

INTRODUCTION

As the author of two guidebooks to the Hudson Valley that have been in print for over two decades, I continually travel throughout this scenic historic region. On these trips I often spend time in several of the villages and cities along the Hudson River. Each one of them has a unique ambiance and its own colorful history. And each is a dynamic entity, constantly changing.

Over the years, as I drove around the Valley I passed through cobblestone streets, explored the ruins of an old factory, or watched the renovation of a celebrated theater. I grew curious about the stories behind these buildings and historic sites and why the towns grew up where they did—an aspect of the region I had not yet delved into.

And so I set out on a journey that spanned from Albany, Kingston, and Poughkeepsie to Newburgh, Beacon, and Nyack, to name just some of the places award-winning photographer Hardie Truesdale and I have explored. The photographs and text here present only a glimpse of what these vital places have to offer. The book follows some of the major Hudson River cities, towns, and villages, from Albany in the north to Westchester and Rockland counties in the south, approximately half the 315 miles of the Hudson River.

In these busy hubs of the region, change is the only constant. Houses disappear, riverfront parks sprout up, and towns are transformed in one generation into totally different communities. Entire industries are lost, relocate, or are replaced by new technologies. One example of this phenomenon is the whaling industry of the city of Hudson that has left behind only a small collection of model ships at the local historical society. Nothing in the city today suggests the atmosphere of a whaling port.

Between 1820 and 1830, the Hudson Valley was the fastest growing region in the nation, and the Hudson River was the main artery of trade in America. The

strategic importance of the Hudson River increased after 1825 when the Erie Canal was completed.

Every town and village from Manhattan to Albany had a fleet of sloops, and these graceful vessels dominated the river until 1807 when Robert Fulton introduced the steamboat. At the time, steamboats were cheaper and faster than sloops and they accommodated large numbers of passengers as well. But their heyday was short lived.

The Civil War marked the end of one period in Hudson Valley history and the beginning of another—the era of the railroads. By the end of the nineteenth century, accessible areas north of Manhattan had expanded greatly thanks to rail travel. Also between 1825 and 1875 the land area of the United States more than doubled and the population of the country more than tripled. The prosperous years of the Catskills were to a great extent a result of the rise of the railroads.

In the early twentieth century, the automobile evolved from a luxury item to a widely used vehicle for both pleasure and business and approximately 2,500,000 cars were registered. After state and federal highway systems were built, this led to increased interest in Hudson Valley real estate and tourism—and the demise of the railroads.

Critical events occurred in Hudson River towns; many of them influenced the course of American history. Interestingly, Kingston was the first capital of New York State, Poughkeepsie was the second, and Albany was the third. While I grew up near Peekskill where the Standard Brands plant employed 1,000 people, I never realized the significant role their yeast played in literally raising the bread of millions of Americans. The *Clearwater* originated in Beacon and the sloop has inspired citizens everywhere to become involved with environmental issues in their communities since its maiden voyage in 1969.



The four-hundredth anniversary of Henry Hudson's journey seemed like an appropriate time to look back as well as ahead. Over four centuries the Hudson Valley, once inhabited solely by Native Americans, developed into a densely populated commercial region rich in manufacturing but also in scenery and culture. The commerce of the Hudson River—and the towns that developed along its banks—was the lifeblood of New York State's economy for centuries. Water transportation made possible the limestone, cement, brick, and bluestone industries. The beauty of the region attracted tourists, writers, and artists. In the twentieth century when the river became heavily polluted by industrial waste, this damage was recognized, and efforts were undertaken to end it and revitalize the Hudson. Once again, the region is prospering, particularly through growth in tourism, and there is hope for a bright future.

Perhaps this book will spark the curiosity of readers to visit Hudson Valley towns and villages and discover more about their pasts as well as enjoy what they offer today. I sincerely hope this pictorial journey will lead you on as fascinating a trip as Hardie and I have experienced to the heart of our region, to the pulsing towns that have always been such a vital part of the Hudson Valley—and our nation.

SUNY Central Administration Building, left
Albany skyline, right