour of the upper reaches of the Hudson. While viewing Lake George, the general suggested that New York would become the “seat” of a new American empire, a phrase echoed in “Empire State.” After supervising the demobilization of his elite guard regiments in June, Washington said a final farewell to his officers on December 4, 1783, in a famous dinner meeting in Fraunces Tavern near the Battery in Manhattan. He then returned home to Virginia, never intending to return to New York.

Creating National Institutions

The 1780s were difficult years for the new nation, and particularly so for New York. No section of the country held a greater number of Tories, and thousands of British sympathizers decided to leave the state rather than betray their king. But most of the Hudson lords, the Livingstons, Schuylers, Van Cortlandts, and Van Rensselaers, had supported the Revolution, so the lands of the “patriot aristocracy” were hardly affected by the change of government. Some Hudson Valley properties had been damaged by warfare, but the authority of the river aristocracy remained secure especially since many of their tenants supported the Crown. Tory family dynasties such as the Delanceys and the heirs of Sir William Johnson were hardly as fortunate. Perhaps the greatest example of postrevolutionary chance occurred in Westchester, where Frederick Philipse III, the last lord of Philipse Manor, had remained loyal to George III; his outspokenness earned him banishment to Connecticut early in 1776. After Lord Howe conquered Manhattan, Philipse led two hundred loyalists who proudly signed a Declaration of Dependence on November 28, 1776. He was attainted of treason by New York courts; the sentence made his lands forfeit when peace broke out. Even before Philipse died in London exile in 1785, his vast estates had been seized and made available to soldiers, farmers, and speculators. Cornelius Low purchased Philipse Manor House in Yonkers, the first of several individual owners before the village converted
it into the town hall (1868). One unquestioned result of the Revolution was more democratic land ownership throughout the Hudson Valley.

Manhattan, the metropolis of the state, gradually regained trade, erected new buildings, and hosted sessions of the national and state legislatures. Despite difficult economic conditions under the Articles of Confederation, the city grew rapidly. But municipal leaders such as Alexander Hamilton and John Jay believed America’s future greatness depended upon creating a stronger central government and supported the writing of a Constitution in 1787. Governor George Clinton, who reveled in being a simple farmer from Ulster County, spoke for many residents of the Hudson Valley when he opposed New York’s ratification of the newly proposed Constitution. The two rival groups debated the completed new charter of government in a dramatic meeting held in Poughkeepsie. When the New York Constitutional Ratifying Convention met there on June 17, 1788, Clintonites controlled it by a 46–19 margin and, had they insisted on an immediate vote, could have rejected the Constitution. Instead, they agreed to debate the entire document and allowed its supporters, led by Alexander Hamilton and John Jay, to make their case. Coauthors of *The Federalist*, the two nationalists gradually convinced their opponents that New York would benefit more by accepting than rejecting the document. If the Constitution was rejected, they threatened that Manhattan might secede from the state. If approved, New York would lead the already ratifying states that surrounded her. Moreover, every New York property owner would prosper under stable government. Their arguments were further strengthened when Virginia ratified the Constitution on July 2. Feelings were running high, and on July 4, even as Hudson Valley residents celebrated the Declaration of Independence, political violence erupted in Albany between supporters and opponents of the Constitution; the riot caused one death and injured a score of persons. At Poughkeepsie the Clintonians won agreement that a Bill of Rights would be added to the Constitution, but finally bowed to superior argument. On July 26 the delegates voted by a narrow 30–27 margin to join the United States, even though every delegate from north of the Dutchess County–Orange County line cast his vote against ratification. No state benefited more from the creation of the new Constitution than New York, and nineteenth-century Poughkeepsie would reign as “Queen City” of the Hudson Valley.

At first it seemed certain that New York City would become the center
of the new government. George Washington was inaugurated president in its City Hall on April 30, 1789, a ceremony presided over by Chancellor Robert R. Livingston. The first sessions of Congress and the Supreme Court were held in Manhattan, but political maneuvering soon shifted the national capital, first to Philadelphia and later to a newly constructed city named for the first president. Secretary of the Treasury Hamilton dominated the Federalist administration, but his failure to grant patronage to the Livingston clan alienated the proud chancellor, who soon joined the Clintonian opposition. The old system of Hudson Valley life was clearly changing as aristocrats became essential elements in the Democratic Republican movement of the 1790s. But Livingston, perhaps the largest single landholder in the Valley, joined the Jeffersonian movement not as a yeoman farmer but rather as a disgruntled politician ignored by a Federalist regime.

Livingston’s decision was in accord with the political future. A fundamental change brought about by the Treaty of Paris was a revolution in land tenure. New York’s landholding class expanded enormously when thirty thousand loyalists abandoned the state rather than betray their king. As early as 1779 the state assembly had declared the lands of seventy-nine loyalists forfeit, and formal victory guaranteed that colonial landlords such as Frederick Philipse would not return. As with the Philipse estates, other loyalist lands along the Hudson and great tracts of virgin acreage farther to the west were distributed to demobilized soldiers who had fought and bled for the United States.

Peacetime change fractured the traditional power of the New York landed aristocracy, which had supported revolution. For example, the Beekman family, recipient of a thirty-thousand-acre grant along the east shore of the Hudson in 1768, found the costs of land maintenance insupportable after peace came. By 1785 the Beekman tract was surveyed, broken into smaller units, and sold. Similarly, Philip Schuyler was forced to reduce his vast holdings in the wilderness north of Albany as a potential liability. His family retained vital lands near the Hudson, converted them to business use, and rebuilt the summer mansion burned by Burgoyne. But most of Schuyler’s holdings were made available to eager buyers. Manor lands held by the Rensselaer and Livingston dynasties were less available, but after 1783 Stephen Van Rensselaer rarely bothered to enforce the requirement of “quarter sale”
payments. He never renounced the semifeudal duties due, but the fourteen hundred farmers resident on his properties rarely paid rent to the “good patron.” Like the Livingstons to the south, Van Rensselaer retained eviction authority and regularly oversaw the distribution of ballots to his tenants on Election Day.

The portent of these changes was clear to a young Orange County farmer. During the Revolution Michel-Guillaume Jean de Crevecoeur lived on the west bank of the Hudson, and in the 1780s he served as French consul in Manhattan. A brilliant essayist who pondered the meaning of the Revolution, Crevecoeur’s Letters from an American Farmer (1782) alerted Europeans to the powerful forces loosed in America. His book described life on a frontier farm in the Hudson Valley, an experience that was creating self-sufficient men, free citizens with title to their own land. The emerging new American was a blend of many peoples and so could act “upon new principles; he must therefore entertain new ideas and form new opinions.” In trenchant essays, Crevecoeur described a “smiling country” filled with optimistic workers, a realm where even the newcomer “meets with hospitality, kindness and plenty” and where “the avenues of trade are infinite.” America was a place where an individual “for the first time in his life counts for something.” Orange County in the Hudson Valley mirrored the spirit of a new nation.

Population growth along the Hudson forced New York State to create a more efficient administrative structure. First Charlotte County, which earlier had been carved away from Albany, was renamed to honor the hero of the Revolution and became Washington County on April 21, 1784. Shortly thereafter, Columbia County was fashioned out of Albany and Dutchess County land (April 4, 1786). Both new counties had their eastern boundaries adjusted in 1790, when the State of New York finally settled its long land dispute with Vermont. But the process of reshaping the Hudson Valley was not yet ended. Albany County was further reduced in size on February 7, 1791, when the legislature authorized creation of Saratoga and Rensselaer counties, while on the west side of the river Rockland County was created out of Orange County in 1798. To complete the revised political architecture of the valley, the legislature decided to honor two generals of the Revolution whose reputations were partially made in fighting along the river. Greene (March 25, 1800) and Putnam counties (June 12, 1812) were created out of Albany and
Ulster and Dutchess counties, respectively. A new ten-county Hudson Valley was established, which has endured to the present day.

After more than a century of intermittent war, the Hudson Valley was being reborn and seemed confidently poised to enter the 1800s. Regional optimism was fully justified during the next century of growth and development, but a last spasm of international conflict recalled the adventurous past. During the War of 1812, New York, because of its long border with Canada, again was the focus of military operations. While opposing navies contended in the world’s oceans, Oliver Hazard Perry became a national hero by winning control of Lake Erie in September 1813. As in the Revolution, the United States hoped to conquer Canada, and an overconfident President James Madison declared that victory was “only a matter of marching.” But, as in 1776, American thrusts into British North America quickly collapsed, in part because the parochial New York militia refused to leave the state. Just as surely the counterthrust came. After defeating Napoleon Bonaparte’s armies for the last time in 1814, Britain transferred thousands of battle-tested troops to Canada and prepared to invade along the Champlain-George-Hudson axis. General George Prevost led an army of eleven thousand men and supported them with the Confiance, the most powerful ship ever to sail on Lake Champlain. Yet, on September 11, Captain Thomas Macdonough, fighting from his flagship Saratoga, defeated the British fleet commanded by Commodore George Downie in the Battle of Lake Champlain. His victory prevented another invasion of the United States and forced Prevost to retreat to Montreal. Macdonough’s valiant stand confirmed national pride, and was the last in the long series of battles for control of the Hudson Valley corridor. During the nineteenth century, the rivers, creeks, and lakes of the region would become viaducts for settlers, commerce, and manufacturers rather than warriors.

A final footnote to battle. During that invasion summer of 1814, as American forces mobilized in areas around Albany, their needs were supplied by local commissary agents. One of many sutlers providing edibles for the defenders was Samuel Wilson (1766–1854), a former brickmaker and slaughterhouse operator. Wilson marked his shipments to the troops with a distinctive “U.S.,” and the delighted men who consumed his meat decided that they came from “Uncle Sam.” Wilson, a man of the Hudson Valley, had unknowingly provided the nation one of its most enduring symbols. Today tourists
still make pilgrimages to Sam Wilson’s grave in Troy’s Oakwood Cemetery. Most realize that the entire Hudson Valley is filled with echoes from American history.
Chapter 2

Life and Labor in the Hudson Valley

Rapid change marked the history of the Hudson Valley in the nineteenth century. As the conflicts of previous times receded into a storied past, its farms and towns became laboratories in which the new nation experimented itself into modernity. Major changes in agricultural production, the stirrings of big-business enterprise, and a transportation revolution that would transform both state and nation were only part of its tumult. The Hudson Valley also fostered alternative lifestyles and the first great school of American artists. Many members of the American leisure class chose to settle and frequent the region. The story of the century is often telescoped as the rise of New York City as the national metropolis, but the domination of Manhattan makes far more sense when considered in conjunction with events in the valley.

The New Hudson Valley

No state suffered more from the Revolution than New York. Its borders were ravaged, the Hudson corridor was a battlefield, and its greatest city was depopulated and forlorn. When rebuilding began in the 1780s, the flight of tens of thousands of loyalists along with their money and expertise posed a severe challenge. New York’s recovery would have been long delayed had not a major shift of population occurred to replenish the loss. A wave of new immigration flooded into the state from the countryside of New England after
peace opened a convenient route west from its unyielding soil. The “Yankee invasion” that began in the 1780s aimed to occupy arable land where hard work would receive a better reward. Emigration in the postrevolutionary years was of such proportion that Timothy Dwight, later president of Yale, claimed that the entire Hudson Valley became a colony of Connecticut by 1788; he was both impressed and saddened by his state’s losses. Dwight feared that virtue itself was being drained from New England as the unending flow of Puritan stock replenished New York’s lost population. Lured by rich and fertile land, and inspired by the reports of those who preceded them, the Yankees filled vacant acres first in Westchester, then Dutchess, and finally Orange counties. Some newcomers sought commercial opportunity in cities; in New York and Albany they proved themselves “the tribe of trade.” Some of Manhattan’s greatest retailing fortunes were amassed by newcomers named Low, Griswold, and Macy. Arriving by the thousands, the industrious migrants altered the nature of Hudson Valley life. They were tenacious; not even winter deterred them since many arrived by sled. They were careful; Yankee thrift and close dealing soon became the rule in both city contracts and county horse trades. They were inventive; the changing land system of the Hudson area allowed Yankee farmers the flexibility to initiate and profit from new agricultural patterns. New England stock constituted the largest population group in the Hudson Valley by 1825 and retained its primacy for the rest of the century.

The Yankee invaders rejoiced to find available fertile land that lacked the rocky underpinnings of New England, but their influence extended beyond agriculture to the urban life of the valley. From 1783 to 1785 several groups of Quaker sailors from Nantucket and Providence founded the town of Hudson. Situated on a high bluff along the river, Hudson occupies a site the Dutch called Claverack Landing and was supposedly a place where the explorer traded with friendly Indians. Whether indeed the site of Hudson’s landing, today’s town luxuriates in fine views of the moving current. Seth and Tom Jenkins led “The Proprietors,” settlers who arrived with families, ships, and homes they transported in prefabricated sections. The site they occupied was a sheltered bay at the last deep water of the river, and it was there they replicated not only their former town life but also their livelihood. The Nantucket whalers, anticipating another war with Great Britain as inevitable, had
decided that only a complete transfer of their home port could guarantee access to the world’s oceans. Hudson began its urban existence as a whaling port complete with sperm oil works, rope and sail manufacturers, and the essential distillery. Incorporated by 1785, it had a population of 1,500 within a year, boasted an urban grid by 1787, and was a United States port of entry by 1795. The town added houses, tanneries, and mills so rapidly it challenged Albany’s claim to upstate leadership; in 1797 Hudson failed to become the state capital by only a single vote in the legislature. Its mariners made fortunes from hunting whales well into the 1830s, and prosperity lasted until kerosene displaced whale oil. Linked by ferry to Athens across the river, the area became famous for shipbuilding while later in the century Hudson produced cement, iron goods, and doors. Rowdy sailors and workmen made Diamond Street the most lawless place on the river. In the contemporary town, nineteenth-century mansions built by successful sea captains still look down from Promenade Hill to the river while tourists search for antiques along Warren Street.

North of Hudson but also on the east bank of the river, another town was created by the New England influx. Farmland opposite the mouth of the Mohawk River was originally part of the original Van Rensselaer grant, but in the mid-seventeenth century Derick Van der Heyden turned the site into the most important ferry crossing on the upper Hudson. A century and a half later, the combination of fertile land and access to the river drew New Englanders, who purchased choice plots after a land survey was completed in 1786. The newcomers founded Troy in 1789, a name paying homage to classical learning and implying ambition strong enough to challenge Albany’s historic control of river-borne commerce. By 1798, when Troy was awarded village status, it already had a post office, brick works, and several paper mills. Across the Hudson but also in 1798, Schenectady received the third city charter in New York. Connecting the growing urban centers was imperative, and between 1797 and 1807 New York State chartered eighty-six turnpike companies, which constructed nine hundred miles of road; the fabled Albany Post Road along the east bank of the Hudson assumed definite shape in this decade. The profusion of river ferries and new roads eased the movement of Yankee settlement and the subsequent flow of farm goods toward the river. Albany, the hub where eight separate turnpikes met, kept its commer-
cial leadership despite the Trojan challenge and its turnpike to Schenectady was the busiest in the nation. Four thousand miles of roadway served the ten-county Hudson region by 1821 and facilitated the growth of area industry. Troy never aspired to political power, but its industrial drive and entrepreneurial skills fostered bitter economic rivalry with Albany for many decades.

Located across the Hudson, Albany itself was strongly influenced by the arriving Yankees. The second-oldest city in the colonies, Albany had long been dominated by a Dutch merchant elite. It had pioneered the fur trade and sent armies off to battle, but the city retained a staid complacency; its showplaces included the Pastures, where Schuylers reigned, and a new mansion at Cherry Hill (1787) built by the Van Rensselaers. Yet at the turn of the century its traditional leadership was challenged by ambitious newcomers such as Elkanah Watson, a merchant who arrived in 1788 from the “hive” of New England. Watson described himself as one of many workers arriving to “subdue and civilize the wilderness,” and by 1797 he was part of the coalition of old and new Albanians that wrested the title of state capital away from New York City. Albany was close to the agricultural heartland of the state, more connected to ordinary people, and its location, 150 miles inland, made government secure against invaders. The coalition seemed to believe that Albany, with a population of six thousand, was capable of challenging Manhattan’s commercial primacy. For a decade the state legislature would convene in the old Stadt Huys, but proud Albanians led by Mayor Philip Van Rensselaer laid the cornerstone for a more suitable building in 1806; Philip Hooker designed the new capitol and New York’s representatives first convened under the statue of Themis (Divine Justice) in 1809. Within another decade, Yankee politicians dominated the town council and wrested control of Albany’s future away from Dutch dynasties. But despite all its pretensions, the city seemed insecure in its role, and an executive mansion was not purchased until the 1870s.

The effects of the Yankee influx had an obvious impact on the east shore of the Hudson. Sleepy Poughkeepsie, granted a town charter in 1788, quickly became a transportation hub serving migrants from New England. Located on the post road to Albany, it built turnpikes eastward to Sharon and Litchfield so that Connecticut’s caravans could more easily wend their way west. Poughkeepsie, along with the smaller ports of Athens and Catskill, joined with Hudson to send whalers out into the oceans of the world. These
towns and a dozen others along the river used capable New England shipwrights to build improved nineteenth-century versions of the traditional Dutch sloop. The new river craft were sixty- to seventy-foot-long, centerboard, tiller-directed ships that effectively moved the ever-increasing volume of river tonnage through the narrow channels of the Hudson. Nyack specialized in creating vessels with brightly colored hulls, while the Poughkeepsie firm of Van Zandt, Lawrence and Tudor boasted the finest craftsmanship. Commerce-minded Albany built the most vessels, and its largest, the sloop Utica, could carry 220 tons of cargo down to Manhattan. The downriver trip normally took four days, but under exceptional sailing conditions might be accomplished in one. Naval historians estimate that 1,300 Hudson River sloops were built from 1796 to 1835, but their commercial domination gradually faded as barges and steamships replaced them.

**Transportation Revolution in the Hudson Valley**

Despite increases in population and urban settlement, life in the Hudson Valley remained essentially rural and agricultural as a new century began. But revolutionary improvements in steam power and canal construction would bring sudden, massive change. One leader of the transformation was Robert Fulton (1765–1815), the son of an impoverished tailor whose accomplishments inspired the new age of steam. Fulton received little formal education, but his aptitude for drawing won him a letter of introduction to the expatriate American painter Benjamin West from no less a hero than Benjamin Franklin. Six years of apprenticeship near London (1787–93) proved the limits of Fulton’s artistic gift, and the young man transferred his attention to building machines. Great Britain was in the first decades of its Industrial Revolution, and Fulton contributed schemes for ropemaking machinery and iron bridge building to that movement; he also patented a method of canal improvement using inclined planes. The young inventor worked with Charles Mahan to build a steamship for the British navy, but their efforts failed. A disgruntled Fulton left London for Paris, where he spent the years 1797–1803 vainly attempting to interest the French in a “plunging boat” that could fire torpedoes. Then, in 1802, the young inventor was introduced to the United States ambassador to Paris, an encounter that changed history.
Robert Livingston, the lord of Livingston Manor whose family controlled the shoreline of Columbia County, had been sent to Paris to negotiate American access to the Gulf of Mexico; his mission ultimately purchased Louisiana and doubled the size of the United States. A man of eclectic interests and something of a political chameleon, Livingston presided as Washington became president but had joined Jefferson’s Republicans when his talents went unappreciated by Federalists. Mechanical advances also intrigued the ambassador, whose farms made use of every agricultural innovation. He had previously financed two failed efforts to build a steamship, but Fulton, now styling himself an “engineer,” convinced Livingston that his new scheme would work. Their collaboration in Paris experienced many setbacks, including a prototype that broke in half due to excessive engine weight, but Livingston retained his faith in Fulton. While his friend tinkered, Livingston used his political influence to obtain a steamship monopoly from New York State. When the partners returned to Manhattan in 1806, they held an unused monopoly that would expire unless they could show results by December 1807.

No one knows the exact dimensions of the steamship that Fulton built in Manhattan; its hull is estimated to be 135 by 16.5 feet, but it was essentially a flat-bottomed Durham-style platform capable of holding a heavy Watt engine. Constructed at the Corlear’s Hook shipyard of Charles Brown, “Fulton’s Folly” was powered by a British “tea kettle” when it made its first test run on the East River on August 9, 1807. After adjustments were made, Fulton sailed the North River Steamboat of Clermont around the Battery to a dock opposite Trinity Church. Steam power, if properly utilized, would allow ships to ignore the prevailing Hudson River winds and sail upriver at any time, but to onlookers in 1807 Fulton’s ship appeared very dangerous, “a sawmill on a raft spitting fire.” When Fulton steered it upriver on August 17 he was immediately forced to fine-tune the ship’s balky engine and saw “nothing but disaster” in the faces of his passengers. But listen to his quietly triumphant log report. “I left New York on Monday at four o’clock and arrived at Clermont, the seat of Chancellor Livingston, at one o’clock on Tuesday... On Wednesday... arrived at Albany at five in the afternoon... The sum is one hundred fifty miles in thirty two hours, equal to near five miles an hour.” Fulton’s dry reportage heralded a revolution.
Fulton’s journal of the steamboat’s first trip omitted interesting side-lights. The North River Steamboat carried members of the Livingston clan, who endured the overnight trip despite the lack of cabins. When the vessel docked, the chancellor greeted the travelers with an effusive welcoming speech that ended with the announcement of the inventor’s engagement to Miss Harriet Livingston; whether the nuptials depended on nautical success was not recorded. After the Clermont (the name reporters decided to use) returned to Manhattan, major renovations began and by the time the ship made its first scheduled trip to Albany on September 7, twenty-four berths had been added and a $7 fare established. Brave souls who wished to experience steam travel on any leg of the vessel’s trip were charged a dollar. When the Clermont, under the command of Seth Jenkins, proved capable of making three round trips weekly, the delighted Albany legislature extended Livingston’s steamship monopoly to the entire state. Fulton, so often destitute during his earlier career, never had to worry about his bank account afterward. During the frozen winter months of 1808, Fulton reconfigured the Clermont to offer fifty-four bunks and a family room. New engines were ordered from a Jersey City fabricator, and in 1809 Car of Neptune, Firefly, and Paragon joined Fulton’s fleet.

As the steamship conquered the river valley passenger trade, communication and trade in the entire region were revolutionized. Falls in the Hudson at Troy made that town the last stop for upriver traffic, but by 1809 steamboats of Fulton’s monopoly sailed on Lake Champlain. River sloops recognized the threat that steamships represented to their livelihood, and their angry captains often sailed close in attempting to disable paddle wheels. Moreover, Fulton, who launched the first Ohio River steamboat in 1811 and instituted steam-ferry passenger service between Manhattan and Brooklyn in 1814, was forced to constantly defend his monopoly from infringements. The year after he died of overwork and fever in 1815, having initiated a revolution that made his life a subject in school curriculums, the New York City Council named a street in his honor. The Fulton-Livingston steamship monopoly was nullified by the Supreme Court in 1824 (Gibbons v. Ogden), but the revolution unloosed by the partners continued to expand. By 1840 more than a hundred steamships were active on the Hudson, and a decade later 150 vessels carried an estimated one million passengers. Steamships capable of cross-
ing the Atlantic entered service in the 1820s, and by 1860 the time for a transoceanic voyage had been reduced to only a week. When combined with the impact of the steam engine on wheels, the locomotive, the legacy of Fulton and Livingston was the modern United States.

Hudson Canals

Scores of volumes describe the origins, construction, and importance of the Erie Canal, an idea that ambitious New Yorkers had advanced since the late eighteenth century. Visionaries insisted that if goods from west of the fall line could gain access to the Hudson and New York City, if the flow of immigrants could be channeled, then New York would become the empire George Washington predicted. Presidents Jefferson and Madison refused to endorse the enormous project, much less provide national assistance, but able young leaders such as De Witt Clinton, the son of General James Clinton and nephew of Governor George Clinton, kept the dream alive. As early as 1811, a route through the wilderness using the Mohawk River Valley had been tentatively mapped out, and New York State seemed willing to fund the project on its own. But before the immense financial and engineering problems were addressed, the entire scheme was temporarily shelved as the United States once again fought Great Britain.

Prosperity came to Manhattan in the aftermath of the Treaty of Ghent, and its busy merchants were not interested in providing support for the canal scheme. But De Witt Clinton was elected governor in 1817 on a platform that promised a canal to his upstate supporters. He immediately won legislative approval of a 363-mile-long canal, a proposal opponents derided as “Clinton’s Folly” or the “Governor’s Gully.” It took eight years, but the state and its fiery governor “built the longest canal, in the least time, with the least experience, for the least money and to the greatest public benefit” in history. The economic effect of the Erie Canal transformed New York into the “Empire State” and brought Manhattan commercial supremacy in the nation. In Albany, the merchant community, which had always supported Clinton, began construction of a four-thousand-foot dock even before the Erie Canal was completed in 1825. In 1823 engineers completed a series of tiered locks at Waterford, which finally connected the Mohawk and Hudson Rivers. The locks bypassed the
raging falls at Cohoes and made possible direct shipment of western New York wheat to Manhattan millers. Albany, which had long awaited the junction of the two rivers, received only 1,329 ships in 1823, but by 1826 its newly built docks serviced over 7,000 vessels; city population exploded from 12,630 in 1820 to 24,209 a decade later. For the next two decades the Erie Canal primarily served New Yorkers; until 1847 more than half its total freight came from within the state. But American expansion brought ever greater trade to valley and city; as early as 1851, two-thirds of Erie tonnage came from beyond New York’s borders. The 218,000 tons transported in the Erie’s first year rose to 4,650,000 tons by 1860 and reached an all-time high of 6,000,000 tons in 1872. Before the Erie opened, both New York City and New York State already held the largest populations in the nation. After 1825, Manhattan ranked as America’s premier port. State farmers filled the national breadbasket, and New York was truly the Empire State.

But the Erie Canal was not the only story of the decade. In 1823 political leaders such as George Tibbett (Rensselaer) and Philip Schuyler (Albany) understood that the old invasion corridor between the capital and Lake Champlain awaited another canal that could tap the riches of the northern Hudson wilderness. The Champlain Canal was authorized in 1818 to connect Fort Edward on the Hudson to Whitehall on the lake. When completed in 1823, the 64-mile-long Champlain Canal made commercial lumbering operations possible and facilitated American trade with Canada. Logging operations in the eastern Adirondacks now became possible, a welcome addition to the log driving from Glens Falls south toward Troy, which had begun in 1813. Lumber finishing, furniture making, and paper production would soon bring great prosperity to the small town at the “Big Bend” of the Hudson and create a raft of job opportunities in Fort Edward and Hudson Falls. By 1850 New York would surpass Maine to become the leading producer of lumber in the nation. But lumber was not the only product the Champlain Canal brought south. Eels and other freshwater fish, ice, and grain were also coming down to Albany, and the large capacity of canal boats made area iron mines profitable. The economic transformation of New York was extended to its far north.

Upstate leaders were the most enthusiastic supporters of canals, but profits gradually transformed metropolitan resistance. Thus, when William and
Morris Wurts arrived in Manhattan from Philadelphia to solicit funding for a mid-Hudson canal, investors such as Philip Hone paid attention. Addressing a meeting at the Tontine Coffee House in January 1825, the brothers proposed a plan to bring coal from the anthracite fields of Pennsylvania to the Hudson. The million dollars they raised enabled the Wurts to build a “gravity railroad” across the Moosic Mountains and link it with a canal heading for Kingston on the Hudson. Benjamin Wright, fresh from years of engineering work on the Erie, was hired to create a system of 108 locks, 137 bridges, and 26 basins that became the Delaware and Hudson Canal (1828). John Jarvis, who designed the railway, and John Roebling, whose innovative aqueducts bridged four rivers, ably seconded Wright; both engineers would go on to greater glory. In October 1828, the Orange became the first ship to travel the 160-mile length (108 canal miles) of the D&H system, completing the trip in only two days.

From 1828 to 1898, the D&H was the economic heart of the mid-Hudson economy. The Orange carried agricultural goods and bluestone, but Pennsylvania coal made the D&H invaluable. Kingston shipbuilders became rich by constructing hundreds of “flicker” barges specifically designed for bulk service on the D&H. Coal was floated down Rondout Creek to Hudson River holding areas and transferred by barge to New York City. In 1831, William and Simon Finch launched a second major industry from their home in Wilbur, at the New York end of the D&H. By 1850 the firm they created was the largest exporter of bluestone in the world, and thousands of miles of Manhattan sidewalks attested to the longevity of their product. Before the D&H arrived, Kingston was a quiet town of only three thousand persons that occupied seventeen square blocks and could be covered in a ten-minute walk. When Rondout, Wilbur, and Kingston merged in 1872, their combined population was twenty thousand. The D&H Canal operated for only seventy years, but it was largely responsible for Kingston’s growth and prosperity during the nineteenth century.

**Agricultural Change in the Hudson Valley**

Agricultural production is the oldest industry of the Hudson Valley. Both Dutch and English governors gave away vast tracts of land, conferring neo-feudal privileges in the expectation that grain for export and sustenance
would flow down the river to Manhattan. Milling was the first great New York City industry, and it is not surprising that the seal of the city displays a barrel of flour. But historians agree that the paternalism inherent in the manor system deterred initiative, especially along the eastern shore of the river. Individually owned farms were far more the norm on the other side of the Hudson, and corn production flourished there. But the great estates kept an estimated five thousand tenant farmers in almost medieval restrictions. Deep resentment and restrictions on agricultural opportunity led many renters on “Patriot family” manors to remain loyal to George III.

After victory in the Revolution, as reform of land tenure made land more available, agriculture continued to support four-fifths of New York’s population. Crevecoeur’s Letters from an American Farmer not only studied the emerging national character but also offered a pungent analysis of farming practices along the Lower Hudson. He believed farms prospered only if all members of the immediate family worked and considered that the availability of land fostered wasteful agricultural methods. New York farmers knew little of crop rotation, fertilizer use, or the conservation practices Europe’s agricultural reformers were advocating. Instead, Hudson Valley farmers simply used up land fertility, and when it returned depleted yields they moved on to other acreage. The process caused a gradual westward movement of the agricultural frontier even before the Yankee invasion tremendously increased New York acreage under cultivation; from 1784 to 1821 improved farmland in the state rose from one million to 5.5 million acres, mostly in western areas of New York. By 1823 the Genesee Valley had replaced the Hudson area as the “Granary of America,” and the wheat grown there soon made Rochester the state’s primary milling center. New York remained the breadbasket of the nation, but the grain in the loaf no longer came from the Hudson Valley.

No manor lord understood the ongoing process and saw the threat as well as Chancellor Robert Livingston. The lord of Livingston Manor not only ordered better methods of cultivation on his lands but also decided to shift production toward fruits and vegetables. Livingston helped found the Society for the Preservation of Agriculture, Arts and Manufactures (1791), a group whose primary goal was revitalization of farm practices. Aware of British efforts to improve grain production, Livingston was an early advocate of a more scientific approach to agriculture in the valley. The society gradu-
ally convinced valley producers they need not “skim” the land and move elsewhere. By using clover and grass and applying gypsum as fertilizer, even older farms could remain self-sustaining and profitable. By 1811, the wheat farming that had long dominated the Hudson Valley was clearly declining as more lands opened in the western counties. In Westchester, gentleman farmer John Jay decided that growing wheat was “like taking a ticket in the lottery.” Area wheat farmers made their last profits during the War of 1812, and corn then replaced it as the staple on most farms. Potash and lumber production increased as it became apparent that Hudson Valley farmers would have to diversify if they were to survive.

Beyond pioneering fruit and vegetable crops, Livingston also helped to create the Hudson Valley woolen industry. Wool from farm sheep had always been harvested and used by women to produce clothing for their families. But Livingston introduced Merino rams to improve the breed and published his *Essay on Sheep*, which publicized the good results. When the market for fine wool passed $2 a pound in 1807, the valley’s economy experienced a speculative frenzy; the price of a single Merino ram surpassed $1,000 before the bubble burst in 1810. Hard times and war followed the market decline, but Livingston estimated an average farmer kept two dozen sheep and hogs, stock readily augmented when economics changed. By the time of Livingston’s death, raising sheep was part of the normal farm economy on the east shore of the river, and it remains visible today in Chatham. More importantly, when textile manufacturing began in the 1820s mills on the Hudson had access to a basic raw material.

Elkanah Watson (1758–1842), who purchased his first breeding sheep from Livingston and helped to stimulate the Merino craze, retained his faith in the product even after its first bloom faded. As part of the Yankee invasion Watson accumulated a substantial fortune in Albany even though he considered its citizenry “the most illiterate portion of the human race.” Retiring to Pittsfield, Massachusetts, he raised sheep and is credited with convincing nearby Shaker communities that producing “superfine broad cloth” was a worthy endeavor. But Watson’s influence extended far beyond his faith in wool. He sponsored the first Berkshire County Fair, and the nationwide publicity garnered by that event made him a crusader for better agricultural information. He helped New Yorkers organize county farm societies and

*River of Dreams*
advocated shifting cropland into orchard or dairy operations, new businesses that would become identified with the Hudson Valley.

The third Hudson reformer of the period was Jesse Buel (1778–1839), a New England transplant who made a fortune buying up lands sold for taxes and reselling them. Buel edited newspapers in Kingston and Albany before establishing a model farm at Sandy Barrens near the capital. He advocated crop rotation, the use of manure, planting fallow grasses, and the use of deep plowing techniques, all of which turned unproductive land into thriving enterprises. Buel called for the creation of farm journals and state supported agricultural schools; his influence was critical in forming the Board of Agriculture (1819). Greater crop yields demanded better equipment, and Buel encouraged use of a cast-iron plow developed by Jethro Wood; demonstrations at county fairs doomed the wooden plow. Forges across the valley, especially those in Troy, provided many models, with a particular favorite being the “Livingston county” type. In 1834 Buel founded the *Albany Cultivator* and preached agricultural reform as editor; he also published the *Farmers Companion* and *A Treatise of Agriculture*, volumes that succinctly summarized the agricultural reforms practiced in the valley.

By the 1820s the wheat culture of the valley was being replaced by more varied agricultural production. Wheat continued to flow down the Hudson River from the Erie Canal, but its sources were now the Genesee Valley or the lands of the Middle West. The historian David Ellis concluded that along the river “farming as a way of life” had ended and was replaced by “farming as a means of profit.” Orange County became known as a butter producer and would soon add cheeses and fluid milk to the stream of foods it sent down to Manhattan. Onions would soon become a major crop in the “black belt” lands of its western reaches. The Hoosick Valley running east of the Hudson above Albany became a major producer of flax and provided it to spinning mills. Schuyler money sponsored a linen manufacturing plant close to the river at old Saratoga, and grateful residents renamed their town Schuylerville in 1831. The Downing family opened a plant nursery in Newburgh, and offered their expertise to farmers who were shifting to the production of fruits and vegetables for the urban marketplace; young Andrew Jackson Downing advocated planting apple orchards on the west bank. As dairy farming and cattle raising grew in importance, larger herds made possible the creation of
major slaughtering facilities in Albany and Troy; scores of smaller, equally bloody operations served communities along the river. New York State led the nation in beef production in the 1840s and remained third into the 1870s. In 1835 John Jacques, heir to a Huguenot tradition of fine winemaking, planted his first vines in Ulster County and produced his first wine four years later. The Brotherhood Winery (1839), the oldest such business in the United States, still has the largest cellar in the nation and receives half a million visitors annually. By the twentieth century, wine would rank as a major valley industry, and tourist “Wine Trails” were established in several counties. Brotherhood survived Prohibition and the Depression by manufacturing sacramental wine, and in May 2002 the Hudson Valley Wine School opened on its grounds.

By 1860 New York State led the country in number of farms, farmers, and value of production, and in crops as varied as potatoes, hops, flax, and lumber. The Jonathan apple, introduced by Abe Jensen in the 1820s, became a staple crop in the valley, but there were also Pippins, Greenings, Maiden’s-blushes, Baldwins, and Russets; beginning in the 1880s the Macintosh assumed primacy. The profusion of apples was outdone by a variety of pears surpassing the century mark. The county fair movement, begun in Dutchess County in 1806 by Dr. Samuel Bard and expanded by reformers such as Watson, created regional pride in the cornucopia of Hudson Valley produce. The New York State Fair, approved in 1841 and first held in Poughkeepsie, become an annual extravaganza to display the wealth produced by the soil of the Empire State. While the bulk of agricultural yield gradually shifted away from the Hudson Valley, its farmers continued to prosper because the doctrine of diversification had adjusted production to meet changing conditions. The flexibility of nineteenth-century farmers provided stability for the region even as the foundations of American economic expansion shifted toward manufacturing.

Rather inevitably, agricultural change provoked another rebellion against the manorial system, which still existed in sections of the Hudson Valley. The survival of patroonship and feudal practice into the nineteenth century seemed a standing insult to America’s democratic spirit. Livingston Manor tenants in 1811–12 petitioned the legislature against sporadic attempts to have local officials collect levies, and sheriffs in collusion with the chancellor soon regretted their alliance with wealth. Yet the legal system continued to
support the lordly rents. As Jacksonian democracy swept the nation, the manor lords on the east side of the river retained their extrajudicial authority and the right to evict their tenants for nonpayment. Stephen Van Rensselaer, the “Good Patroon,” did not collect his due rents for years, but the issue remained unsettled. Van Rensselaer died in January 1839, like most gentlemen deeply in debt. His will instructed his sons to collect the $400,000 in back rents he had ignored for decades. When the notices demanding payment were sent, a “committee of respectable men” met with Stephen Van Rensselaer IV, only to be treated “with marked coldness and disdain.” Therefore, on July 4, Independence Day celebrations in Columbia County were transformed into anti-rent rallies demanding the termination of a pernicious system; leaders of the tenants then made a concrete offer of settlement. The two Van Rensselaer brothers, who disagreed on most subjects, united to obtain eviction notices if December rents were not forthcoming. Tenants in Columbia County believed the land was theirs. Possession for years had made it so, and when Sheriff Michael Archer attempted to serve the papers he and his deputies were rudely handled. Governor William Seward had to call out guardsmen from Troy and issue a proclamation insisting on the enforcement of the law. When some leaders were evicted from their farms, the so-called Anti-rent War began.

For the next decade the upper Hudson Valley and land as far west as Delaware County experienced acts of civil disobedience and guerrilla warfare that undermined the power of large landlords. Tenants masquerading as Indians rode into town as “Calico Cowboys,” and by threatening the courts they virtually paralyzed the legal system. Anti-renters admitted that their own ancestors were “fools” who had agreed to work for a “lazy, worthless, immoral and bastard aristocracy.” But their heirs were free men “no longer willing to be slaves.” Columbia’s rebels were led by Dr. Smith Broughton, popularly known as “Big Thunder” for his troublemaking ability. When Broughton was captured in Hudson, the cowboys gathered at the jail in such numbers that three militia companies were mobilized to prevent his escape. More devastating were two deaths in Delaware County, where mobs also destroyed the records of the Holland Land Company. Anti-rent advocates became a potent political force, and by 1845 most political leaders had been converted to their cause. Public opinion as well as local courts favored
the rent protesters, but everyone was forced to take sides. The most famous defender of the landlords was the novelist James Fenimore Cooper, an aristocrat who simply condemned the entire “disagreeable race” of anti-renters. Years of analyzing the American character and writing social criticism had honed Cooper’s instinctive class bias; he considered the protesters merely invading Yankees who hated their betters. Cooper’s anger renewed his literary muse, and his quickly written “Littlepage Manuscript” trilogy of novels (Satanstoe, The Chainbearers, The Redskins) defended the old system. Of more lasting value, Cooper finished his Leatherstocking Tales.

When New York held its scheduled Constitutional Convention in 1846, the rent controversy was much discussed by delegates. One proposed amendment set a twelve-year limit for the leasing of land yet ignored the question of previously existing obligations. The anti-renters had successfully supported the election of local sheriffs and justices who impeded landlord attempts to collect their rents, and in the gubernatorial race of 1846 they provided the decisive margin of John Young’s victory. When Young assumed office, he immediately pardoned convicted anti-rent leaders and authorized a state investigation into land titles. Ultimately the Court of Appeals decided that “quarter sale” payments to landlords like the Livingstons (who still held 700,000 acres) were unconstitutional; rentals claimed by the Van Rensselaers were not settled until the 1850s. Almost 225 years after the patroon system was instituted, democratic landholding finally became reality throughout the Hudson Valley.

Industrialization Comes to the Valley

As the nineteenth century opened, the Hudson Valley provided some of the most beautiful vistas in America, ever-changing panoramas of land and water. But the land, which originally drew settlement because of its wealth of furs, was now producing a wide variety of crops that sustained the families, towns, and cities of the area. The magnificent river, filled with a vast variety of fish and the largest oyster beds in the world, offered its bounty freely to both the lonely angler and commercial fisherman. Already shattered by decades of conflict, the bucolic idyll was now to be altered by the forces of an Industrial Revolution whose effects were already evident in Western Europe. The Hud-
son Valley did not lead this process but would shortly display many examples of its impact. In less than a century labor would shift away from the land and the river into factories and shops. The process of industrialization would change life in the valley.

Samuel Slater, who emigrated from Great Britain in 1789, carried in his mind the schematics that allowed him to build textile machinery along New England streams. The secrets of technology spread rapidly, and New York entrepreneurs quickly learned how to adapt steam power to textile machinery. By 1813 there were already forty-three cloth factories in Albany and Columbia counties, and in 1814 investors led by John Jacob Astor and Philip Hone started a cotton mill at Fishkill Falls. In 1815 William Tel-dor, taking advantage of the sheep-raising craze, opened the Hudson’s first woolens factory on Sparkill Creek. The census of 1820 identified 9,400 New Yorkers already employed in factories, and increasing productivity made clothing manufacture at home foolish. After the Erie Canal opened in 1825, New York City investors financed the huge Harmony Cotton Manufacturing Company at the Cohoes waterfall. Harmony became the largest textile complex in the nation and pioneered the manufacture of knitwear. Nearby the Star Woolen Mills made use of local wool and flax to challenge Harmony’s dominance. County fairs along the Hudson corridor simply stopped displaying homespun cloth by the 1840s, since little was being made, and before the Civil War most New Yorkers purchased only readymade clothing. Industry had altered the texture of valley life.

Manufacturing inventiveness and business initiative transformed the Hudson economy. Local entrepreneurs used natural resources—trees, wool, clay, stone, and metals—to industrialize the valley. More than a hundred steamships operated on the Hudson by 1840, but factories using steam-powered engines far surpassed that level. The advantages of machinery are apparent in the development of nineteenth-century lumbering. In colonial times small-scale sawmills, mostly for local consumption, were established as towns grew along rivers, but nineteenth-century steam-powered cutting for export could make a town rich. Glens Falls, under the leadership of Daniel Parks, made logging the foundation of its economic revival. In 1813 Alamson and Norman Fox “drove” individually branded logs to a holding/sorting pool above the village, and water-driven mills transformed the raw wood into
boards. When the newly constructed Champlain Canal opened, trees from the eastern slopes of New York’s mountains became available for processing. By 1830 Glens Falls, Sandy Hill, Fort Edward, and Cohoes had built sufficient steam-powered mills to challenge Maine’s long domination of the lumber trade; Francis Parkman visited Glens Falls in 1842 and counted twenty working mills. New York State led the nation in finished lumber products by 1850. Glens Falls alone produced 26 million running feet, and wood products were the most important Adirondack industry of the nineteenth century. During the Gilded Age, as wood pulp substituted for rags in newsprint, a dozen large factories supplied the raw material for the papers and books Americans read. Logging, steam power, and the Champlain Canal trade created a vital role for the north Hudson in the national marketplace.

Lower Hudson Valley trees made possible a prosperous leather industry along the west shore of the river after the War of 1812. Natural tannins from hemlock trees can soften stiff hides before they become shoes, gloves, boots, saddles, or belts. The vast stands of hemlock along the Hudson below Albany spurred the new industry, and soon oak, chestnut, and blue spruce were also being used in the tanning process. Zadock Pratt in Greene County pioneered the new industry, became rich, and served two terms in Congress. A host of imitators around the Catskills followed in his wake. As the industry outgrew the capacity of local herds, hides had to be imported from South America to keep valley tanneries operating. By the 1860s the tree stock was depleted, and the leather industry moved west from the river to towns like Gloversville. But during the Civil War the Hudson Valley still produced most Union cavalry saddles. Hudson tanneries injected industrial pollution into the river and destroyed forest land. By 1870 clear-cutting techniques had destroyed all the hemlocks along the Hudson, eradicating as well the blue sheen they gave to the Catskills. The green-hued Catskill wilderness of the twentieth century is almost all second-forest growth.

But another industry emerged from the forest devastation. Tanneries need the tannins from the trees but left behind thousands of hemlock and spruce stripped of their bark. These naked trunks were harvested, cut into four- or eight-foot sections, shipped to New Paltz sawmills, and transformed into hoops and barrel staves. A niche industry was built out of the debris of another, and it manufactured fifty to sixty million hoops yearly. Cooperage
was a Hudson industrial craft that lasted until the world no longer needed wooden barrels.

Boston’s “Ice King,” Frederick Tudor, had taught New Englanders that money resided in frozen water, and New York and Hudson entrepreneurs quickly emulated his business success. Manhattan first sent ice south in 1816, beginning a river trade that shipped 146,000 tons by 1856. From the 1820s hundreds of Rockland County farmers cut winter ice for Manhattan dealers, and innovations pioneered by John and Edward Felter created a major industry after 1835. The brothers successfully moved ice from the pure waters of Rockland Lake (Hook Mountain) and Hessian Lake (Bear Mountain) down to the Hudson using gravity railways and ice chutes. River sloops, soon replaced by a fleet of thirteen steamships, transferred ice blocks packed in straw and hay down to the city. The Knickerbocker Ice Co., an offshoot of Felter operations around Sloughter’s Landing, dominated the lucrative trade until 1926. During the 1800s ice sheds 150 by 200 feet in size and storing up to 30,000 tons could be seen along the river from the Palisades to Troy. Upriver firms benefited by cutting ice directly out of the river, since salt contamination ended at Poughkeepsie. The advent of refrigeration in the 1920s ended this saga of Hudson River life, but nineteenth-century icehouses found new occupation in the twentieth century as mushroom producers.

Perhaps the most famous Hudson Valley industry grew out of the clay and stone of its riverbank. Yellow brickwork was one of the features of Dutch colonial architecture, and local brickmaking facilities date back to the Revolutionary era. Making good brick demands wood, suitable clay, straw, and coal dust, as well as businessmen capable of bringing all these elements together. In nineteenth-century Haverstraw, British immigrant James Wood formed his first bricks in 1817–18. He discovered clay fields near the river, which supplied a fine compound for bricks, and locally grown straw added to the strength of his product. In 1829, Wood received a U.S. patent for an oven that reduced brick firing time to a single week rather than the normal fifteen days. Experimentation discovered that anthracite dust quickened drying from inside the bricks, and this additive was abundantly available from Kingston’s D&H coal yards. All the nascent industry lacked was large markets.

On the evening of December 16, 1835, a fire broke out in downtown Manhattan. Whipped by strong winds from the harbor, the flames devastated
the area around Broad, Wall, and South Streets before moving north and west toward Greenwich Village. Before overmatched volunteer companies halted the blaze, more than twenty city blocks were consumed and millions of dollars in property lost. New metropolitan building codes were enacted, making brick the favored material; brickyards from Haverstraw to Hudson expanded rapidly to meet the need, and 75 percent of Manhattan construction for the rest of the century was done with goods produced in the Hudson Valley. Thousands of Irish immigrants found their first jobs digging clay, tending the kilns, and transferring bricks to scows at dozens of sites along the river. At its height there were perhaps 250 brickyards, with John Derbyshire, Richard Van Valen, John Rose, and Juan Jovas among industry leaders; Haverstraw alone had forty-two firms employing 2,400 men in 1883. The height of valley brick production came in 1905 when 1.3 billion bricks were fired, but the industry died as twentieth-century builders shifted to steel and glass and southern competitors undercut valley prices. Haverstraw and Kingston closed their remaining yards in the 1980s and the last river brickyard, Powell and Minnoch near Albany, closed in 2002. Modern travelers can experience this basic Hudson industry at the Brick Museum in Haverstraw.

Hudson quarries also provided stone for construction. Haverstraw held deposits of red sandstone, while brownstone and hard bluestone were found in the hills of Rockland, Orange, and Ulster Counties. Brownstone, despite its fickle composition, became the primary construction material for acres of Manhattan townhouses, while bluestone, hard enough to resist freezing cold and impervious to heat, became the ubiquitous paving material of city sidewalks. When the state prison at Sing Sing opened in 1825, inmates sent “up the river” excavated marble deposits used in mansions as well as the walls that held them inside. The stones of the Hudson Valley endure as part of many architectural monuments.

Most significant for national development was an entirely new industry shaped in the Catskills. During construction of the Erie Canal it had been discovered that certain earth would harden below the waterline, “cement” that made construction of locks much easier. During the 1820s, in the hills west of Kingston, around High Falls and Rosendale, the cement industry was born. The Rondout Formation under the lands of Jacob Snyder dates back 400 million years and contains vast amounts of limestone rock heavily laced
with magnesium. Farm workers under Snyder had been ordered to make quicklime for agricultural use, but the powder produced when mixed with water created slurry that hardened into rock. Rosendale cement was first used in construction of the D&H canal, but found its major market in Manhattan. Cement from the Rosendale Company was immensely durable, and late in the century it provided the foundation for both the Brooklyn Bridge and the Statue of Liberty. Cement was so essential that after the D&H Canal officially closed in 1898, the channel between Rosendale and Rondout remained operative to ship cement; today it is part of the Rosendale Natural Cement Historic District.

No Hudson Valley city benefited as much from the Industrial Revolution as Troy, long a ferry site and the best way across the Hudson. Already a prosperous transportation hub, the Champlain Canal gave the city access to iron ore mined in the Adirondacks, and the genius of Henry Burden (1791–1871) made Troy the most important iron manufacturing center of the antebellum period. In 1823 Burden invented a machine that made spikes (nails), and he soon adapted it to manufacture horseshoes. His iron works near the river soon produced a horseshoe every second, adding up to a million a week. Burden iron products were essential when Troy engineers built the first railway bridge across the Hudson in 1835. In 1851 Burden enhanced his fame by unveiling a giant water wheel sixty feet in diameter, an ever-turning wonder that provide up to five hundred horsepower. The great wheel was dismantled in 1941, but visitors can still experience Burden’s accomplishment in a modern museum demonstration. Unlike earlier iron forges in Sterling Forest or the Livingston works at Ancram, Burden’s installation was Troy’s big business and fostered secondary operations in iron plating, lamps and lanterns, farm equipment, and stoves.

Troy benefited enormously from its geographic position opposite the Erie Canal. When bargemen celebrated their arrival at the Side Cut of the long canal, they headed for Troy’s Barbary Coast, a district of taverns and sporting houses. For much of the century Troy battled against Albany for economic primacy, valiantly seeking to overcome the banking, governmental, and shipping advantages of the capital. It was an uneven struggle, but because of an overworked housewife named Hannah Lord Montague the city was able to persevere. Mrs. Montague was simply tired of constantly washing
and turning the dirty shirt collars of her equally hardworking husband. In 1827 she created a detachable collar for men’s shirts, an innovation so useful that Ebenezer Brown began mass production of the product in 1829. An industry was born, and by the 1840s Troy’s riverfront was devoted to some two hundred factories employing more than ten thousand seamstresses; America’s “Collar City” was responsible for 90 percent of total U.S. production. The sewing machine made it possible to add cuffs, and Troy’s Cluett-Peabody firm introduced fully assembled Arrow Shirts to department stores.

These vignettes hardly present the full story of fifty years of industrial growth in the Hudson Valley, but they do illustrate its unexpected vitality. Taking advantage of the natural resources of the area, people of the valley created new industries even as river life shifted away from its agricultural base. The enormous barge traffic generated by the Erie Canal was headed for Manhattan and generally bypassed river communities. Unwieldy canal boats lashed together at Albany or Troy for conveyance to New York would rarely make stops along the Hudson. Nevertheless, local initiatives compensated for lost trade by creating new commodities. Transportation convenience cost river towns some degree of prosperity, but entrepreneurs did create products indispensable for metropolitan growth. Apparel, lumber, iron, bricks, ice, stone, paper, and leather all flowed toward the great national marketplace as the transportation corridor of the Hudson grew ever busier.

The Hudson Valley in the Civil War

Until 1827 it was legal for New Yorkers to own slaves, and Hudson Valley farmers held many in bondage well into the 1800s. Although Manhattan organized one of the earliest antislavery societies, the state constitution of 1821 retained high property qualifications for black voters, a discriminatory practice endorsed by several statewide referendums. Although Governor William Seward refused to return fugitive slaves to the South in 1840, Southern slave catchers legitimately roamed the state until the war. New York business gained far more by maintaining good trading relations with the South than by adopting a stance of moral condemnation. The circumstances invited individual protest, and some valley residents became abolitionists and actively supported the Underground Railroad transporting fleeing slaves. Peekskill’s
African Methodist Zion Church and the Beecher estate outside the village were stations on that line. Harriet Tubman, the most famous “conductor” on the railroad, had valley support during several of her nineteen trips out of the South. Only illness prevented her personal participation in the Harper’s Ferry raid of 1859. When John Brown, the leader of that action, was executed, the city of Albany accorded him a hundred-gun salute. He is buried in North Elba, the Adirondack community he helped found. In April 1860 Tubman led a Troy crowd that prevented the court-ordered return of a fugitive slave to the South, a militant action that would have thrilled Brown.

In November 1860, Manhattan gave two-thirds of its vote to opponents of the Republican Party, but a torrent of Hudson Valley and upstate votes gave Abraham Lincoln a narrow statewide victory. In January 1861, New York City Mayor Fernando Wood suggested New York City’s secession, while in Albany a large public meeting resolved that “Civil War will not restore the Union, but will defeat forever its reconstruction.” When Lincoln stopped in Manhattan to solicit the support of its bankers in February, city businessmen were already lamenting declines in the ship, iron, carriage, apparel, and ice trades. Lincoln did his bit for the economy by purchasing a Tiffany necklace for his wife, but he left uncertain of the loyalty of the city. Many New Yorkers believed the new president was incompetent, yet when the Civil War began at Fort Sumter everything changed. During the greatest crisis in American history no state sacrificed more, purchased more bonds, or paid more taxes than New York. The legislature authorized 30,000 volunteers, but by the end of April 1861 more than 47,000 enlistments had been processed. During the war the state provided more than 484,000 men for the Union, a sixth of the army total, and 53,114 of them died to give the United States a “new birth of freedom.” Within this immense effort, the role of the Hudson Valley was preeminent.

The many textile factories of the valley produced miles of cloth that were transformed into blankets and uniforms by New York firms as different as A. T. Stewart and Brooks Brothers. Hudson River steamships were conscripted into the navy, while the leather industry produced saddles and riding gear for the cavalry. No industry contributed more to Union victory than valley iron foundries. A naturalized American named John Ericsson, while staying at the Poughkeepsie estate of industrialist John Winslow, worked out the
plans for an armored ship with a movable turret. Winslow was an ironmonger whose family had introduced the Bessemer process at the Burden works, and that innovation allowed the casting of iron plates large enough to cover the sides of such a vessel. The Burden works forged the plates and floated them downriver only weeks before a great fire destroyed much of Troy. At Greenpoint, in Brooklyn, Ericsson’s “saltbox on a raft,” the USS Monitor, was actually constructed, but the Burden Museum at Troy displays artifacts gathered from its wreckage. Pending completion of a final home for the Monitor at Newport News, remnants of the famed vessel are visible only in the Hudson Valley.

Most vitally, the Hudson Valley produced the artillery that won the war. The oldest armory in the United States was established at Watervliet in 1813, and the “Arsenal City” opposite Troy proved its value during the conflict as Napoleons, howitzers, naval weapons, and all types of ammunition poured out of its doors. Yet by the end of the war, the Cold Spring Foundry opposite West Point surpassed Watervliet in fame. It was there that Robert Parrott, using pig iron produced in Orange County (some from the same mines that had produced ore for the West Point chain), created rifled artillery barrels with great range and amazing accuracy. Parrott guns provided Union regiments with artillery supremacy, and Cold Spring produced more than 1,700 cannon and 3 million rounds of ammunition during the war. Although the famed works closed in 1911, a historical society in nearby Philipstown offers an extraordinary collection of memorabilia.

Valley support for Lincoln never wavered during the long struggle, and thousands viewed his funeral cortege as it came up the Hudson rail corridor in 1865. Celebration of Memorial Day and the influence of the Grand Army of the Republic were important in the valley. A profusion of Grand Army memorials in towns along the river mark losses sustained, but perhaps Yonkers can represent them all. During the Civil War the city sent 254 of its sons into battle, and seventeen of them died. But as manufacturing and commerce dominated the development of the city, wartime efforts were forgotten. On Memorial Day 1888, William Allen Butler, a local lawyer and poet, chastised city burghers for their neglect of the past. Butler’s appeal fostered a two-year fundraising campaign, featuring expositions, lectures, bake sales, and businessmen’s lunches, to place a memorial at the most important intersection.
in the city, in front of old Philipse Manor, now converted into the City Hall. Yonkers spared no expense, and bronze statues representing each service (army, navy, artillery, cavalry) were commissioned to surround a column of Vermont granite. When the Soldiers and Sailors Monument was dedicated on September 17, 1891, Grand Army veterans from the entire Hudson Valley stood at attention, the USMA band played, and twenty thousand spectators cheered. Sadly, when the Yonkers monument was restored and rededicated in 2002, only a handful of persons attended the ceremonies.

Completing a Century of Enterprise

In Gilded Age America, business enterprise continued to flourish along the Hudson River as the United States matured as an industrial power. Yonkers developed a diversified economy that included hats made by the Warner company, patent medicines, and sugar refining. Its major factory, founded by Elisha Graves Otis in 1854, built elevators. Otis made his reputation in Manhattan but set up shop in Yonkers, where his son Charles reorganized the company. Otis Brothers and Co. (1864) set the world standard for stock and passenger elevators, boasting that no lift problem was beyond its capability. When a tourist railway was installed to the top of Mount Beacon, Otis overcame the steep angle; the company’s funicular operated until 1971. When Yonkers was incorporated as a city in 1872, the Otis Company was its largest employer and remained a presence there for the next century. It employed workers of every ethnic background, and the famed comedian Sid Caesar developed and perfected his double-talk routines before those mixed audiences.

The second signature corporation in Yonkers, the Alexander Smith carpet and rug plant, arrived with the new city charter. Smith and his partners pioneered the use of the Axminster power loom, and their enormous factory buildings covered almost a mile of riverfront. The corporation remained the largest rug manufacturer in the tri-state area until it moved south in the 1950s. Large companies such as Otis and Smith made Yonkers extremely prosperous even as it retained its suburban charms. Those who remember the plot of Hello, Dolly know that many Manhattan merchants lived in Yonkers and, because of municipal wealth, it is not surprising that the first golf club in the United States was formed there in 1888. Twentieth-century Yonkers lost its
industrial edge as manufacturers moved away, but it remains the third-largest city in the state.

Across the Hudson, the town of Piermont nestles between the end of the Palisades Escarpment and the mountain called High Tor. Located where Sparkill Creek runs into the river, Piermont, the entry point into both Rockland County and New York’s interior, at mid-century became a railroad center. It was the eastern terminus of the Erie Railroad, which reached Dunkirk on Lake Erie in 1851. All Erie passengers to and from Manhattan had to board steamships for part of their trip. Despite its railway importance, Piermont remained isolated, and only in the 1860s did State Senator William Marcy Tweed win legislative approval funding for a road down the west side of the river. In time the terminus for the Erie was shifted to Pavonia, but the complex of machine and metal shops and the concentration of locomotive workers and painters brought prosperity to Piermont into the twentieth century.

The town of Peekskill (1866) offers an example of mixed industry that brought prosperity in the late century. After 1865 Peekskill won fame as the manufacturer of Crayolas, hats, and underwear. It flourished as a port and railroad stop, and as the place where seven foundries built cooking stoves. Although Peekskill fell victim to the changing economic tides of the twentieth century, more than half its most attractive housing dates from the Victorian Era. Crayolas left for Pennsylvania, the foundries closed, and large employers such as Fleischmann’s Yeast and Baker Underwear came and left. Today Peekskill brags of being an artists’ haven whose residents endure economic decline and debate whether their most prominent citizen is former Mayor (and later Governor) George Pataki or movie star Mel Gibson.

North of Peekskill on the Hudson is Poughkeepsie, the seat of Dutchess County since 1714 and a transit hub, which became the “Queen City” of the Hudson in the nineteenth century. Poughkeepsie welcomed railroad lines, integrating them with the road system it already commanded, and became quite prosperous. Matthew Vassar (1792–1868), an English immigrant who had become the town’s leading brewer, recognized that bringing the New York and Harlem north out of Peekskill to his town was essential to its growth. He and fellow merchants raised $3 million and hired John Jervis to extend the tracks up the east shore of the Hudson. When the line was finally extended up to the capital area, Poughkeepsie became one of five express stops on the line. The town
appreciated the value of innovation. Samuel B. Morse built his mansion there, and Poughkeepsie enjoyed telegraph connections even before Manhattan. Railroads going north and east stimulated its growth, and its merchants built their factories on bluffs that rose some two hundred feet above the Hudson.

Poughkeepsie developed a varied manufacturing sector in the decades after 1865. There were elevator and typewriter companies, knitwear and silk thread factories, and iron works that turned out both horseshoes and gun turrets. Adriance Platt & Co. built the Buckeye mowers and reapers coveted by every farmer in the valley, while dairy and farm machinery as well as refrigeration equipment also made substantial contributions to the local economy. But amid all the hardware, the most famous factory in Poughkeepsie was run by the sons of James Smith, the maker of "cough candy" powerful enough to thwart the cold winds that blew down the valley. William and Andrew Smith first worked in the family “home-quality” restaurant, but soon focused on producing "drops" that eased throats across the nation. Despite a host of imitators, shopkeepers insisted on the real thing, dispensing the distinctive Smith Brothers cough drops in glassine envelopes from jars on the store counter. The Smith Brothers (not really "Trade" and "Mark") introduced their first packaged product in 1872, and a grateful nation cheered when menthol, cough syrup, and wild cherry flavor became additional weapons in the unending fight against common colds. Although now part of a conglomerate, Smith Brothers products are still made in Poughkeepsie.

Vassar’s contributions to his adopted hometown did not stop when the railroad arrived. His goal was to use his fortune for public good, and he first attempted to build a memorial to Henry Hudson on Polly Pell Island in the river. When that scheme failed, he decided to fund a girl’s school to provide “useful, practical and sensible” learning. The Vassar Female College was established in 1861 and became Vassar College in 1867. It admitted men in 1974, but it has never wavered from its founder’s goal. With astronomer Maria Mitchell as one of the many stars of the faculty, Matthew Vassar’s school became the model for female colleges as the century progressed, and its prominence encouraged Poughkeepsie to host Ivy League regattas at the end of the century. In 1895 the first of these was held on the Long Reach above the city, and grandstands were erected on both sides of the rivers to hold the crowds that cheered a victory by Columbia University.
During the 1870s Poughkeepsie Mayor Harvey Eastman encouraged factory construction and proposed spanning the Hudson with the first railroad bridge south of Albany. Even many engineers believed the project was impossible, but the railroad bridge that opened on December 2, 1888, ranked as the longest in the world. Poughkeepsie became the key link between New England to the coal fields of Pennsylvania, but its success hastened the economic decline of Newburgh and Catskill across the Hudson. The Queen City remained a transit hub for decades, but its great bridge has been closed since a fire in 1974.

Farther to the north, Kingston enjoyed the prosperity fostered by the coal, concrete, and fishing enterprises centered near Rondout Creek and the D&H Canal. By 1872 population growth eliminated the borders between settlements and three area villages were merged into the city of Kingston. A Victorian city hall, magnificently situated on a high hill, dominated its skyline. It was carefully renovated in 2000. Believing that future growth demanded improved rail connections, Kingston investors purchased a failing railroad line and extended it north along Lake Champlain to Plattsburg and Montreal. By the time the D&H Canal closed in 1898, the Kingston railroad system named in its honor was the third-largest network in New York. The D&H headquarters building near the river in Albany is a well-preserved city landmark, now serving as the administrative center for the State University of New York.

Kingston’s future depended on adding manufacturing to use the new rails. New factories were soon producing cigars, clothing, and electric trolley cars for the light-transit lines that crisscrossed upstate counties and ran into the Midwest. River traffic and fishing employed many residents. Thomas Cornell, founder of the prominent Cornell Steamboat Company, made his first fortune by shipping cement to Manhattan, but by the time of his death in 1890 he was a principal in several steamship lines, the Rhinecliff Ferry, the First National Bank of Rondout, and the Ulster and Delaware Railroad. Kingston was a major landing site for river steamers, and the town was an early pioneer of tourism. The city administration built Kingston Point amusement park to accommodate daily visitors debarking from Manhattan vessels. Tourism was increasing on the Hudson—the city of Newburgh made Washington’s Revolutionary War headquarters the first historic site in New York in
1850—and Kingston worked with Albany to purchase the Senate Building and have it designated the second state historic site. Few valley communities have competed for the tourist trade as successfully as Kingston, whose many museums and old Stockade District continue to attract visitors.

Above Kingston smaller industrial sites dot the Hudson, but the major complex of industry grew in the Albany-Troy metropolitan area. Troy ranked as the fourth-richest urban center in the nation at the time of the Civil War, and its prosperity financed cultural amenities. Architect George Post constructed one of the finest concert spaces in the United States above the Troy Savings Bank in 1874, and Louis B. Tiffany built his studio in the city; his finest glasswork still glows in St. Paul’s Episcopal and St. Joseph’s Catholic churches and the public library. Troy also has the oldest continuously used synagogue in New York (1870) and some of the Hudson Valley’s most exceptional homes along Second Street. A rich city rebuilt after a wartime fire, Troy survived the St. Valentine’s Day flood of 1889 and remained an extremely busy port well into the new century. It continued to dominate the shirt business and, in an unpredictable offshoot of industrialization, held leadership in laundry machine production by 1900. Yet it never lost its undertone of bawdiness. Madame Faye, the most notorious courtesan of the riverfront, was so famous that she had a tugboat named in her honor. Modern Troy honors all aspects of its past, and present-day visitors to the city will discover no fewer than eight separate historic districts.

Finally there was Albany, both the administrative center of the state and a capitalist stronghold. In 1830 Henry Christman still believed the city was the “seat of power of a landed aristocracy, the center of an island of semi-feudalism,” but modern business was already displacing the old regime. Its antebellum industries included tanneries, distilleries, tobacco manufacturing, furriers, and brickmakers, while iron fabricators, lumber companies, printers, and apparel factories were increasing in number; furniture and shoemaking were soon added to the capital mixture. Francis Parkman noted the bustle of its docks, the vigor of its people, and “the most ancient and fish-like smell which saluted our shrinking nostrils”; commercial fishermen provided “Albany beef” to the state while Albany meat packers were the largest in the valley. Antebellum Albany and Troy combined to produce fully 10 percent of all American beer, and from 1845 to 1917 the Quinn and Nolan Ale Co. was
consistently one of Albany's largest employers. But shipbuilding for canal and river traders remained the single greatest industry.

Albany was a transportation hub, the center of the state turnpike system, the transfer point for traffic from the Erie and Champlain canals, and the focal point of railway networks that covered upstate New York after the Civil War. It was a railroad town, and the Union Station constructed near the Hudson was one of the most impressive sights of the valley. Troy built the first rail bridge across the Hudson, but when the Hudson River Railroad arrived at Greenbush in 1851, Albany seized the traffic. The city failed at its first attempts at bridge building, in part because of Trojan obstructionists, but in 1866 freight could cross the Hudson at Albany. The capital prospered as three additional bridges were built by 1882.

During the 1840s an effort to relocate New York's capital to the geographic center of the state failed before the power of an Albany/Manhattan alliance. But Albany politicians knew that no specific law proclaimed their city the Empire State's permanent capital, and they were determined to guarantee its place as the permanent government center. In 1863 construction of a new capitol building was authorized on lots donated by banker John Pruym. Robert Fuller won the design competition, and Governor Reuben Fenton broke ground for the building in December 1867. But ceremonies setting the cornerstone were postponed for three and a half years, and the construction of the capitol became one of the great sagas of Hudson Valley lore. Impressively situated on a hill some 150 feet above the river, the State Capitol Building is certainly unique. It took as long to build as the Great Pyramid of Giza and cost twice as much as the national capitol in Washington. The capitol incorporates the visions of three architects in a “Battle of Styles” (Italian Renaissance, Romanesque, and French Renaissance). It is a cacophony of noisy turrets and ridges, gables and varied granite; its Great Staircase alone cost a million dollars. Governor Lucius Robinson labeled the entire project a “public calamity” and refused to set foot in its Executive Chamber. The capital’s famous outdoor Grand Staircase facing State Street was not finished until 1897 and the complex was not completed until 1899, just in time for the gubernatorial inauguration of Theodore Roosevelt.

In 1900 Greater New York City had a population of over 3,000,000, while Albany, the largest city of the Hudson Valley, held a mere 94,151. Yet
the capital boasted of its antiquity and basked in the confidence that the Schuyler (1762) and Ten Broeck (1798) mansions outpaced nouveau riche Manhattan counterparts. Albanians were disturbed when Stephen Van Rensselaer’s manor house, built in 1765 and torn down in 1893, was gutted, but its architectural features quickly became part of the most elegant townhouse in the city. William Van Rensselaer, the current “prince” of the storied clan, built a new mansion opposite Washington Square in 1895 and imprinted the family crest onto its facade. Manhattan might have more people and more money, but Albany was the capital city, had greater class and represented a wider historic area. It held the oldest state museum in the United States and boasted a Catholic cathedral that replicated Cologne’s masterpiece and an Episcopal cathedral that was the fifth-largest in America. Take that, Manhattan! In terms of lifestyle and distinction, Albany and the Hudson Valley were more than content.

**Seeking Utopia in the Hudson Valley**

From the first Dutch settlement to the present day, the lovely Hudson Valley has always been a place where dreams might become reality. The Dutch West India Company envisioned a commercial empire; patroons and manor lords built feudal domains; the Revolutionary generation fought to achieve a world where ideals of equality and personal liberty could become reality. Entrepreneurs and merchants sought wealth amid the exciting tumult of an industrializing economy. It is not surprising, therefore, to discover that the Hudson Valley drew more than its fair share of utopian settlements in the nineteenth century. Many practical-minded moderns dismiss those who believe in communal egalitarianism as eccentric, if not outright foolhardy, but there was a plethora of such experimentation in what was a less cynical age. Attempts at building a perfect society flourished in the now-lost optimism of the peaceful Hudson Valley. With one exception, the attempts failed.

The most famous and successful group that sought Utopia along the river comprised the followers of Mother Ann Lee (1736–84), the sect called the Shakers. It was in Britain in 1758 that Lee joined an extremist Quaker sect called the Tremblers. She later led a small group of followers to settle seven miles north of Albany, and taught them to “put your hands to work and
your hearts to God.” Near Watervliet, the small group lived in celibacy and cooperation as they cleared the land, and there Lee won additional converts. Lee’s successor, “Father” James Whittaker, authorized a second Shaker community at New Lebanon in January 1786, and it served as the “Center of Union” for the Shaker movement until its demise in 1947. Absolute obedience to authority and constant labor established a Shaker “gospel order” that forbade play, pets, and sex. Charles Dickens visited New Lebanon and perceived a “silent commonwealth” whose rigid rules “strip life of its healthful graces, rob youth of innocent pleasures . . . and make existence but a narrow path toward the grave.” Yet in the 1870s Charles Nordhoff was impressed by the community’s health and its “tricks of housekeeping.” But Mother Lee’s prohibition on procreation doomed the community, and the last Shaker died in 1961. The Shakers were the most durable of all Hudson Utopias, and the history of their community is kept alive at an extraordinary museum located in Old Chatham, a site that holds the finest collection of their artifacts, and by the Shaker Historical Society of Albany.

A different vision of the Promised Land was presented by Jemima Wilkinson (1752–1819), a prominent Rhode Islander deeply influenced by the preaching of George Whitefield and Mother Lee. In 1775 she became convinced that a prophetic spirit had assumed control of her body and that she had been returned to life as the “Public and Universal Friend.” Winning an immediate following, the Friend and her followers first settled near New Paltz under the Shawangunk Mountains, before they moved farther west.

Equally short-lived were two experimental villages adopting the societal prescriptions of Robert Owen (1771–1858), the utopian visionary who created a successful industrial community in Scotland. Owen had reluctantly concluded that only in the New World could his dream of fully functioning socialist communities become reality. He traveled to the United States in 1824, spoke before Congress, and met President Monroe. Owen’s famed attempt to build a working cooperative society in New Harmony, Indiana, marked the high point of his effort to create Utopia, but in 1826 his Manhattan supporters, led by George Houston and Abner Kneeland, founded the Franklin Community on a 130-acre farm west of Haverstraw Bay. A constitution was adopted and a Church of Reason established, and the Rev. Robert Jennings arrived from New Harmony to direct the effort. A second community was created at
Forestville on a 325-acre site near Coxsackie. But both communities were populated by Manhattan freethinkers who knew nothing about farming, and by the end of 1827 a combination of unremitting work, bad weather, and indecisive leaders doomed the effort. Robert Dale Owen (1801–77), later a Manhattan editor and politician who lived out his days in an estate on Lake George, rarely spoke of his father’s forlorn Hudson communities.

Perhaps the strangest attempt to build an Eden along the river was that of Robert Matthews, a failed shopkeeper from Sandy Hill on the upper Hudson who transformed himself into the Jewish Prophet Matthias, the embodiment of the “Spirit of Truth.” His passion attracted a few zealous believers, and in the summer of 1833 he moved his converts to the Heartt Place mansion in Sing Sing village. The estate was renamed Mount Zion, and Matthias ruled his extended family as a biblical father. By 1834, reports of strange sexual couplings at Mount Zion led to local police intervention. Robert Matthews was forced to spend a few months in Bellevue Hospital, after which he migrated west and vanished from history.

One woman involved in Matthias’s community, though not part of its sexual athletics, was a servant named Isabel Van Wagener, who had grown up a slave in Ulster County. The closing of Mount Zion left her longing for a cause, and Isabelle enlisted in the most notorious of all the utopian dreams spawned along the Hudson. William Miller (1782–1849) knew from his reading of the Bible that the Second Coming of Jesus was imminent, and his pamphlets and lectures convinced thousands of potential believers, including Isabelle. In June 1843 Isabel changed her name to Sojourner Truth and experienced the “great disappointment” as Millerites gathered near the falls of the Hudson to await the advent of the Redeemer. She went on to serve abolitionism nobly. Despite crushing disappointments in 1843 and 1844, the Millerite faith endures in the Advent Christian Church and Seventh Day Adventists.

**Personal Edens**

The Hudson is often called “America’s Rhine,” a phrase indicating both its centrality and its attractiveness. Both rivers lead the way into a continent and can justly boast of the castles, landed estates, and vineyards that line their shores. The Rhine is more than twice as long as the Hudson and has its source
in significantly higher mountains, but residents along both great rivers attempted to hold the outer world at a distance by constructing private domains. From the patroons to the CEOs of the twentieth century, personal Edens have dotted the banks of the Hudson, just as the dukes and barons of earlier times appropriated parts of the Rhine. The modern river still lures wealth as powerfully as it did in the age of Kiliaen Van Rensselaer.

During the seventeenth century, only the Van Rensselaer grant on the east side of the Hudson was effectively developed. The manor house on that estate, the site where “Yankee Doodle” was written, was in reality not very large and was overshadowed by the family’s Albany mansion. Mansion construction on the upper Hudson is more properly identified with the dynasty established by Robert Livingston, the first Lord of the Manor, whose heirs would control over a third of Columbia County. The riverside mansions of the Sixteen Mile Historic Area along the river that so intrigue modern tourists are primarily located on Livingston land. In 1742, Judge Robert R. Livingston (1718–75) married Margaret Beekman, a union that produced ten children and constant hubbub at the country estate they called Clermont (Clear Mountain). The judge’s oldest son, also a Robert, inherited his original thirteen-thousand-acre grant, augmented by Margaret’s dowry, which was the heart of Livingston Manor at the time of the Revolution. Livingston was a signer of the Declaration of Independence and chancellor of New York from 1777 to 1801, and it is natural that his home made a tempting target for John Vaughan’s loyalist raiders in October 1777. They burnt the original Clermont to the ground. The task of rebuilding was undertaken by Margaret, who built a new Clermont on the foundations of the old manor house. The Georgian mansion she erected from 1779 to 1782 was substantially different from her original home and has been much enlarged, but it has served as the ancestral home for seven subsequent generations of Livingstons. It survives today, filled with family artifacts and objects present when the North River steamboat stopped at the estate in 1807. Modern visitors can enter Robert Livingston’s office in the north wing and see the table where the lord received tenants paying rent.

Only a few miles south of Clermont, at Annandale-on-Hudson, a twenty-three room rival estate was constructed from 1803 to 1805. General Richard Montgomery failed in his heroic attempt to capture Canada, but a
New York county had been named in his honor, and his widow, Janet Livingston Montgomery, built a home that is today the heart of a 434-acre riverside estate. Later remodeled by famed valley architect Andrew Jackson Davis, who added gardens and orchards, Montgomery Place (along with Clermont) displays the style and power of the Livingston dynasty. Preserved as a National Historic Landmark and meticulously restored by Historic Hudson Valley, the estate allows visitors to recapture a lost era.

The many siblings of Chancellor Robert Livingston could not be satisfied with visiting their illustrious brother, and constructed their own sanctuaries on personally selected sites across the manor. Between 1750 and 1900 the clan built almost forty family mansions close to Clermont, an ongoing construction process lovingly documented by architectural historians. Although time and development have doomed many of these, a good number survived for inclusion in the Hudson River National Landmark District created by Congress in 1991. Besides Clermont itself, the oldest survivor is Walter Livingston’s Georgian Teviotdale, built in 1774 with stone from Livingston quarries and iron forged at their Ancram works; its most famous residents were Robert Fulton and his bride, Harriet Livingston. Henry Gilbert Livingston built the Callendar House in 1794. It has been extensively remodeled and long ago changed hands, but John Livingston’s Oak Hill, constructed in 1795, remains in possession of the family; Henry H. Livingston, a financial analyst, was among its recent tenants. Catharine Livingston married the Methodist leader Freeborn Garretson, and together they built Wildercliff (1799) at the southern end of the family property opposite Esopus Creek and lighthouse.

It was family that drew the Livingstons to the Hudson Valley, but it was the incomparably lovely sights of the river that kept them resident. Early in the nineteenth century, General John Armstrong brought his wife Alida Livingston to La Bergerie (1811) in Red Hook, and through years of national service he never changed his residence. After his death the estate was renamed Rokeby and was owned by Livingstons, Beekmans, and Astors. William B. Astor, whose socialite wife was “the” Mrs. Astor, hired Stanford White in 1895 to add a Gothic library done in octagonal shape. Rokeby remains one of the most impressive riverside mansions. Nearby are Richmond Hill (Walter Tryon and Elizabeth Livingston, 1808), Grasmere (Peter R. Livingston, 1824),
the Forth House (Carroll Livingston, 1833), Southwood (Levinus Clarkson and Mary Livingston, 1842), Holcroft (Edward P. Livingston, 1881), and Chiddingston (Thomas S. Clarkson, 1895). In 1868, Robert E. Livingston designed the church for St. Paul’s and Trinity Parish, in whose graveyard numerous members of the family, including the chancellor, rest.

It is something of a paradox that Benson Lossing, the first great historian of America’s Rhine in 1866, either totally missed or willfully ignored the presence of such landed dynasties along the upper Hudson. His volume on the Hudson proudly notes that the river “presents no gray and crumbling monuments . . . no fine old castles . . . no splendid abbey or cathedrals. . . . Nor can it boast of mansions and ancestral homes wherein a line of heroes have been born, or illustrious families have lived and died, generation after generation.” While it is true that many of the most luxurious estates were constructed later, during the Gilded Age, the Livingston presence in Columbia mocks his words. While all deference ought to be accorded Lossing, an identical conclusion applies to the lower reaches of the Hudson.

Staats Dyckman (1755–1806), a Dutch aristocrat who loyally served the Crown during the Revolution, returned to the United States after the Constitution was approved. He married, won success, and planned a family dream house along the Hudson at Montrose in Westchester County. Dyckman died before the structure was completed, so no one knows the architectural origins of Boscobel, but in 1808 his wife and son moved into the beautiful mansion he commissioned. The Dyckman family remained at Boscobel for eighty years, filling their home with Duncan Phyfe furniture, fine silver service, and a Benjamin West painting. Boscobel became a model of elegance, a home whose owners made their money elsewhere but who spent it pursuing the good life in the Hudson Valley. The pattern was to be a recurring one. When the famous estate declined precipitously by the 1950s, a wrecker/developer purchased the site for $35, intending to raze the structure. Preservationists organized by Benjamin West Frasier obtained financing from Lila Wallace of the Reader’s Digest and transferred the entire mansion to a new hillside location. The Federal-style house traveled fifteen miles to its present outlook opposite West Point, and after a period of restoration, it was opened to the public in 1961. Fully restored with original furnishings and now boasting landscaped formal gardens, Boscobel thrills
thousands of visitors with walking tours, concerts, Shakespeare plays, and Christmas candlelight fetes. Like the Livingston homes farther north, it embodies the spirit of a bygone age.

Contemporary New Yorkers believe the riverside towns of Westchester County are characterized by rundown housing and abandoned factories, yet in the early decades of the nineteenth century Westchester represented the desirable suburbs. Lovely sites along the flowing Hudson and an already existing tradition of gentility drew successful businessmen and prominent artists to Westchester. A northern orientation was part of the city mentality since the colonial era when the Van der Donck, Philipse, and Van Cortlandt families established restful Edens along the river. In the 1800s, one of the first luminaries to escape to Westchester was William Paulding Jr. (1770–1854), the former New York mayor who had presided over the ceremonies formally opening the Erie Canal (1825). Seeking the pleasures of retirement, Paulding purchased Westchester farmland in 1836 and hired Alexander Jackson Davis (1803–92) to create a sylvan retreat. Davis, who would also redesign Montgomery Place during this decade, willingly accepted the job. The diarist Philip Hone, also a former mayor, scorned the isolated estate as “Paulding’s Folly,” but the initiative inspired others to break away from Manhattan.

Manhattan-born Davis was the most important architect working in the Hudson Valley during the nineteenth century. When approached by Paulding he was about to publish Rural Residences, a volume that aimed to free American architecture from European restrictions of style. Davis, who advocated an emphasis on the connections between a building and its site, is given primary credit for creating the “American Bracketed” style, which would soon dominate architecture in the valley. Paulding allowed the young architect freedom to experiment with both techniques and material. The Knoll (1842), a home suitable to a cliffside setting, was completed using the Gothic Revival style that would soon be greatly imitated. Philip Paulding continued to use the home after his father died, but in 1864 he sold the property to the noted inventor George Merritt (1807–73). Fortunately, Davis was still available to make renovations which transformed the existing building into a castle. William Pierson in American Buildings and Their Architecture (1866) declared that Davis had made Lyndhurst “the most profoundly intelligent and provocative house to be built . . . since Thomas Jefferson’s Mon-
ticello.” Merritt, enthralled by the renovation and by the natural setting, was inspired by the linden trees stretching down to the Hudson to make the name change that endures to this day. Lyndhurst served as the Merritt family home until 1880, when they moved farther up the Hudson and built Leacock in Dutchess County.

The new owner of Lyndhurst and its sixty-seven-acre park was Jay Gould (1836–92), the famed financier who reveled in his reputation as the meanest man in America. Ruthless though he was in business, Gould was a dedicated family man who delighted in pleasing his six children; his family used the estate as their summer home while Gould commuted to Manhattan by yacht. He loved Lyndhurst and spent a fortune on new greenhouses while landscape designer Ferdinand Mangold created magnificent “surprise” views of the nearby river. Gould’s daughter Helen considered Lyndhurst her favorite residence, adding a swimming pool and a bowling alley. Helen was also a good neighbor who allowed the town sewing circle to meet in her home and opened her rose gardens to local horticulturists. Her sister Anna, the Dutchess de Talleyrand, volunteered Lyndhurst for the use of recuperating veterans of the Second World War and later arranged its transfer to the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Located within sight of the Tappan Zee Bridge, the estate that enthralled New Yorkers as different as Paulding, Merritt, and Gould now beguiles a much wider public.

Even more than businessmen, writers and artists sought the quiet and serenity of the Hudson Valley. Modern tabloids and celebrity shows in our time document the relocations of media stars to havens along the river, but the inclination to enter nature and revitalize a muse has been evident since the 1830s. Washington Irving (1783–1859) first won literary attention in 1808 with Salmagundi, a compilation of poetry and essays he published with his friend James Kirke Paulding. But the comic History of New York (1809), a whimsical look at Dutch Manhattan by “Dietrich Knickerbocker,” won Irving fame. In the Sketch Book a decade later, Irving (writing in the guise of Geoffrey Crayon), gained immortality as the creator of Rip van Winkle, Ichabod Crane, and the Headless Horseman. Travelers along the Hudson, whether on sloop or steamship, knew that “not a mountain reared its head unconnected with some marvelous story” and it was Irving’s genius to recapture those folk tales; his descriptions of the Hudson “fairy mountains”
charmed a nation. After a stint in the foreign service, Irving returned home to be hailed as America’s greatest writer. He no longer sought fame; the “plaintive cry of the whip-poor-will” and the “sudden leap and the heavy splash of the sturgeon” called him back to the river. In 1835 the nation’s most beloved author decided to quit Colonnade Row in Manhattan and purchase a Dutch stone cottage in Westchester County.

Tarrytown was supposedly named by the willingness of its men to linger in local taverns, a neighborly characteristic that attracted Irving. Located “in the bosom of one of those spacious coves which indent the eastern shore at that broad expanse of the river denominated the Tappan Zee,” Tarrytown seemed caught in a time warp suitable to Rip van Winkle himself. Irving set about converting his hideaway home into a “snuggery,” adding a Dutch roof and a Spanish tower to stone walls. Sunnyside was now “made up of gable ends and as full of angles and corners as an old cocked hat,” a mélange of styles that delighted the author and where he lived happily until his death. Irving willingly shared his “dear, bright little house” with the world’s literary and political elite (Thackeray, Louis Napoleon) and entertained the many other visitors who made pilgrimages up the Hudson. He was thrilled when a nearby river town renamed itself Irvington in his honor (1854) and participated in its business and community affairs. A founder and board member of the People’s Westchester Savings Bank, the author resented the railroad, which reduced access to his beloved Hudson less than a decade after he moved north. Yet his move to rural climes initiated a flight from the city he christened “Gotham.” Wealthy Manhattanites seized anchorages on the Hudson, claimed a section of the landscape, and built homes on a scale Irving rejected. But Sunnyside always remained the home of a working author who continued to write and entertain; he was buried at the Old Dutch Church in the town he had come to love and was soon joined in the graveyard by Americans such as Andrew Carnegie, Whitelaw Reid, and William Rockefeller. Almost 150 years after Irving’s death, no American writer is more identified with the Hudson River. In a contemporary tribute, North Tarrytown changed its name to Sleepy Hollow in 1996.

A second major artistic figure who settled along the Hudson was Samuel F. B. Morse (1791–1872), America’s own Leonardo da Vinci. Morse founded the National Academy of Design and served as its president for
twenty years, but it was the telegraph, “the invention of the century,” that secured his place in the American pantheon. In 1847 Morse, recently defeated in an effort to become Manhattan’s mayor, purchased a riverside estate south of Poughkeepsie that originally served as the landing site for Henry Livingston’s farm. Working in tandem with A. J. Davis, Morse rebuilt the existing house into a mansion named Locust Grove, a site that later became the first National Historic Landmark in Dutchess County. Perched within the four-story Tuscan tower that dominates the structure, Morse painted, watched his tenant farmers, and marked the advance of the east shore railroad. Unlike Irving, he reveled in progress, perhaps because his hilltop site was less affected by the noisy passage of the steam locomotives that brought great prosperity to Poughkeepsie in the 1850s.

The list of notables who chose to live along the Hudson is impressive. Riverside summer homes began to appear everywhere from the northern end of Manhattan all the way to Columbia County. The Morris family built Wave Hill in 1893 in what later became the Bronx. Literary friends who emulated Irving’s example included Nathaniel Parker Willis, who built Idlewild near Murderer’s Creek south of Newburgh. Willis wrote of the beauty of the Hudson Valley in articles for the Home Journal gathered and published as Out of Doors at Idlewild; or the Shaping of a Home on the Banks of the Hudson (1855). Willis’s salon on the west bank of the river rivaled Irving’s at Sunnyside, and he led the campaign that changed the name of Butter Hill to Storm King Mountain. A frequent visitor at both villas was James Kirke Paulding (1778–1860), whose popular novels of the Dutch era helped to salvage its place in history. Paulding’s estate, called Placentia, ultimately became part of the College of Mount St. Vincent. Businessmen from Manhattan quickly followed the intelligentsia north. Robert Pell erected Cliffwood amid the 25,000 fruit trees of his model orchards; Cyrus Field was an early settler of the new town of Irvington; and shipping magnate George Howard hired Richard M. Hunt to built Tioranda (1859) in Beacon. The Gothic Revival mansion built by actor Edwin Forrest, called Fonthill, echoed the melodramas in which Forrest starred. A. J. Downing designed a country estate for the horticulturist Henry W. Sargent in Beacon called Wodenethe. In Westchester, the vast Waring mansion called Graystone (1864) completed the first cycle of construction, but in time luminaries such as Peter Cooper, Henry
Ward Beecher, and Horace Greeley also joined the exodus north; Chauncey Depew, Hamilton Fish, and Thomas Fortune Ryan came in the 1870s. Literally dozens of homes were constructed as the Hudson Valley became the sanctuary of the well-to-do.

Society followed the elite’s migration north. John Jacob Astor, reportedly the richest man in America, already had a “country” home on the west bank of the Hudson, near the Elysian Fields where organized baseball would be born. His salon drew literary figures as prominent as Irving and William C. Bryant and minor writers such as Fitz-Greene Halleck, but the estate was, after all, in Hoboken. Better society was found farther upriver, and by the 1840s the Astors moved north to join the Livingstons in the Rhinecliff area. Colonel J. J. Astor held court at his Ferncliff estate, William Astor took possession of Rokeby from the Livingstons, and William’s sister Mary lived nearby. Ferncliff became the family gathering place, and Vincent Astor lived there well into the twentieth century; it ultimately was converted into a convent for the Carmelite order. One of the truly great river mansions belonged to Mrs. Elizabeth Schermerhorn Jones, an Astor relation whose Wyndcliff estate (1853) was so lavish that it inspired the phrase “keeping up with the Joneses.” In the late nineteenth century, Elizabeth ruled society in the upper Hudson as ruthlessly as her cousin, Mrs. William Astor, controlled Manhattan. Edith Wharton, a niece who spent many months there, found Wyndcliff “intolerable,” and mocked her aunt’s excesses in her famed novel *The Age of Innocence*.

**Saratoga Springs**

After the 1830s, a sizable element of Manhattan’s elite pursued part of its elegant lifestyle outside the city. Hudson Valley suburbanization was often joined with ostentation. In the years before the Civil War, having a retreat “up the river” became increasingly common, and the shores of the river took on a velvet edge. What was lacking was a common meeting ground, and the development of Saratoga Springs gave the Hudson Valley its “must see” destination. Located on a lake just off the upper Hudson, Saratoga’s land has been continuously occupied since 7000 BC, making it one of the world’s most ancient human settlements. The Mohawk Indians who long held the area believed in the healing power of local mineral springs. In 1765 William
Johnson, wounded at the Battle of Lake George, came to the springs to recuperate and returned years later to treat his arthritis. George Washington considered buying the entire springs area as an investment before victory diverted his attention toward Mount Vernon. Afterward, except for the activities of loggers, the area reverted to sleepy isolation.

Saratoga Springs was created by lumberman Gideon Putnam, who began to lay out a full town site in 1802, finishing it by 1805. With a clientele of rough loggers, the Springs won a reputation for hard drinking and inspired Dr. Billy Clark to organize America’s first temperance society there in 1808. Clark hoped to reform the lumberjacks who worked the Adirondacks forests, but he failed; in its heyday Saratoga boasted more bars per capita than Manhattan. To attract visitors, Putnam added amenities such as billiards, bowling, and fishing to its “waters”; dancing at his Union Hall hotel joined the roster of pastimes in 1816, and weekly balls became commonplace during the 1820s. It was then that Dr. John Clark began to bottle mineral water taken from Saratoga Springs, marketing it first in Manhattan and then nationally. Saratoga’s sudden cachet led city merchants to send their families north by river steamer and Albany stagecoach. When the Schenectady and Saratoga Railroad was completed in 1832, Saratoga became accessible to visitors from everywhere. The attraction increased when President Martin Van Buren located his Summer White House there. The “Little Magician” who organized New York’s first political machine, the “Albany Regency,” Van Buren is best remembered today for the “O.K.” (Old Kinderhook) that he used to approve documents. In retirement Van Buren purchased a mansion he named Lindenwald and made it one of the most famous places along the Hudson. But his presence clearly made Saratoga a summer destination, and before the end of his uninspired presidency the small village near the Hudson was receiving twelve thousand tourists annually. Most of them sipped the “waters” at John Clark’s entertainment pavilion in Congress Park, and their patronage soon made him the richest man in town. By 1839 Manhattan aristocrat Philip Hone confided to his Diary that “all the world is here.”

The introduction of gambling (1835) and horse racing (1847) made Saratoga Springs attractive to southern planters who “summered” there to escape Dixie’s heat. Men compared fast trotters and bet every race at Horse Haven track, while women enjoyed an extensive summertime program of circuses, magic-lantern shows, and concerts. In 1853, George Crum responded
to the demands of Cornelius Vanderbilt and created a thin potato treat called a “Saratoga chip.” By 1860 the spa received fifty thousand visitors annually and was the finest resort in America, an “oasis of repose in the desert of American hurry.” Not even the tragedy of Civil War dimmed its luster. Although southern belles and their beaus were gone, they were replaced by wealthy war contractors, members of the “petroleum aristocracy,” and several battalions of dubious “actresses.” In 1864 a thoroughbred racetrack operated by William Travers, John Hunter, and Leonard Jerome was opened. The first Travers Stakes was held that August at what is still the finest track in the nation; the Society for the Improvement of the Breed has always considered the Saratoga Meeting as the key to the racing season. Other attractions for the visiting elite included polo, the annual Ivy League regatta on Saratoga Lake (1874–98), balloon ascensions by Madame Carlotta, and afternoon teas at magnificent hotels. The pampered nouveau riche came to town with their “Saratoga Trunks,” stayed at the United States Hotel or the Grand Union, and shopped under covered piazzas. As many novels attest, the hotels were an international marriage marketplace for American debutantes. At the Grand Union in June 1877, New York banker Joseph Seligman and his family were denied rooms, a well-publicized case of anti-Semitism.

During the 1890s, under the stewardship of Richard Canfield, Saratoga became even more opulent. Canfield hired a French chef for his casino, paid him $5,000 for two months, and considered the investment a good one. Women were encouraged to dine in his restaurant but barred from the greater excitements of roulette and faro. In time the saga of Saratoga included almost mythical stories about wagers by “Bet-A-Million” Gates and the excesses of “Diamond Jim” Brady, who once gambled in a suit that featured 2,548 gems. Lillian Russell reigned as the uncrowned “Queen of Saratoga,” and her court of “Farm Flirts” broke many a heart and emptied many a wallet. And in keeping with the Spa’s respect for horseflesh, the Saratoga Polo Club was organized in 1898 to provide yet another outlet for high-spirited competitors. Canfield abandoned Saratoga in 1907, and his casino is now a museum sitting amid Daniel French sculptures in Clark’s Congress Park. But even after he left, reporter John Reed declared Saratoga Springs the focus of “society, sport and sin” above Manhattan.

Twentieth-first-century Saratoga remains a pleasant place to visit, even though it lacks a casino, a regatta, and a queen. Walking tours reveal its truly
extraordinary architectural history, even though the United States Hotel (1946) and the Grand Union (1953) have been razed. Restorations of the Saratoga Arms (1870), the Saratoga Bottling Plant (1903), and the casino have reclaimed bits of a past that still draws visitors. Racing remains supreme in Saratoga, and the heritage of William Travers and Leonard Jerome suffuses America’s oldest thoroughbred track. The Fasig-Tipton annual horse auction is world famous; few owners are unaware that Man o’ War was purchased there for only $5,000. Saratoga’s annual six-week race meet has been supplemented by a cultural extravaganza featuring the New York City Ballet and the Philadelphia Orchestra, along with jazz and chamber music festivals. Whether for the waters, the horses, or the cultural rush, summer at Saratoga remains a strong Hudson Valley institution.

Valley Architecture and Art

Andrew Jackson Downing (1815–52) led the emergence of the Hudson Valley as a cultural entity. His brief and meteoric career fostered architectural and artistic forces that affected the area for the next century. A native of Newburgh, Downing was the protégé of Baron de Liderer, the Austrian consul-general in Manhattan and husband to a Fishkill heiress, and so secured entry into Hudson Valley society. His contributions to valley agriculture have been noted, but his true importance was in creating a Hudson sensibility. His first architectural commissions were organizing gardens around mansions of the valley, work that yielded *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening Adapted to North America* (1841). Downing enhanced that success by publishing *Cottage Residences* (1842), a primer on building country homes free of city turmoil. The Hudson River setting demanded houses using Tuscan, Tyrolean, or Gothic styles, for classical forms of architecture were out of place there. Downing, a close friend and advocate of the work of A. J. Davis, recruited the young British landscape architect Calvert Vaux to join his practice. Together the three men created an architectural and landscape heritage that still endures.

Downing’s *Architecture of Country Houses* (1850) affected Hudson Valley life for the next century and influenced generations of architects. If builders and designers intended to create a fine valley society, they must move away from Dutch and English simplicities and create homes that ex-
erted a civilizing force. Wealth was flowing into the valley, and the young theorist rejoiced in a clientele that could afford homes that would complement the beauty of the landscape. In truth, Downing was a bit of a snob and used his writings to appeal to rich patrons. His theory of architecture divided homes into cottages, farmhouses, or villas dependent on the number of servants each demanded; villas were suitable only for those “whose aspirations never leave them at rest.” But every home—small Tuscan, forbidding Gothic, or large Georgian—had to use local material and blend into the landscape even as its cut trim, turrets, stained glass, and interior elegance displayed the client’s affluence. The Hudson River Bracketed style advocated by both Downing and Davis insisted that site selection, choice of material, and planned vistas were integral elements in building a home.

Downing taught Americans that architecture had to respect the landscape. He was one of the first public figures to advocate a Central Park for Manhattan. His former partner, Calvert Vaux, working in collaboration with Frederick Law Olmstead, ultimately built the park, which successfully incorporated the ideas of Landscape Gardening. But Downing himself had no part in the plan, for his life tragically ended in the river he loved. The young architect was a passenger aboard the steamship Henry Clay when it engaged its rival the Armenia in an epic race down the Hudson on July 28, 1852. After the race was over and victory gained, the Clay inexplicably caught fire and was wrecked off Yonkers. Downing survived the initial crash but drowned attempting to save other passengers. Famed botanist Asa Gray lamented a “national loss,” since Downing uniquely combined both the practical builder and the theorist. But his theories inspired valley building, and thirty-five years later the city of Newburgh dedicated a riverside park in his memory.

Downing’s lasting legacy was not the few buildings he managed to finish but rather his respect for the Hudson Valley landscape. Appreciating the wonders of nature seems easy for modern travelers in the Hudson Valley, who park at a convenient overlook and gaze out over noble panoramas. Yet in the early decades of the nineteenth century such introspection was rare. Implausibly, the Hudson River Valley came to attract America’s elite because of the power of art. It was the output of the Hudson River painters, the first great school of native American artists, that made the valley come alive in the national mind. In a world that was changing from agriculture to industry, the Hudson River school
painted vistas of the valley that forcefully reminded Americans of their relationship with nature and provided the new nation with self-awareness and pride.

 Until the emergence of the Hudson River school, American art existed in subservience to European forms. Samuel F. B. Morse, president of the National Academy of Art and Design, in fact lamented the lack of true American artists and demanded that “Our soil must warm into life the seeds of native talent.” His request was suddenly fulfilled in the work of Thomas Cole (1801–48), an English-born designer of textile patterns who emigrated to the United States in 1818. Cole worked as an engraver in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh before moving to Manhattan, where his imagination was captured by reports of Hudson Valley mountains. In 1825, Cole traveled north, seeking the union with nature that constituted the “necessary condition of a perfect artist.” He displayed the few oil landscapes that resulted from his trip in the front window of a friend’s frame shop. Showing greater detail than most previous art, dark and woody in feeling, they were sold immediately.

 The impressed pedestrians who purchased Cole’s paintings for $25 were John Trumbull, Asher Durand, and William Dunlap. Trumbull, whose earlier efforts at depicting nature had failed to move the public, lamented that “this youth has done what I have all my life attempted in vain.” He recognized Cole’s work as essentially different and became a forceful advocate for the young artist. Durand, already a successful engraver, was inspired by Cole to turn his talents to painting. Dunlap, a theater person more than a painter, sold his purchase at a large markup to former Mayor Philip Hone. All recognized that Cole was “more than a leaf-painter”; indeed he was the first artist whose work conveyed the “natural magnificence” of the Hudson. In 1826, Cole’s View of the Schoharie emphasized the wildness of the American scene, and his paintings proved that the Hudson Valley was the “soul of all scenery.” Beauty and drama were inherent in his every vista of the Catskills, and Cole taught artists to have reverence for the scenes nature had presented. By 1835, Knickerbocker magazine was hailing Cole as “the best landscape painter in the world,” and Hone was happily seeing his purchases appreciate.

 In 1832, Cole moved to Catskill on the west bank of the Hudson; his house there, Cedar Grove, is a designated National Landmark. It is still possible to stand at its entrance and see the mountains that inspired his revolutionary art. Cole taught Americans that “the Hudson, for natural magnificence, is
unsurpassed.” The river may have been junior to the Rhine, but Europeans had nothing comparable to America’s forests or the might of Niagara. Yet even in 1835 Cole feared the loss of the national heritage as commerce flowed down the Hudson and visitors filled the Catskills. Cole, the artist who saw the United States as the “New Eden” and found God in nature, was also the first American painter to put a railroad train in his art, and he personally feared the rise of industrialization. Civilization threatened to destroy his beloved wilderness, for “where once there was beauty, there is now barrenness.” Despite his fears, most of the scenes that inspired Cole, from Kaaterskill Falls to the mountains that fill his Course of Empire, are still visible. When the Tate Gallery of London exhibited his work, it properly titled the show “America Sublime.”

When Cole died in 1848, William Cullen Bryant’s eulogy credited the artist with teaching Americans to “delight” in their natural environment and cherish “scenes of wild grandeur peculiar to our country.” Cole’s mantle as leader of the Hudson River school fell naturally to Asher Durand (1796–1886). Lumen Reed, who attended Cole’s burial service, commissioned Durand to honor both the poet-eulogist and the painter in a single canvas. The result was Kindred Spirits (1849), a masterpiece of American painting recently and lamentably deaccessioned by the New York Public Library. Durand placed the two men near Kaaterskill Falls, the symbolic center of the mountains they both loved. Like Cole, Durand encouraged aspiring young artists to go into nature and experience its wonders before they studied technique. In the wilderness they could discover God through the creation he had made, and the discovery of his “divine architecture” would infuse all their subsequent art.

A second generation of “Luminists” kept the Hudson River school dominant in America into the 1880s. Twentieth-century scholarship lists up to fifty painters who belonged to the school that Cole founded, a talented army whose work is found in many museums and is particularly cherished in the valley. Prominent among this group is Jaspar Francis Cropsey (1823–1900), famed for autumnal landscapes, who established his Ever Rest studio in Hastings-on-Hudson and lived in a Warwick estate he called Aladdin. Many of Cropsey’s paintings are found in a Westchester museum devoted to his work. But the school began to suffer from repetition, since Kaaterskill Falls, Mount Merino (south of Hudson), and Storm King Moun-
tain appeared with numbing regularity. By the time of the Civil War the Hudson itself was no longer adequate to inspire all members of the expanding Hudson River school, and artists as different as Albert Bierstadt (1830–1902) and George Inness (1825–94) found subjects in other climes. But the works of Hudson River painters, available to the nation in dozens of Currier and Ives prints, proved to Americans that their nation was blessed by God and that the Hudson was Eden.

Frederick Church (1826–1900) was the only student whom Cole personally taught. No Hudson River painter wandered so far in search of images, and *Niagara Falls* (1857) and *Heart of the Andes* (1859) only marked the start of Church’s peripatetic career. Though he traveled to Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East, Church never lost his conviction that the east bank of the Hudson Valley was the “center of the world.” Writing to Cole he rhapsodized about the “blue mountains” of the Catskills, and in 1870 he built a refuge where he might daily enjoy their beauty. Not surprisingly, the site he picked was located almost directly across the Hudson from Cedar Grove. On a bluff some five hundred feet above the river, Church built Olana, arguably the finest home in the entire valley. Richard Morris Hunt and Calvert Vaux contributed to the design, but the “personal Persian” quasi-Moorish house emerged out of Church’s artistic vision. Using Downing and Vaux principles, Church consciously built paths and roads whose turns displayed river vistas and forest scenes to please visitors. Marshes were drained and replaced by reflecting pools and a lake that reflected the sky. Stone for construction came from nearby Mount Merino. The Churches decided on interior stenciling, color schemes, and furniture placement. Increasingly crippled by arthritis, the ailing painter could still experience the Hudson as a living tableau and see his beloved “blue mountains” perfectly framed in a picture window. When Church’s *Iceberg* was rediscovered in 1979, it sold for $2.5 million, but Olana is his greatest work of art.

**Democratizing the River**

The Hudson Valley drew farmers and soldiers, merchants, manufacturers, utopians, and artists. As the century advanced, its fame and beauty also drew tourists in ever increasing numbers. As literary and artistic visions of the river
worked their way into the American consciousness, adventurous travelers decided that they must experience the Hudson on their own. “America’s River” became a destination that drew foreign and domestic visitors to its shores with a power that has never ended. Taking a steamer north through the valley became a travel “must,” and enthusiastic reports created a mystique around the river.

Robert Fulton’s Clermont was a ship that made history, but the mixed company on its initial voyage had to stand most of the time. The river was beautiful, but traders believed that moving goods was more important than transporting people. Steamships gradually introduced belowdeck accommodations for passengers, but travel remained a rough-and-ready experience for decades. James Kirke Paulding, in his New Mirror for Travelers (1828), chose to highlight the potential discomforts of river travel. “We had such a delightful sail in the steam boat, though we were all sick and such a delightful party, if only they had been well . . . going eight miles an hour let what would happen.” Yet the Gazetteer of the State of New York was quite prescient when it urged all readers to see the Catskills, for nothing can match the “elegant display of light and shade occasioned by their irregularity, their fine blue color, the climbing of mists up their sides.” The Hudson held sights to enthrall everyone and, if affluent visitors chose to stay, valley hotels could be situated to offer spectacular views of the river.

The grandest and most storied of these magnificent inns began its career in 1823 atop a high scarp, on the west side of the Hudson, that local Indians called the Wall of Manitou. When Cooper’s Natty Bumppo climbed South Mountain, he was able to see “creation! All creation.” The view was still available. Erastus Beach constructed the Pine Orchard House at the end of a twisting country road that rose swiftly to a height of 2,212 feet. When river travelers landed at Catskill Point, the hotel seemed to be only “a small white cloud in the midst of the heaven.” Few dared walk the twelve-mile trek uphill. Instead they boarded Beach’s coach for the tortuous, even dangerous trip to the pinnacle; the halfway point of the ascent stopped for refreshments at the Rip Van Winkle House. Thomas Cole visited Beach’s hotel during his trip to the Catskills in 1825, and his many paintings of the area, especially “The Falls of the Kaaterskill,” assured its popularity. Renamed the Catskill Mountain House, this towering retreat became the preferred destination for
several generations of river travelers.

Guests made it clear to Beach that they expected more than the opportunity to commune with nature, climb past the falls, or stare out over five states. Amenities must match the view, and changes began when even British visitors complained about the quality of the cuisine. Amid the abundance of the Catskills, the culinary deficiency was overcome, and excellent meals became part of the Catskill House experience. The Mountain House featured 315 rooms, verandahs that faced the morning sunrise, and rocking chairs that allowed people to enjoy the scenery without having to walk the fifty feet to prime viewing locations at the edge of the cliff. The Catskill Mountain House was the first specialized tourist hotel in the nation, the model for the thousands that followed. Competition for the Mountain House began in 1840, when the Windham House opened nearby. While less favorably situated, the Windham claimed that it was closer to the Hudson and easier to reach. Benny Havens’s Hotel near West Point, long the off-grounds emporium where cadets did their drinking, also began to draw visitors to the west side of the Hudson. Yet despite all imitators the Catskill Mountain House remained the premier Hudson hostelry. After 1845 it was efficiently run by Charles Beach, who added superstar entertainers like Jenny Lind to the attractions of nature.

The reports of European visitors taught Americans to appreciate the Hudson. James Buckingham, editor of London’s Athenaeum, praised the valley’s “most extensive and beautiful landscapes,” while Fanny Kemble claimed that in the Mountain House “I felt as though I had been carried into the immediate presence of God.” Kemble typified the intrepid spirit these early visitors displayed; her fall into India Brook entered Hudson lore as “Fanny Kemble’s bath.” The more acerbic Frances Trollope was also stunned but hardly silent. “I had heard so much of the surpassing beauty of the North River that I expected to be disappointed, and to find reality flat after description.” Yet in Domestic Manners of the Americans (1832), she was moved to “weep for my friends at home—they will never see [a stream that] can be surpassed in beauty by none on the outside of Paradise.” Tyrone Power Esq. (not to be confused with the actor Tyrone Power, star of John Ford’s 1955 West Point film The Long Gray Line) praised the wonderful vistas of the valley, as did Harriet Martineau, who made three trips up the
Hudson. Martineau described the Mountain House as the “noblest wonder” of an extraordinary place, but she was probably the only person to claim she saw the Atlantic Ocean from its verandah.

The intelligentsia, the well-to-do, and artists represented the first surge of foreign travelers into the Hudson Valley, but they were far from alone. To ease passenger crowding on steamboats, ornate “barges” were introduced that were towed behind ships loaded with freight and livestock. These sleepers accommodated travelers in comfort, but gradually became unnecessary as upriver speed increased. Alexis de Tocqueville, sailing up the Hudson in 1831 to celebrate the Fourth of July in Albany, wondered at the fragility of the steamships and was told their useful life was brief because technology was improving so rapidly. Sleeping accommodations were soon unnecessary to reach the Mountain House, and later in the century more elegant ships were constructed to make overnight runs between Albany and Manhattan.

In antebellum America, the Hudson tourist trade ranked as big business. By 1846, more than a hundred steamboats were active on the Hudson, and later side-wheelers could measure up to 370 feet and carry a thousand passengers. By 1850, the number of river travelers passed 1 million annually. The Albany–Manhattan trip was cut to seven hours, and widely publicized attempts to reduce it further led to races that cost lives; the wreck of the Henry Clay was merely the most famous of these tragedies. At his Idlewild estate, Nathaniel Willis lamented the loss of rural isolation as up to twenty steamboats passed each day: “There is no seclusion on the Hudson, or there is so much that the conveniences of life are difficult to obtain.” Towns offered inducements to have vessels make stops, or at least slow down and take passengers off smaller boats paralleling them in midstream. Hosts at Hudson hotels enhanced visitor satisfaction with nature trails through the forest, gazebos, afternoon tea, lawn tennis, cards, and croquet. At Catskill Mountain House, where appreciation of natural beauty was the first obligation, managers improved the performance of Kaaterskill Falls by damming part of its flow. In 1866, Charles Baldwin recorded the excitement of the female members of his group when “the water-gates above the falls were opened and a tremendous volume of water poured down. . . . The concussion produced . . . from a height of 180 feet to the pool below fairly shook the dome of rock . . . and the roar of the waterfall echoed and re-echoed.” So
popular were river trips that the Mountain House had to hire the Otis Elevator Company to build a rail incline up to its plateau.

A worthy rival of the Mountain House opened in 1870 when Albert and Alfred Smiley dedicated their Mohonk Mountain House on a glacial lake near New Paltz in Ulster County. Run by Quakers, the Mohonk offered an alcohol-free moral atmosphere of hymns and social-reform seminars. Some years later, Alfred Smiley built a second “Cliff House” at a sky lake in the Shawangunk Ridge and called it Minnewaska (1879). Still later he built the Wildmere. Smiley’s establishments maintained a genteel style of life even as the range of entertainment expected by Catskill guests broadened in other locales. The Kaaterskill Resort opened in 1881, soon followed by the Grand Hotel in Ulster County. New hotels drew crowds not because of their views or their rustic nature, but because of the amusements they provided and their accessibility; the Grand promised that a visitor could go “by Parlor Car to the lawn of the hotel.” As the Catskill region was becoming available to ever larger numbers of people, hotel managers faced the issue of admitting Jewish guests. Generally denied rooms at better places and insulted by an “anti-Hebrew” movement in the late 1880s, Jewish vacationers soon established bungalow communities. The Borscht Belt of the twentieth century had its origins in these unhappy years.

Taking a trip on the Hudson was no longer an adventure for visiting Europeans, enthusiastic writers, or honored dignitaries. The Catskill Mountain House advertised itself as the favorite vacation spot for Presidents Grant and Arthur, but the valley was ever more available to ordinary travelers. By the end of the century the most common Hudson transport was an excursion boat. The most famous of these river queens was the Mary Powell, a 267-foot side-wheeler surely more famous than either the Half Moon or the Clermont. Commanded by the Anderson family from 1861 to 1917, the Mary Powell made round trips from Manhattan to the Kingston Point amusement park. Everyone along the river knew her silhouette, and also knew that she never lost a passenger, whether day visitors, a Vassar girl, or a West Point cadet. The Mary Powell represents the democratization of the Hudson Valley, which belonged to everyone for the price of a ticket.

For a century ships like the Mary Powell, joined by the Herman Livingston, Hendrick Hudson, Washington Irving, Robert Fulton, another Cler-
mont, and a score of other passenger boats made the river available to ordinary Americans. In 1880, more than two million people lived within a day of the Catskills, but that number quadrupled before the First World War. After 1888, almost all first-time travelers to the Hudson clutched Brownie cameras to record their experience. Such towns as Kingston, Cornwall on Newburgh Bay, and Iona Island built parks and amusement areas to entertain the thousands of visitors who went back and forth from Manhattan in a single day. Early in the twentieth century, Indian Point Park in Buchanan opened a pool where refugees from the hot city could frolic in sight of both mountains and the river. At Beacon, the main attraction was an incline railway that rose at an angle of sixty-four degrees, the steepest ever built by Otis Elevator. The Catskills boasted hundreds of facilities that could accommodate up to ten thousand guests; both numbers continued to increase in a new century. Perhaps the greatest compliment the Hudson Valley ever received came in 1899, when the famed German travel writer and publisher Karl Baedeker issued his United States guidebook; the travel connoisseur told his readers that the Hudson River was superior to the Rhine. As the twentieth century began, only three generations after the Hudson first drew the rich and powerful, it now belonged to the world.
By the dawn of the twentieth century, the Hudson Valley was not only a vital part of the New York economy but also had insinuated itself into the consciousness of the nation. Historians instructed citizens on the role the river played in securing independence; writers made the contours of the valley and the foibles of its people available to readers; artists and art lovers gloried in the pastoral nature of valley life, the quality of its light, and the grandeur of its mountains. Elite families inhabited the hilltops and inlets along the river, immigrants filled the cities, and tourists found wonder in Hudson travel. Tangible parts of New York’s past were already being protected at Newburgh and Kingston, and documenting the Hudson’s role in America’s early history obsessed many residents. The extraordinary fertility of the river and its lands continued to provide both food and work. The Hudson had become more than just a river; it was a national treasure, a natural habitat, a cultural sanctuary. Appreciating and preserving the valley and the river was to characterize the new century.

Saving the Hudson Wilderness

In the nineteenth century, Saratoga represented the end of civilized society. The mountains and woods located beyond the spa were foreboding areas to travelers. Despite the importance of the Hudson River in state transportation
and industry, millions of acres of Empire State land on the upper Hudson were terra incognita. Some New Yorkers recognized that mill complexes in the Glens Falls area produced wealth for logging interests and provided the paper for their daily news, that iron taken from Lake Henderson mines had driven Troy’s wealth, and that the Champlain Canal cut travel time to Montreal. But of the vast Adirondacks wilderness, an area in which the entire state of Massachusetts could be lost, they knew nothing. Public ignorance of an incomparable wilderness was long shared by the State of New York.

Governor William Marcy was the first official to make the geological and mapping survey of the Adirondacks region a state concern. In 1836 he authorized Williams College Professor Ebenezer Emmons to map, survey, and pinpoint the source of the Hudson River. The expedition found the country north of where the Schoon River entered the Hudson to be almost impenetrable, but Emmons decided that Lake Colden must be the source of New York’s primary river. During a second foray in August 1837, Emmons led the first team to reach the highest point in the Adirondacks; the 5,344-foot-tall peak was named Mount Marcy in honor of the governor. Further scientific exploration never occurred, and the wilderness remained pristine, except for a famous “Philosopher's Camp” of Transcendentalists in 1858. Ralph Waldo Emerson, who searched for “the infinitude of the private man,” found the Adirondack environment to be stimulating and humbling; he introduced New York’s mountains to several members of the “Saturday Club.” Benson Lossing, the most important Hudson River historian of the century, did visit its “Big Bend” and praised the “grand sweep” of the high Adirondacks, but he accepted Emmons’s conjecture regarding the source of America’s River. The New York Times editorialized that the glories of the Adirondacks might become a “Central Park for the world,” a fond hope that seemed unlikely to be fulfilled, since the area remained dangerous and unexplored, more apt to cause disasters such as the April 1869 flood that destroyed the Glens Falls bridge than to attract tourists.

In April 1869, the Rev. William Murray published Adventures in the Wilderness, or Camp-Life in the Adirondacks. Murray asserted that the Lower Hudson was becoming crowded and that tourism ought to extend into mountains that were as old as any on earth, and that offered good accommodations. The few tourists who took his advice were soon called “Murray’s
Fools.” But the volume did influence Thomas Clark Durant, the driving force behind the transcontinental Union Pacific Railroad, who had been unceremoniously dumped from its board. Returning to New York, Durant built the first railroad into the Adirondacks, from Saratoga to North Creek, in 1871. Durant played a vital role in opening the wilderness; he built one of the area’s first “camps” for his family, creating a style of rural vacationing that would draw other rich men, and his railroad fostered the construction of almost two hundred Adirondack hotels by 1880.

Responding to growing interest, the State of New York decided in 1872 that the Adirondacks must be fully mapped. Commercial potential inspired the state effort, but important works by painters such as Winslow Homer and William Trost Richards and photographs by Seneca Ray Stoddard had given the public glimpses of the grandeur of the region. Just as the mid-century canvases of the Hudson River school fostered appreciation of the Catskills, late nineteenth-century art stimulated interest in and concern for the Adirondacks. Some state legislators were angered by reports of excessive logging and its baleful effects on a virgin wilderness. They hired Verplanck Colvin, an experienced mapmaker who denounced the “chopping and burning off” of the region, to make a complete geographic survey. Thus it was Colvin, on September 16, 1872, who discovered the true source of the Hudson River at 4,322 feet on the southwest side of Mount Marcy. The Hudson flowed out of a “minute, unpretending” lake “shivering in the breezes of the mountains”; the explorer named his find Lake Tear of the Clouds before tracking the river’s flow through Feldspar Creek, Calamity Brook, Henderson Lake, and finally to the lordly Hudson. Colvin’s expedition settled a geographical mystery, and further surveys confirmed the geologic antiquity of the Adirondacks as some of the oldest mountains on earth. New York’s wilderness wonderland held forty-six peaks higher than four thousand feet, as well as three thousand lakes and thirty thousand miles of streams.

Loggers had ravaged Adirondack timberland and miners had hauled away its ore for a century, but now hotels and “camping” came to the wilderness. The beaver (1820), elk (1840), moose (1860), and panther (1870), which had once ranged the mountains, were now gone, replaced by tourists eager for a new experience. Dozens of hotels, usually located on lakefront property, were constructed; the most elegant of them, the Blue Mountain
House, featured electrical wiring installed by Thomas Edison. Today the Adirondacks Museum, a thirty-two-acre complex on Blue Mountain Lake, is the best way to recapture the rich history of the region, its settlement, and its arts and crafts. Scores of individuals built cottages throughout the region as well. In one of these, halfway up the slope of Mount McGregor, General U. S. Grant fought his last battle in 1885; he struggled to complete his *Memoirs*, one of the great American autobiographies, before succumbing to cancer. Subsisting on cocaine and morphine, Grant spent his last days twelve miles north of Saratoga fighting death and deadlines; he finished writing on July 14 and died on July 23. When his body was taken to Manhattan for burial it passed through Cold Spring, where every West Point cadet stood at attention; it was the first time and only time the entire corps left the grounds of the United States Military Academy.

Adirondack “camping” is neither the often severe experience of hikers nor the enjoyment of nature from a tourist hotel, but a wilderness encounter available only to the very rich. Late in the century, captains of industry and finance established “camps” to provide communion with nature and obtain necessary respite from city and business; they would achieve rusticity without roughing it. These quarters were hardly the rude camps of loggers or the Adirondack “lean-to” (three walls and an open front) commonly available to rural hikers. They were complexes of buildings holding every amenity and staffed with servants. Durant built the first great camp at Pine Knot and later sold it to Collis P. Huntington when his family moved on to Sagamore. That installation, a complex of twenty-two Swiss-style buildings over 1,526 acres, became the property of the Vanderbilts in 1901 while Durant’s third installation, Uncas, was sold to J. P. Morgan in 1896. Camp Santononi was constructed by Albany banker Robert Pruyn in 1888, a 12,000-acre site that could be reached only via a five-mile driveway. Richard Hudnut built Fox Lair, a chateau 215 feet long attached to its own private golf course. The great Manhattan firm of McKim White and Mead designed Camp Wild Air for Whitlaw Reid, while Carrère and Hastings did the same for Marjorie Post at Camp Topridge. Most of these rural hideaways are long gone, but New York State maintains Santononi as an example of what elite “camping” meant in the late nineteenth century.

Inevitably, the world intruded on the Adirondacks just as it had invaded the southern sections of the Hudson. As tourism and development...
threatened the wilderness, the often maligned New York Legislature demonstrated unexpected ability to act in the public interest. Colvin had long urged state action to protect forestlands, and in 1885 Albany began a century-long response by designating 34,000 acres in the Catskills as a preserve. Ulster County assemblyman Cornelius Hardenburgh pioneered the effort, but the protected land expanded over the years thanks to people as different as Robert Moses and George Pataki. By the twenty-first century the Catskill Preserve held over 700,000 acres and included 53 percent of Ulster County and 27 percent of Greene County. Although much of the acreage remains in private hands, half the land is a fully protected preserve where the sale, destruction, or removal of trees is prohibited and animals can roam free.

The New York State Forest Preserve at first included very little of the Adirondacks. But advocates such as Seneca Ray Stoddard kept the conservation cause before the legislature and demanded expansion of protected lands. In 1892, inspired in part by Stoddard’s photographs of the ravages inflicted by unrestricted logging and embarrassed because 25 percent of the Adirondacks region was owned by fifty elite families, Albany acted. On May 20, 1892, the Legislature drew a “blue line” on a map and created a 2.8-million-acre state park, which also included a forest preserve. Enlarged by legislative acts in 1912, 1931, 1956 and 1972, the Adirondacks Park now encompasses more than six million acres, half of which is protected land. The vast tract, stretching west from the Vermont border and including much of ten counties, has only some 140,000 year-round residents. Millions enjoy the beauty of the Adirondacks annually, but as tourists and visitors, not exploiters; even private land in the park is restricted by state zoning.

To insure the permanence of their action, the legislature amended the New York State Constitution in 1894 to guarantee that designated lands would be “forever wild.” Logging interests attempted to ignore the new requirement, but Governor Theodore Roosevelt brought them to heel. The clause, now Article 14, section 1, of the Constitution, effectively requires passage of a constitutional amendment before any development of the preserve is permitted. Of all Hudson Valley Utopian dreams, none has proven more permanent. Because of state protection, the beaver has been reintroduced into the Adirondacks and the gray wolf into the Catskills, and the bald eagle flies over the river. The people of New York were given an immense trea-
sure, which they have nurtured even as development threatened other parts of the valley.

In the last years of the nineteenth century, John Burroughs (1837–1921), a naturalist whose books and essays ranked among the most popular of the age, proudly bore the task of explaining the Hudson to the nation. Born in New England, Burroughs as a youth was captivated by Ralph Waldo Emerson’s transcendentalist philosophy and raised to a “state of ecstasy” by his encounters with nature along the Hudson River. His tramps through the Catskills became a series of “From the Back Country” poems and articles in the *Nation*, the *New York Leader*, and *Knickerbocker Magazine*. Burroughs wanted Americans to appreciate the unique qualities of life along the Hudson and the river’s role as a source of national character. In his view, nature was indeed “fraught with high and holy meaning,” and no place in the world showed this connection more clearly than America’s river. Burroughs’s publication of *Wake-Robin* (1871), *Winter Sunshine* (1875), *Birds and Poets* (1877), and *Locusts and Wild Honey* (1879) made him America’s most popular writer, “a more sociable Thoreau.”

In 1878, Burroughs built a Hudson estate at Riverby, opposite Poughkeepsie. But throngs of admiring readers now visited the unspoiled lands he described, knocked at his door, and demanded his autograph. In order to write, Burroughs retreated to a new home called Slabsides, then to an even smaller woodland lodge; he lamented that “the lion hunters are too numerous.” In book after book Burroughs used his Catskill and Adirondack wanderings to convince the public that nature had to be protected and cherished. He supported the conservation efforts of Teddy Roosevelt, and when the president published *Outdoor Practices of an American Hunter* (1906) the volume was dedicated to Burroughs.

Roosevelt made conservation of America’s natural heritage a matter of national policy. But the Manhattan-born leader found the origin of his passion in the many vacations he spent along the Hudson. His love for the valley was nurtured by friendships with Burroughs and the artist Frederic Remington. Roosevelt became president while camping in the Adirondacks near Henderson Lake, and the path he raced down Mount Marcy and Mount Tahawus toward his destiny became part of Adirondack Park in 2003. Judge Alton B. Parker, the opponent he overwhelmed in the election
of 1904, lived on an estate called Rosemont near Esopus Creek. The clash of two New Yorkers with ties to the Hudson only enhanced the prominence of the river in the national mind.

The growing impact of Burroughs and Roosevelt provides a useful background for the Hudson-Fulton celebration of 1909, a dual exposition honoring the three-hundredth anniversary of the *Half Moon*’s explorations and the centennial of the *Clermont*’s epic voyage upriver. The Rev. J. H. Suydam of Rhinecliff, in a letter to the *New York Tribune* in 1893, was the first to suggest an exposition honoring the two events, a celebration that could improve popular education and enhance communication between Americans and Europeans. Serving the interests of commerce was not on their agenda, but planning and financing fell short until J. P. Morgan agreed to take on the chairmanship of all art and history exhibits. After Morgan’s participation was assured, civic leaders from the entire valley met on December 16, 1905. General Stewart Woodford chaired a 250-man committee that included not only Morgan but also such luminaries as Andrew Carnegie, Frederick Grant, Judge Parker, Levi Morton, and William Van Rensselaer. Beyond honoring the accomplishments of Hudson the explorer and Fulton the inventor, the group decided to emphasize the ships that changed American history.

No one knows with complete certainty the dimensions of the original *Half Moon* and *Clermont*. After some dithering, the committee sought the participation of the Netherlands, asking her to construct and contribute a modern *Half Moon* to the festivities. As the Royal Shipyards in Amsterdam laid a keel in October 1908, the Staten Island Shipyards began to construct a version of the *Clermont*. The *Half Moon* was freighted across the Atlantic on the Holland America steamship *Soestdyk* in the spring of 1909, complete with a twenty-man Dutch crew, while the *Clermont* was launched in July, painted a dull gray, and staffed with a crew of yachtsmen. Both vessels were moored in the Hudson well before the scheduled two-week celebration began, and both survived repeated attempts at vandalism. Even more impressively, organizers maintained the educational focus of the event, obtained joint city and state sponsorship, and provided free admission to all public sessions.

The Hudson-Fulton Celebration began on Saturday, September 25, with a parade of ships along the river to Manhattan’s “Water Gate” reviewing
stand near Grant’s Tomb. A flotilla of modern vessels enthralled the crowds along the Manhattan shoreline, but the stars of the day were the tiny *Half Moon* and the *Clermont*. The “marvelous” proceedings were marred when Dutch sailors inadvertently rammed the *Clermont*, which then had to be towed past reviewers. The day ended with a grand fireworks display, and for the rest of the week there were concerts at Carnegie Hall, performances by German singing groups, and aerial demonstrations by Glenn Curtis and the Wright brothers’ “Flyer.” To culminate a festive week, a monument to Henry Hudson was erected near the Spuyten Duyvel, and Palisades Interstate Park was dedicated on September 27. Meanwhile, thousands of patrons walked the decks of the ships that were being honored.

On October 1, the Hudson Valley portion of the festival began as the *Half Moon* and the *Clermont* led a grand procession toward upriver anchorages. Yonkers, the first stop northward, had already benefited from the event. In 1908 planned industrial expansion had threatened the physical survival of historic Philipse Manor, but plans for the coming of the ships inspired Mrs. Eva Smith Cochrane to donate $50,000 and save the structure. New York State arranged to purchase the manor, and in 1909 the building served as the epicenter of city celebrations; it still stands as a museum amid a busy waterfront. Moving slowly upriver, the replicas were passed at Newburgh by modern warships that had already visited upriver towns. The *Half Moon* and the *Clermont* were cheered everywhere. Poughkeepsie greeted them with thousands of lightbulbs and a banquet. Only on October 8 did the procession reach Albany, where Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands presided over festivities as the city rediscovered its Dutch origins. All ceremonies were completed by October 10, and the Hudson-Fulton Celebration ended on schedule with its educational purposes fulfilled.

There was however a sad coda to the symphony. Although it had shipped the *Half Moon* to Manhattan, the Holland America line had no intention of returning it to Amsterdam. No one had given any thought to its preservation in America, and committee members ruefully considered plans to moor the replica in Central Park, encase it in cement at Bear Mountain, or display it near the State Museum in Albany. Instead, the ship was finally transferred to the recently created Palisades Park Commission, which anchored her in Popolopen Creek. Badly deteriorated after years near Bear Mountain, the
vessel was relocated to Cohoes, where arsonists destroyed her on September 9, 1933. In 1989 an even more accurate replica of Henry Hudson’s vessel was constructed, and it operates as a traveling museum on the river, taking school groups and visitors on “Voyages of Discovery.” A lively link to the Hudson’s past, this version of the tiny Half Moon was anchored in Manhattan on September 11, 2001, and witnessed the attack on the World Trade Center.

Saving the Palisades

For almost fifty miles, from the upper reaches of New York harbor to Haverstraw Bay, a wall of rock lines the western shore of the Hudson River, a vast pile of diabase stone atop multiple layers of older sandstone that dates back to the Triassic Era. The columns of the Palisades, now only half their original height, create a magnificent entry for the Hudson Valley, but their mass was a barrier to westward passage. Dutch settlers had a word for the natural wonder; they envisioned a flight of steps lying on its side and called the entire formation a “trapp.” Two centuries later, a “millionaire’s row” occupied by the mansions of Joseph Lamb (Falcon House), William Dana (Greycliff), and other affluent New Yorkers occupied the heights along the shore. The scarp even held its own resort; the Palisades Mountain House provided three hundred rooms where wealthy visitors to Manhattan could enjoy magnificent views of the city. But the cliffs also attracted more prosaic builders who discovered that rocks blasted out of its steps, when combined with asphalt, made an ideal material for street construction. “Trap” rock freighted over to Manhattan fulfilled one need of a growing metropolis, but the assault on the Palisades by blasters led to the first Hudson environmental campaign. Preserving the natural wonder of the Palisades against desecration and development was the first twentieth-century struggle to protect the Hudson Valley from “progress” and “civilization.”

The small town of Englewood, New Jersey sits astride the Palisades, and in the 1890s its political leadership intended to fund public services by blasting the cliffsides. Englewood contracted out the right to blast trap rock from the half-mile section of the Palisades within town borders, and drew unwanted attention in both New Jersey and New York. In 1895, legislative committees considered the damage being inflicted on the Palisades, but since the
“wounds” scarring the formation were visible only from New York, nothing was accomplished. By mid-1898, workers for the Carpenter Brothers were removing almost 1,500 cubic yards of rock each day, and dynamite was gouging holes in the long steps of the Palisades. New Jersey women’s groups such as the Englewood Woman’s Club and Manhattan reformer Andrew Haswell Green organized protests, but not until Theodore Roosevelt’s installation as governor of New York was effective action possible. Roosevelt named a second New York commission to study the ongoing atrocity, and recruited George W. Perkins (1862–1920), a leading banker and insurance executive, to head the inquiry. When Roosevelt’s initiative forced New Jersey to adopt similar legislation, the project became a joint state effort in 1900. The stated goal of the Palisades Interstate Parks Commission (PIPC) was to halt the blasting and create parkland for the public.

George Perkins was a busy man, but he accepted the presidency of the Palisades Interstate Parks Commission because he was personally affected by the quarrying. In 1893 he had purchased Wave Hill (Glyndor), a riverside mansion constructed in 1834 by Judge William Lewis Morris and later occupied by the publisher William H. Appleton. Perkins loved the river view and expanded the property to eighty acres, adding greenhouses and exotic plants. His aesthetic sense was offended by huge advertising signs, featuring individual letters up to twenty feet high, painted on the imposing cliffs opposite Glyndor. He was offended even more by the quarrying explosions, and noise from across the Hudson often woke his sleeping children. Perkins, who owned a relatively small piece of land along the eastern Hudson, construed his riparian enclave as a mandate to deal with the entire shoreline in front of the Palisades, a strip of three thousand acres held by some 175 different owners. The project of saving the Palisades would dominate the rest of his life and create one of the finest parks in the nation.

Stopping quarry work was Perkins’s first priority. By Christmas 1900, with the help of an anonymous gift from J. P. Morgan, he purchased the land the Carpenter teams were working. The quarrymen immediately moved operations farther up the Hudson, and public pressure convinced the legislatures to extend PIPC’s authority up to Stony Point. But the potential for parkland was not ownership, and it was certain that business assault on the rocky escarpment would continue unless Perkins and his supporters could
secure title to fifteen miles of the riverfront. Years of personal negotiation with diverse owners followed; for example, property held by Susan B. Anthony was obtained for only $2,400 in March 1905. Commission member Dupratt White helpfully suggested that an automobile route atop the Palisades ought to be included in park planning, a proposal not implemented until 1958. Land transfers were gradually completed, and by 1908 the Palisades shore was intact. Immediately thereafter, the Commission had to combat a proposed state penitentiary adjacent to the land it had purchased in Rockland. Perkins, with support from both the Harriman and the Rockefeller families, quickly quashed the idea of such a penal institution close to the park. Palisades Interstate Park formally came into existence on September 27, 1909, a triumphal element in the Hudson-Fulton jubilee.

Perkins’s greatest achievement was recruiting influential support for his park program. The Harriman family was the largest landholder in Rockland County, and its patriarch, E. H. Harriman, had personally been involved in Alaskan preservation efforts. In 1910, E. H. Harriman’s widow pledged ten thousand acres and a million dollars to PIPC if Perkins could extend the commission’s protective shield up to Newburgh. The deal was finalized after Perkins convinced the legislature that only PIPC control could safeguard nine Revolutionary War sites. And when quarrymen began to mine Hook Mountain, they offended the Rockefeller family compound in Westchester so profoundly that John D. Rockefeller Jr. became a supporter of PIPC efforts. Perkins used anonymous funds donated by the Rockefellers to purchase Hook Mountain in March 1911. Whatever the original motivation for their concern, each family has contributed both private financial support and public service to PIPC across the entire century.

By 1914, after the last quarries were closed, the Commission concentrated its efforts on building public park facilities to attract city residents and visitors to the Hudson Valley. PIPC planners lavished great care on creating a variety of experiences for patrons. Before the First World War, a visit to the Palisades usually meant a walk in lands along the shore, with transportation provided by ferries from Manhattan and Westchester. Then camps were established on the Harriman properties to allow city children to experience a bit of nature. In 1914, William Welsh, PIPC’s major planner, began to build park facilities at Bear Mountain, and before year’s end six hundred to eight
hundred visitors were arriving daily on steamships from the metropolis. Welsh built the Bear Mountain Inn that winter and opened it to the public on June 1, 1915. Used as a site for sports events and featuring prominent show-business performers, the inn in the State Park was a popular destination for decades. When the singer Kate Smith introduced “When the Moon Comes Over the Mountain” at the Bear Mountain Inn, few listeners knew the mountain referred to was Anthony’s Nose. As years passed, automobiles would displace steamships as the prime access to the valley, and the Commission anticipated such growth by constructing the Storm King Highway. Completed in 1919, when more than a million persons visited PIPC’s 35,000-acre empire, the 4.5-mile road won immediate fame as the “most scenic” in the nation.

After George Perkins died in 1920, leaders from public-spirited valley families such as W. Averell Harriman, Franklin Hopkins, George Perkins Jr., George Perkins III, J. D. White, and Laurance Rockefeller devoted decades to the work of the Commission. In October 1923, the first section of the Appalachian Trail was opened to hikers, allowing them to cross the Hudson at the lowest point of the mountain chain that stretches from Georgia to Maine. Land acquisition and park development never ceased, and during the Depression Works Project Administration money greatly expanded facilities; the ten thousand WPA workers who built PIPC facilities in Harriman State Park were part of the largest single Valley project. President Franklin Roosevelt himself dedicated a memorial tower atop Bear Mountain honoring George Perkins on October 31, 1934. Most importantly, “Junior” Rockefeller anonymously consolidated seven hundred acres of land atop the Palisades that PIPC had been unable to secure and transferred them to the Commission. The New York Times hailed a “munificent” action against “the scars of exploitation,” but the donation represents only part of the more than twenty million dollars one family gave to the PIPC. The Palisades Parkway, a highway that was an ancillary part of park development, was opened in 1958 by Governor W. Averell Harriman.

By 1937 the Commission had halted almost all trap rock operations along the Hudson. Moreover, the Supreme Court, in Standard Trap Rock/Sparkill Realty v. PIPC, had decided that the preservation of scenic beauty by appropriation of land was a legitimate responsibility of public park
agencies. The case was a landmark of the conservation movement, and popular support for public parkland gave PIPC the power to defeat commercial incursions and made its work politically invulnerable. Today the PIPC system continues to grow. Its dozen parks entertain over six million visitors annually and, with the purchase of Sterling Forest in 1998, the Commission has 97,018 acres to manage. PIPC’s domain is no longer the fifteen miles of Palisade shore from Fort Lee in New Jersey to Sparkill Creek near Piermont, but rather a Hudson River empire that belongs to the public. Side-wheel steamers no longer run on the river, the Alexander Hamilton having made its last trip to Bear Mountain in 1971, but tour boats and automobiles continue to bring visitors to irreplaceable PIPC parks.

Crossing the Hudson

Perhaps the most important change in the valley’s economy in the twentieth century was to eliminate the Hudson River itself as a barrier to commerce. Valley towns were born and prospered because people and material in the Northeast had to stop at the river before continuing westward. The Hudson separated New England and New York City from the rest of the country. Even America’s railroads were unable to breach the river barrier until late in the nineteenth century. Cornelius Vanderbilt’s New York Central system ran north along the river, while Piermont in Rockland County was the eastern terminus of the Erie Railroad. “Commodore” Vanderbilt had built his fortune not on rails but by transporting people across New York Harbor in ferries. Goods and people reached America’s greatest marketplace either by lighter from New Jersey or as the result of a tortuous detour north through bridges at Troy and Albany. The opening of the Poughkeepsie and Eastern Railroad Bridge in December 1888 began a process that tremendously enhanced the valley’s prosperity yet made the Hudson River irrelevant to efficient trade and travel.

In the first decade of the new century, the Hudson and Manhattan Railroad built the first tunnels under the river to bring passengers from New Jersey to New York. Emboldened by this successful project, the Pennsylvania Railroad tunneled under the Hudson and connected its multistate system to the new station it constructed at West 32nd Street in Manhattan. Interstate rail traffic was established in 1910, and the giant railroad soon extended ser-
vice into New England by tunneling under the East River and constructing the Hellgate Bridge. But passenger service did not alleviate the freight and traffic problems posed by the Hudson, and in 1921 the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey was established to confront and solve that issue. More than eighty years later, a direct link between New Jersey freight yards and New York City remains only a dream. Instead the Port Authority opened the Holland Tunnel for automobile traffic in 1927, and the three tubes of the Lincoln Tunnel (1937, 1945, 1957) confirm that cars, not freight, hold a dominant position in urban planning.

New Yorkers fell in love with the automobile almost as soon as it appeared. The Cosmopolitan, only the second automobile race ever held in the United States, was run from the Bronx to Irvington as early as 1896. In 1899, Benjamin Walker and Anzi Barber built an automobile manufacturing plant for steam-driven cars near Kingston Point, and a factory for steamers was opened in Poughkeepsie the next year. The small firm of Abendroth & Root made luxury cars in Newburgh until 1913, and the Electric Vehicle Company produced a few cars in Rockland. These Hudson Valley enterprises are now forgotten except by car buffs, for they were only the preliminary stages in the triumph of the internal-combustion engine. In 1914 the Maxwell-Briscoe Car Company, which had taken over Walker and Barber’s operation in 1903, shifted operations to Tarrytown and then became part of the new Chevrolet combine. For the next eighty years, Chevys were turned out by a General Motors plant that became one of the largest employers in the Hudson Valley. “Car du jour” paint from plant operations was always visible in the Hudson, and the pollution caused by this major manufacturing success story contributed to the decay of the river. When Tarrytown’s automobile manufacturing ended in 1996, General Motors pledged millions of dollars to clean up the site.

Until well into the twentieth century, ferries were the only established way to cross from one side of the Hudson Valley to the other. The first known ferry service was established near Fort Orange in 1637, and the ugly but useful craft soon were ubiquitous on the stream. The saga of ferry service in Manhattan is well known because of the exploits of Robert Fulton and Commodore Vanderbilt, as well as the genius of Whitman’s poetry. The Dyckman Street ferry alone transported 325,000 passengers over to Palisades Park in
1922. Yet valuable ferry service existed at every reach of the Hudson, with some companies lasting well over a century. There was ferry service between Newburgh and Beacon from 1743 to 1963, between Kingston and Rhinecliff from 1700 to 1957, and between Catskill and Hudson from 1800 to 1935. A famous ferry ran at Haverstraw and Yonkers, and legends surround the service provided by the family of Jeremiah Dobbs in Westchester County from 1698 to 1944. The cross-Hudson trip from Dobbs Ferry to Sneden’s Landing even became the subject of a popular song in 1947. As late as the 1930s, car ferries at Nyack and Yonkers were always busy. Yet of all this immense effort, little trace remains except for contemporary tour boats that leave valley piers. Bridges for automobiles made ferries expendable.

For centuries the Hudson was a supreme divider, but the exponential growth of cars in the twentieth century and the need to move them quickly from shore to shore made bridge construction imperative. The first and perhaps the most cherished of all Hudson bridges was constructed between April 1923 and November 1924 at Bear Mountain. The thriving Bear Mountain Inn, already the showplace of the PIPC empire, would prosper even more if it became accessible to day-trippers from the other side of the river. Mrs. Mary Harriman was willing to privately finance a cross-Hudson bridge, calling it a “little time-saver,” if PIPC agreed to build western approach roads around her property. It cost Mrs. Harriman five million dollars to have Howard Baird design and build a private toll bridge, the longest in the world when it opened on November 26, 1924. Cars paid $.80 to cross, trucks $1.75, and the income proved so lucrative that New York State purchased the bridge from the Harrimans. Sited where the Appalachian Trail crosses the Hudson, the over-the-river journey from Bear Mountain to Anthony’s Nose is one of the most impressive hikes in the United States.

The success of the first river crossing demanded other automobile routes. Governor Al Smith personally lobbied for the Mid-Hudson Bridge (Highland-Poughkeepsie), and when it opened to traffic on August 25, 1930, it put several ferries out of business. Ralph Modjeski’s design was not quite as long or as high as the Bear Mountain Bridge, but it proved a workhorse installation. Moreover, it led to creation of the New York State Bridge Authority to plan other crossings. The first Parker Dunn Memorial Bridge at Albany (1933) and the Rip Van Winkle Bridge at Catskill (1935) rapidly followed. In
time, the Kingston-Rhinecliff Bridge (1957) and the Newburgh-Beacon Bridge (1963) were built as the automobile conquered America.

Despite the beauty, utility, and grace of these upriver bridges, the two most famous Hudson crossings are located closest to New York City. The magnificent George Washington Bridge, designed by Othman Amman and built by the Port Authority, was dedicated by Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt on October 24, 1931. Connecting Fort Lee with Washington Heights, “the George” was the longest and heaviest suspension bridge in the world; its construction made the Palisades Interstate Parkway inevitable. Toward the northern end of that parkway, the sprawling Tappan Zee Bridge (1955), built to handle 100,000 cars daily and last fifty years, transformed Rockland into a suburb of New York City by connecting it to Westchester. Rockland, where Erie Railroad passengers transferred to steamships to get to Manhattan, was finally tied to the metropolis. The Tappan Zee’s daily load is already 35,000 cars beyond maximum capacity and it is plagued with safety violations. Emission pollution and haze surround the bridge, and hearings in 2002 suggested 156 ways in which traffic congestion might be eased. Many plans to replace the bridge exist, but no design has yet been selected. The debate over the future of the Tappan Zee forces Hudson Valley residents to acknowledge the costs attached to progress.

Indian tribes once lit bonfires along valley shores to warn river travelers of dangerous waters, but New Yorkers preferred building lighthouses. The first was constructed at Stony Point in 1826, and fourteen others soon followed. Seven survive today. These Hudson landmarks at water level proved as vulnerable to the elements as the ships they were designed to protect. The Stuyvesant Light, for example, was washed away by river ice on three occasions, and the West Point Lighthouse was destroyed when an errant schooner was blown ashore. Over time, the remaining installations have been automated and adopted by local preservationists. Saugerties Light doubles as a bed and breakfast, and the Rondout Light is part of the Hudson River Maritime Museum. Strangely, the most famous of all lighthouses survives because of the power of literature. The Little Red Lighthouse under the George Washington Bridge, originally built on Sandy Hook and moved to Jeffrey’s Point in 1921, was immortalized in a children’s book that sold two million copies. Each of the remaining structures deserves an individual vol-
The New Hudson Economy

During the twentieth century, life in the Hudson Valley was reshaped to meet the demands of an ever-growing modern economy. Regional agricultural output became increasingly specialized, continuing the process that began almost two centuries earlier when the valley moved away from grain production. Area farming now concentrates on specialized production for an increasingly demanding marketplace, with melons predominant north of Albany and egg, dairy, and poultry production preeminent in sections of Columbia and Dutchess Counties. Truck farming of vegetables and the cultivation of organic crops has become the norm across a region whose lands under cultivation gradually decreased during the course of the century. Individual farm size increased even as “gentleman farmers” occupied much of the land, and consolidated acreage increased productivity. In the “black dirt” region of Orange County, long the state leader in supplying onions and squash, “muck farms” maintained their dominance even though there were little more than 5,500 acres under cultivation in 2000. It was in Orange that the processed dairy item Velveeta was formulated in 1920, and it remains the most popular cheese product in the nation. One particularly innovative adaptation was the empire in mushrooms created by Herman Knaust, who from 1936 to 1950 converted old mines on Livingston land into chambers for mycological research and commercial growing.

Dairy production and fruit orchards are the solid pillars of Hudson Valley agriculture, as they have been since the 1830s; the state remains the third-largest producer of milk in the nation. It was a Poughkeepsie inventor who created an effective milk separator, and fluid milk from east-bank farms constantly flows south to the city. Valley farmers lead the modern cartel, keeping prices stable and guarantees prosperity. In a normal farm year, apples remain one of the most profitable Hudson Valley crops, as A. J. Downing knew they would. In 2000, regional orchards yielded over eight million bushels, as the Hudson Valley Fruit Growers Task Force sought to achieve for apple growers what the milk cooperative had done for fluid milk/cheese prices. The effort
was hindered by international competitors, especially juice from China and fresh fruit from Chile. In 2002, a series of killer frosts did severe damage to the valley apple crop and made this traditional industry even more vulnerable.

In 1997, the American Farmland Trust declared the Hudson Valley the tenth most threatened agricultural complex in the nation, particularly citing the loss of open space. Nevertheless, commercial agriculture remained a $370 million industry in 2002, and the Empire State as a whole is a national leader in the production of snap beans, apples, sprouts, beets, onions, buckwheat, and grapes.

In the mechanized twentieth century, the enormous canal system of the 1800s was no longer vital. Peak tonnage on the Erie traffic was reached as early as 1872, and the D&H was closed down in 1898. In 1903, after efforts to deepen the existing canals failed, the State of New York financed the creation of a new system and Governor Charles S. Whitman opened the first section of the Barge Canal in May 1915. When the project was completed in 1918, canals (Champlain, Oswego, Cayuga, Erie) and rivers (Clyde, Oneida, Oswego, Seneca, Mohawk) were integrated into a 524-mile system that could accept three-hundred-ton freighters. In the 1930s federal WPA money deepened the Hudson channel to Albany—it now is thirty-two feet everywhere—and seagoing vessels again used its docks. The capital city is the fuel center for the entire upstate region, and keeping the river open in wintertime occupies the efforts of a fleet of icebreakers. Constantly increasing its ability to handle containerized shipping, the port of Albany handled 220 million tons of cargo in 2000.

New York ranked as the nation’s leading manufacturing state from the 1830s to the 1960s, and industrial growth in river towns helped maintain this domination. One seemingly invulnerable industry was the huge paper and pulp complex on the upper Hudson, where International Paper and West Virginia Paper plants continued to use the timber resources of the Adirondacks. Also protected from economic vagaries were the five thousand employees of the Watervliet Arsenal, a federal establishment. But traditional nineteenth-century industries in the valley, such as leather, brickmaking, and apparel manufacture, gradually withered. By 1955, the region held only 2.2 percent of state factory workers, as Yonkers carpet workers and Cohoes mill hands saw their jobs exported to southern sites. Troy did retain Cleutt-
Peabody textile jobs but endured substantial losses in metal fabrication and milling. The town of Hudson retained diverse workers because of the manufacture of glue and matches and the production of quick-drying Portland Cement—and because it held the largest red-light district on the river. State police closed the latter in the 1950s and, after the cement plant closed in 1977, Hudson shared the regional economic distress.

A few companies succeeded in meeting twentieth-century industrial needs. The International Business Machines Corporation (IBM) built its first Hudson Valley installation in 1942 at Poughkeepsie, a town that had fortunately maintained many industrial workers. IBM’s presence brought prosperity to the Queen City; in 1944 it added a laboratory doing war work and gradually staffed the valley’s largest business complex. Under IBM’s guidance, the computer age was born in the Hudson Valley, and in 1956 the company found it necessary to move some operations across the river to Kingston. IBM moved its international headquarters from Manhattan to Westchester in 1964, and its honeymoon with valley communities lasted almost fifty years. When cutthroat competition in the 1990s forced severe cutbacks in IBM operations, the economic fallout devastated Poughkeepsie, Kingston, and other towns throughout the valley. The twenty-first century began on a more positive note as IBM dedicated a new chip manufacturing facility in East Fishkill (2003). Moreover, under the sponsorship of Governor George Pataki, a consortium of computer companies agreed to use Albany as the center of nanolithography, which will create a new generation of computer chips. Over $2 billion has already been invested in the program, which may invigorate the valley’s economy.

The second great success story of the twentieth century focuses on the city of Schenectady, the third-oldest city in New York but hardly an economic dynamo until the arrival of General Electric. Created in Manhattan in 1878, the Edison Electric Company was reorganized by the banker J. P. Morgan into General Electric in 1892. GE’s original six hundred acres in Schenectady become the core of an international conglomerate, and many of the company’s accomplishments were in the Hudson Valley. Thomas Edison himself oversaw the installation of electricity in several Adirondack hotels, and an iron works near old Fort Fredric was the first in the nation to be run with electric power. The electrical genius Charles Steinmetz designed the
seven cast iron generators of the Mechanicville Hydro-Electric Station, a fa-
cility so effective that it operated for a century. Preservationists are now at-
tempting to transform the plant into a working industrial museum. GE built
additional plants at Waterford, Fort Edward, and Hudson Falls, and
statewide operations made it New York’s biggest employer into the 1970s.

Since the 1820s, the accomplishments of Hudson Valley entrepreneurs
had created business legends. Smith Brothers Cough Drops, Chevrolet cars,
Fleischmann’s yeast and gin, Portland Cement, and Waring hats were na-
tionally known brands, but Troy horseshoes, New York farm equipment, ap-
ples, onions, and wines all played roles in making the Empire State America’s
economic bellwether. For over a century, the refuse of an industrial age was
dumped into the Hudson, and by the mid-1900s the environmental cost of
past achievements was becoming evident. Phosphates from farm fertilizers;
pulp debris from wood processing plants; oil residues from railroad yards;
aluminum, barium, cadmium, lead, mercury, manganese and the wastes of a
dozen other metals; salts and raw sewage from towns and farms all flowed
into the river. By the mid-1900s the river was filled with the pollution of civi-
lization, and its “dead spots” were gradually increasing in size. While the
Hudson economy appeared to be a substantial success, the side effects of
growth were silently creating the greatest crisis in valley history. Overcoming
the damage took several generations, but a phalanx of famous families, dedi-
cated environmentalists, and public officials, with support from a concerned
public, would restore the river’s glory.

Reclaiming the Hudson

The genteel traditions of a landed aristocracy ended in the turbulent business
revolutions of the nineteenth century. The carefully preserved homes and
manicured gardens of the Columbia County riverside elite and the splendor
of Westchester mansions was gradually eroded by changing times. The orig-
inal owner of a riverside manor might have been a Livingston, a Beekman, or
an Astor, but properties changed owners many times before being destroyed;
many were resurrected as hospital, college, or other public buildings. Largely
in one county, named for England’s Lady Anne Hyde (1637–71), the
Duchess of York and mother of two future queens, does the older way of life
still seem alive. It still can be experienced because the Hudson Valley has re-
stored itself in large part by making tourism its greatest industry.

Dutchess County was one of New York’s ten original administrative en-
tities. Staatsburgh, perhaps the first permanent settlement in the area, was
economically unimportant and largely bypassed by the industrial revolution.
Staatsburgh was notable only as the home of Morgan Lewis, the third gover-
nor of New York, and his wife Gertrude Livingston Lewis. During the nine-
teenth century, their twenty-five-room Greek Revival manor was the largest
home on a section of river where icehouses were far more common. In time
ownership of the site devolved to Ruth Livingston, whose marriage to the
philanthropist Ogden Mills mandated a larger home. In 1895, the couple
hired the firm of McKim, Mead & White to transform the decrepit manor
into an American Renaissance mansion where they might give fine parties.
The renovated Mills Mansion had sixty-five rooms and fourteen baths.
Ready for the 1896 season, it provided the Mills family with river views for
the next forty years. Elegant and stately, the mansion was the model for “Bel-
lomont” in Wharton’s *The House of Mirth*. In 1938 Gladys Mills Phipps,
discreetly prodded by her neighbor President Franklin D. Roosevelt, pre-
sented the mansion and its surrounding 192 acres to New York State in mem-
ory of her parents. Today’s Mills Mansion sits within the Mills-Norrie State
Park, and is one of the most popular New York State Historic Sites. Filled
with original furniture donated by Ms. Phipps, watched over by the Friends
of Mills Mansion (1988) and funded by the state, the site is a triumph of the
preservationist art. Visitors enter the same portico used by the Mills family,
walk through their picture gallery, and view the river from the restored west-
ern terrace. The mansion, one of seven restored Dutchess homes along the
Hudson, draws visitors into a time past.

Hyde Park, only a few miles south of Staatsburgh, was named after
British Governor Edward Hyde (Lord Cornbury). The family of Dr. John
Bard lived in Hyde Park (their name is honored by an area college), as did
the pioneering horticulturist Dr. David Hosack. By the late nineteenth cen-
tury, Hyde Park was known as a social center of Dutchess County, since
many Astors resided there, and in 1895 one of their properties was sold to
Frederick William Vanderbilt, a grandson of the Commodore. Frederick, the
first of the famous family to actually graduate from college, was an astute
businessman who fell in love with both Dutchess and the Hudson. He decided to raze the old Astor house and called upon McKim, Mead & White to build a Beaux Arts masterpiece. It took the firm three years. The limestone palace it created cost $660,000 to construct and over $2 million to decorate, but Vanderbilt’s fifty-four-room house immediately became “the finest place on the river.” Like their neighbors, the Mills family, the Vanderbilts occupied the mansion for only a few months of the year, but a permanent staff of sixty ran house and grounds. The Hyde Park Vanderbilts embodied the patroon ethic. Fred expanded his estate, built gardens, ran a dairy, and sent the fruits, vegetables, and flowers he produced to compete in the Dutchess County Fair. His wife provided a college education for female employees, sponsored the local visiting nurse service, and oversaw greenhouse plantings. After Frederick died, his heirs donated the mansion to the nation, and in 1940 it became a National Historic Site.

The most famous Dutchess County resident of the twentieth century was a country squire named Roosevelt. In 1819 Nicholas Roosevelt purchased land along the Hudson with money he had made as a partner in the Clermont. His son James purchased a mansion named Springwood in 1867, and in 1880 brought his bride Sara Delano to that home. It was there that Franklin Delano Roosevelt was born in 1882; he swam in the river, ice-boated on Haverstraw Bay, and in 1905 brought his own bride, Eleanor, to live in the mansion. Springwood was the headquarters of Roosevelt’s 1910 election campaign for the legislature, and he planned and carried out its restoration in 1916. During his long political career, Roosevelt returned to Springwood to restore his spirit. Presidential fireside chats were delivered from his home, and he famously entertained the king and queen of England there, serving them frankfurters. In the darkest days of the war he wrote, “All that is within me cries out to go back to my home on the Hudson River,” and few of his friends were surprised when he insisted that he be buried in Springwood’s rose garden.

Roosevelt’s love for the Hudson led him to suggest to his Dutchess County neighbors that the Mills and Vanderbilt estates become federal obligations. His ardor also fostered the determination to build the first presidential library in Hyde Park. FDR himself supervised construction of the library, which opened in 1941. During his presidency Springwood became a National Historic Site, and Eleanor Roosevelt transferred title to the nation after his
death. Roosevelt’s home, run by the National Park Service, and his Presidential Library, operated by the Archivist of the United States, draw visitors and scholars to the town and river he loved. From 1947 to 1962 Eleanor Roosevelt lived in nearby Val-Kill Cottage, the very personal retreat built for her by FDR in 1924; it, too, is a National Historic Site. Probably no single man is as identified with the Hudson as President Roosevelt, and the displays at Springwood and the Library Museum continue to evoke his memory.

Dutchess County has a myriad of attractions; it advertises itself as the “Anemone Capital of the World,” hosts the CIA (Culinary Institute of America), and boasts of its “Wine Trail.” Yet its mystique centers on the heritage of a bygone river aristocracy. In 1990 Congress created the Hudson River Historic District, an area that begins north of Robert Livingston’s Clermont and covers twenty miles of riverfront down to Poughkeepsie. In addition to the riverside estates, the district includes historic Dutchess towns such as Annandale, Rhinecliff, and Staatsburgh and most of the existing Livingston homes. No part of the valley is as evocative of the past, as carefully tended, and as rich with meaning.

Along the Hudson’s eastern shore, wealth fostered examples of excess as several “castles” made their appearance. Iona Island, once the site for a grape growing and winery experiment, was transformed by the federal government into an arsenal for the U.S. Navy. The proximity of dangerous munitions to both Bear Mountain and excursion ships caused Iona Island to be closed and the property was ceded to PIPC, but the turreted remains of the installation can be visited. On an island in the river, Scottish immigrant and arms dealer Francis Bannerman built another munitions warehouse complete with a drawbridge, a moat, and turrets. His family never lived in the faux Highland stronghold but used the island for weekend picnics. Although a powder explosion in 1920 partially ruined the buildings, it apparently added to their allure. The Bannermans moved their business in 1959, and the castle deteriorated as fire and vandalism took their toll. Since 1993 the Bannerman Island Trust has rehabilitated sections of the islet, and it is reachable today by boat from nearby West Point. Farther south in Tarrytown, Howard Carroll’s Carrollcliff was built as a family home in 1910 but is now a magnificent hotel and restaurant called the Castle. Dick’s Castle, across the Hudson from West Point, built to mirror the Alhambra, cost Mrs. Evans Dick over $3 million be-
fore she ran out of funds in 1911; its ruins may yet become a museum or a hotel. Perhaps the strangest of all these relics is Wing’s Castle in the village of Millbrook, seven towers and a moat built by using stone and parts salvaged from other “castles.” Its present rulers made it the site of a Shakespeare day camp. The castles represent failed dreams that valley people have kept alive; they are testimony to a revival of pride and hope in the future.

No single volume adequately discusses, or even lists, the multiple attractions—historic, commercial, entertainment—that pull tourists into the reaches of the Hudson Valley. From the New York City line to Troy, more than eighty separate jurisdictions seek to convince visitors of their uniqueness. They are inherently competitive and proud of their heritage, yet the multiplicity of their laws and regulations has often hindered cooperation. In the closing decades of the last century, these towns and villages successfully overcame local parochialism to forge a regional outlook that seeks to preserve remnants of the past and protect the river they share. Legislative actions by both state and nation provided a framework under which the municipalities work together. Both in preservation of the past and in protecting the environment, the Hudson Valley has experienced a series of major triumphs. Pride in shared heritage unites the region and has given the Hudson Valley a far brighter future.

Mention has been made of the Palisades initiative, a project initiated by two states that accomplished enormous public good by enlisting both patri- cians and plebeians under its banner. George Perkins actively recruited members of the great river families to accomplish PIPC’s goals, and the tradition of service has endured for over a century. No family has demonstrated its devotion to the Hudson more tangibly than the Rockefellers, who backed PIPC financially and who donated the lands atop the Palisades where a parkway could be constructed. The Rockefeller family presence along the Hudson River began with William Rockefeller, who lived at Rockwood Hall near Tarrytown for years before his brother decided to join him. During the Panic of 1893, J. D. Rockefeller began to amass lands along the Pocantico River where a private family compound could be created. He hired William Welles Bosworth to design Kykuit, the “Lookout,” a six-story Georgian stone house high on a hill surrounded by stables, garden terraces, and even a golf course. The Rockefeller retreat was a place whose “fine views invite the soul and
where we can live simply and quietly,” an enclave secure from worldly concerns where four generations of Rockefellers enjoyed the simple life. Governor Nelson Rockefeller displayed his great collection of twentieth-century sculpture on the estate, and ten families of the dynasty still maintain residences on the lands. In time, the Rockefeller Foundation presented Kykuit to the National Trust (1979) along with a substantial endowment, and it has been open to the public since 1994. The core of the Rockefeller State Park and Preserve is acreage originally purchased by John D. Rockefeller.

Junior Rockefeller’s numerous philanthropies included preservation projects at Williamsburg, Chartres Cathedral, and the Cloisters Museum he built in Manhattan. His anonymous support of PIPC projects on the west side of the Hudson was soon mirrored by an equal ardor for saving historic structures on the eastern shore. These began in 1937 when a homebuilder focused unwanted attention on Philipse Manor, whose mill and trading post were critical elements of a colonial dynasty. When the Tarrytown Historical Society asked for his support, Rockefeller not only helped with the purchase but also financed historic reconstruction. The additions of centuries were painstakingly removed, and by 1943 the original Philipse Castle emerged; additional funding added the old mill and dam to the site. In 1945 Junior intervened when a descendant of Washington Irving wanted to sell the famed Sunnyside “snuggery.” The third element of what became Sleepy Hollow Restorations occurred when the manor house built by Stephanus Van Cortlandt in the 1680s was purchased by Rockefeller interests in 1953. Expert restoration at the three sites made them popular tourist attractions.

The success of Sleepy Hollow Restorations spurred a score of similar efforts throughout the Hudson Valley. But tensions remain between the plans of developers, groups who would protect historic buildings and the tax needs of towns. Debate is essential, for not every old structure is important, not every developer is ruthless, and preservation can be an excuse to preserve an exclusive way of life. But PIPC, “the most successful public-private partnership in the country’s history,” and Sleepy Hollow illuminated a pathway that could serve the public interest. Sleepy Hollow ultimately morphed into Historic Hudson Valley, and Mark Rockefeller served as its president. By the 1990s Montgomery Place estate and the Union Church of Pocantico Hills completed its holdings. The latter, “Rockefeller Chapel,” was donated to
Preservation continued to gain supporters as the last century waned, and every community included watchdog committees. But even more important in creating a regional consciousness was growing scientific proof that the entire Hudson was in environmental crisis. Three centuries of development had finally caught up with the mighty stream. One typical tale was the decay of Quassaick Creek in Newburgh, a stream called the “Vale of Avoca” in the 1830s and so lovely that it drew visitors from abroad to the town. By 1842 the creek also hosted grist and woolens mills, plaster and candle makers, rug and furniture factories, a brickyard, a foundry and a carriage maker; by 1850 it was an open sewer. Only in the twenty-first century did Quassaick Creek Estuary Preserve Coalition efforts restore the waterway.

Reform efforts began as early as 1899 when the Federal Refuse Act made it illegal to dump industrial waste into a navigable waterway, and Theodore Roosevelt put conservation and reclamation efforts atop the national agenda. But business interests were powerful, laws were ignored, and not until the 1930s did another Roosevelt tackle environmental problems; the Civilian Conservation Corps built parks for PIPC and protected forest land. The Hudson River, however, was left to its own devices and was unable to cope with the volume of modern pollution. Somehow the river had flushed the debris of the iron, brick, cement, leather, paper, and sugar industries out to sea, but twentieth-century chemicals and an increasing population overcame the river’s natural defenses. Raw sewage released into the river closed the famed Hudson oyster beds as early as 1925, and ever-decreasing fish catches indicated an approaching crisis. Perhaps the most dramatic example was the declining shad catch, that bony native fish that Indians called a porcupine turned inside out by the Great Spirit. Well prepared, shad makes an incomparable dish, a “savory herring” from the river that recorded an all-time record catch of 4.322 million pounds in 1889; by 1916, the annual catch was only 40,173 pounds. No one was able to say exactly what was happening or why, but commercial fishermen noted that catches of blueback herring, alewife, Atlantic tomcod, and striped bass were declining. The Hudson was slowly dying.

Almost everyone professed a love for the Hudson and lamented its de-
cline. In a classic American mental straddle, the inability of local, state, and federal governments to reverse the decay was condemned even as capitalistic enterprise was extolled. Agencies as varied as the New York State Health Department, New York State Conservation Department, the Intrastate Sanitary Commission, PIPC, the Corps of Engineers, the Federal Water Pollution Control Administration, New York City antipollution groups, and the health departments of virtually every riverside community had little impact during the Hudson’s slide into toxicity. Inspectors found reasons to ignore Penn Central rail yards that dumped oil directly into the Hudson, a GM plant that colored the river with car paints, a battery plant in Cold Spring that expelled cadmium into the stream, and an Anaconda plant that dumped metals into the river at Hastings. Brick works were an accepted part of the Hudson shoreline, as were leather operations in Greene County. Paper processing plants above Troy were vital to the prosperity of Glens Falls, Fort Edward, and Mechanicville, and Rockland could not afford to lose a paper mill that was the only large employer in Piermont. Pollution came from a cement factory in Athens and the fleet of Liberty Ships anchored off Haverstraw while fish kills occurred in the “dead pool” south of Albany and in hot water expelled by a nuclear facility at Buchanan. Yet each calamity affected only a small area of the Hudson and local protests were effectively muted. And so the entire stream decayed.

In retrospect, a strong environmental movement has been a factor in American political life since the 1960s. If the modern preservationist movement stems from the wanton destruction of Pennsylvania Station in New York City, its environmental counterpart was an attempt by the Consolidated Edison Company to transform Storm King Mountain into a hydroelectric site. Hudson Valley communities normally received utility service from a regional conglomerate, the Central Hudson Gas and Electric Corporation, but Con Ed generating needs were far greater since it drew customers from the massive metropolitan region. Late in 1962, its nuclear reactor, constructed at Buchanan on the Hudson, was completed and had gone to full power on January 15, 1963. But Indian Point 1 was a prototype facility, the first of six planned reactors, and both its efficiency and its productivity were uncertain. Faced with the possibility of energy shortages, Con Ed announced plans to construct a non-nuclear “pumped storage power generating plant” into the
face of Storm King Mountain across the Hudson. The corporation also contemplated four other such facilities along the Hudson, proposals that made Storm King Mountain a regional concern. Instead of a corporate triumph, the Storm King pumping station initiated a bitter seventeen-year battle that created regional unity. Valley environmentalists ultimately stopped “progress” and inspired a national movement.

Con Ed’s proposal had the support of PIPC, the village of Cornwall-on-Hudson and local business leaders. Governor Nelson Rockefeller appeared to favor Con Ed’s proposal, as did his brother Laurance, head of the State Council of Parks. But the Storm King project would build into the mountain, construct power lines across the “Wind Gate” of the Highlands, and deface the Hudson’s scenic splendor. Although the New York Times opposed the plan, PIPC leaders testified that the proposals would have “little adverse effect on the scenic beauty” of the river. Only in November 1963 did Carl Carmer organize area opposition, recruiting environmental lawyers and prominent local residents such as Cornelia Otis Skinner, Jimmy Cagney, and Brooks Atkinson to oppose Con Ed. Soon fleets of small boats appeared opposite the proposed plant site emblazoned with the motto “Dig They Won’t.” The threat to the river fostered the creation of new groups such as Scenic Hudson Preservation Conference, while established groups like the Cortland Conservation Society questioned the plant’s impact on Hudson fish resources. In 1964 Richard Ottinger won a seat in Congress by opposing construction of the plant and New York City leaders began to see it as a threat to their water supply.

Governor Rockefeller was paying attention, and in 1965 he created the Hudson River Valley Commission to deal with such issues. He also sponsored the first New York bond issue to achieve cleaner water. Con Ed boasted of support from the Federal Power Commission, which licensed the project, but a federal appeals court in 1965 declared that “preservation of natural beauty and of national historic shrines” were issues yet to be decided. Opposition swelled with the formation of the Hudson River Fisherman’s Association (1966) and Secretary of the Interior Morris Udall’s declaration of personal opposition. PIPC suddenly reversed itself and announced its “vigorous opposition” to industrial use of parklands, while opposing lawyers filed unending appeals. Although the utility actually turned earth for three months
in 1974, it faced so many suits from various constituencies that its board lost hope. The final blow came in 1977 when the newly created federal Environmental Protection Agency ordered that cooling towers must be added to the facility to protect river fish populations from heated water, a ruling that also applied to Con Ed nuclear facilities at Indian Point.

After all the court proceedings, the welfare of Hudson fish populations finally killed the Storm King proposal. Fish kills at the expanded Indian Point nuclear facility had become common, and in 1980 the utility agreed to fund a $12 million research project on river fish populations; it also surrendered its license to build at Storm King. Studies of the Hudson ecosystem indicate that fish kills have practically ceased over the last twenty years, while striped bass in the river now outnumber the human population of New York State. Storm King proved that the Hudson Valley could achieve impossible goals if its associations and communities worked together. The seventeen-year fight over the pumping station fostered environmental awareness and court drama in the entire length of the valley. For example, Fred Danbeck quit his job at Anaconda Wire and Cable in 1969 because it was dumping acid, waste oil, and copper filings into the Hudson. The U.S. Attorney pushed Danbeck’s suit, and in 1973 the corporation was fined $200,000 for violating the 1899 Refuse Act. Similarly, Arthur Glowka, with the help of the Hudson River Fisherman’s Association, won a judgment against Penn Central’s dumping of oil into the river. Successful proceedings against Ciba-Geigy, Standard Brands, American Cyanamid, Philmont Finishing, General Motors, Yonkers Contracting, and Refined Syrups and Sugars quickly followed. Congress passed the National Environmental Policy Act (1969) mandating that environmental impact statements be filed on construction projects. A decade later protection of striped bass quashed Corps of Engineer plans to build the Westway on Manhattan Island.

The Storm King controversy inspired folk singer Pete Seeger to finance construction of the Clearwater. Launched in May 1969, the 106-foot sloop has carried almost 400,000 schoolchildren in educational trips on the Hudson, while Seeger’s foundation campaigns for clean water, wetland restoration, and edible fish along the entire river. The Clearwater is the focus of an annual Great Hudson River Revival that raises funds for environmental testing, education, and lawsuits. Smaller versions of the Clearwater, the Woody
Guthrie and the Sojourner Truth, later joined the environmental task force. The culmination of regional effort was the founding of Hudson Riverkeeper in 1983, an organization whose lawyers have achieved an enviable record in court against polluters and unplanned development.

Hudson history during the last thirty years has been a series of hard-won triumphs that have restored a national treasure to health. Using federal law, individual citizens were able to sue local polluters and obtain personal compensation from both companies and laggard state agencies; Riverkeeper encouraged these suits with its “Bag-A-Polluter” campaign. State money from several bond issues was effectively allocated and formerly impossible tasks, such as eliminating the vast toxic area of the Albany Pool, were accomplished. New York City intensified sewage treatment and completed a municipal system of fourteen plants in 1986. Today it is safe to swim almost anywhere in the Hudson, and Manhattan’s waters are so clean it can host river swimming meets. By 2000, all major waste dumping in the Hudson was eliminated, and the Hudson River Foundation reported that less than a million gallons of toxic material entered the river daily. The Superfund enacted by the Carter administration in 1980 provided a mechanism to force the cleanup of abandoned factory sites and battles to eliminate the toxic residues of decades of manufacturing commenced. Even without Superfund money, the Marathon Battery Company agreed to dredge and clean Foundry Bay in Cold Spring, where it had expelled cadmium from 1953 to 1979; a second consent decree in 1993 provided $109 million for the removal of toxic chemicals from the land. Similarly, General Motors agreed to clean the Tarrytown site where Chevrolet cars were produced until 1996. The town plans to build housing on lands that were thought to be irrevocably lost. Reclaiming the Hudson was hard work, but individual efforts, scientific study groups from area colleges, and the tireless advocacy of Scenic Hudson, the Hudson River Foundation, the Natural Resources Defense Council, Clearwater Sloop, the Open Space Institution, and other watchdog groups have been successful. In 2002, the New York State Department of Environmental Protection issued the declaration every lover of the river had awaited: the Hudson is “the cleanest it’s been in 90 or 100 years.” Water quality is so improved that the valley now has five public beaches, with plans for thirteen more.

Many campaigns are unresolved. For example, since 1942 General
Electric plants in Fort Edward and Hudson Falls manufactured power capacitors, and in the process daily dumped as much as ninety pounds of excess polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) into the Hudson. The dumping was then legal and was halted in 1977, but almost forty-four miles of the Hudson above Troy were found to be “hot” with the long-lasting chemical. GE, which funded the first cleanup efforts, was condemned as a polluter, so its chief executive officer refused to settle the case. Since the science of PCB removal is much in dispute, dredging efforts await the construction of processing plants not scheduled to begin until 2006. Not all conservation issues are straightforward and easily settled. The town of Beacon was able to halt installation of a plastic waterslide, but Hudson was severely divided by a proposal to build a $300 million cement plant. Hudson lost most of its factory jobs in the 1970s when the existing cement plant closed, and its recovery in the 1990s was based on tourism, antique stores, and second-home buyers. Working people looked forward to permanent jobs and construction contracts, and Hudson officials anticipated increased tax revenues to fill the treasury. But the details revealed that the proposed plant would have an open pit limestone mine, use a 2.1-mile conveyor belt, and cause air and visual pollution and would not create many jobs. Its coal-burning smokestacks would be visible from Olana and throw a smoke plume over much of New England. The meager industrial gains provided to workers would be offset by ending tourism, and the proposal died in 2005. And finally, a hundred miles south in Buchanan, questions about the safety of Indian Point nuclear reactors roils the river. Indian Point 2 has the worst safety record in the nation, and regional apprehension intensified after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Local politicians led a chorus of cries to close the facility, while anxious mothers demonstrated against “Hiroshima on the Hudson,” even though the facility was paying 95 percent of Buchanan’s village taxes and 50 percent of its school taxes. Management reforms by new ownership resulted in vast operating improvements, and Indian Point has repeatedly passed federal regulations. Its electrical output could be replaced only by building smaller facilities along the river; construction of each would be certainly opposed by neighboring communities. Yet opposition to Indian Point is so intense that four surrounding counties have refused to certify evacuation plans for the area, and its future is unclear. The issue has led to serial finger pointing at all levels
Predicting the future is always difficult, but the Hudson Valley seems poised to undergo revitalization over the next decade. The high-tech industries coming into the valley demand secure energy, and New York plans up to twenty small electric plants along the river. Natural gas needed to run these plants will be delivered by the Millennium Pipeline, a 425-mile conduit for Canadian reserves that will serve both river factories and the metropolitan area. Tourism, largely responsible for the rebirth of many towns in the valley, will continue to increase, and the artist communities in Hudson, Nyack, and Poughkeepsie will continue to thrive. Beloved for its landscapes, the Hudson Valley now boasts the Storm King Art Center and a new museum, Dia in Beacon, as well as a Frank Ghery building in Annandale-on-Hudson, all of which promise to draw future visitors.

The Hudson Valley’s comeback from disaster is one of the great stories of the last forty years. Everywhere there are examples of renewed vitality. Legislation by every level of government demonstrates that politics has caught up with the concerns of preservationists. Hudson estuaries are now protected by federal legislation (1982), the state authorized a Greenway along its shore in 1992 and the entire stream was designated an American Heritage River in 1998. Its water is again clean and shellfish beds of the river were opened in 2001 after being closed for over seven decades. Porpoises again swim in the river, the shad run is increasing, and virtually all fish caught below Albany may be eaten. Eagles, reduced to a single breeding pair in 1975, again fly over the river while wolves roam the Catskills; there was even a moose loose in the Adirondacks. The story of the Hudson Valley is America’s saga. Identified with the birth of the United States, integral to its industrial expansion, and a vital part of America’s cultural history, the area is an amazing blend of both old and new. Its multiple attractions draw over 30 million visitors every year and they enjoy every experience. Historical reconstruction, modern art, spiritual renewal, spa facilities, and simple contemplation are all available. Armies of defenders protect the history, health, scenery, and society of America’s River. Optimists claim the river has already been “saved,” while pessimists claim there is still much to be accomplished. Both agree that the Hudson is a living reality that must be nurtured and protected. Appreciating its history makes the task a little easier.