

ONE

The Valley Setting

IN 1884, WALLACE BRUCE, in his handbook for tourists traveling up the Hudson River on steamboats, described the city of Poughkeepsie as having “a beautiful location, and is justly regarded the finest residence city on the river. It is not only midway between New York and Albany, but also midway between the Highlands and the Catskills, commanding a view of the mountain portals on the south and the mountain overlook on the north—the Gibraltar of Revolutionary fame and the dreamland of Rip Van Winkle.”¹

The larger context for the history of the city of Poughkeepsie and, by the twentieth century, the Poughkeepsie urban region has always been the mid-Hudson valley with its surrounding mountains, farms, and resorts, and other river towns. Our narrative begins with the valley as both physical environment and culturally significant locale. This chapter then asks what kinds of continuity, change, and adaptation occurred in the valley before the twentieth century, letting us see how they prepared residents for change during the twentieth century.

RIVER, MOUNTAINS, VALLEY

Bruce’s description in 1884 locates Poughkeepsie on a mental map that combines regional literary legend, including the writings of Washington Irving and James Fenimore Cooper, and references to the emerging historical narrative of the birth of the nation, with economic and political coordinates to the state capital upstream and the growing metropolis of New York City downriver. Romantic, perhaps, but it was a description that could appeal to tourists. The beauty of the natural environment drew most of them to the valley where they sought out the picturesque wilderness landscape painted by the artists of the Hudson River school.

Thomas Cole, founder of the Hudson River school, painted the mountains, gorges, and “kills” of the Catskills in the 1820s and 1830s, helping to

establish the consciousness of wilderness and nature in the creation of an American culture. His painting of Kaaterskill Falls drew numerous other artists to sketch this landmark feature, second only as a site to search for the sublime to that of the larger Niagara Falls. The Year 1824 saw the establishment of a mountain resort, the Catskill Mountain House, where thousands of artists and tourists could more comfortably enter the mountain landscape. It was from the site of the Catskill Mountain House overlooking the Hudson River valley to the east that James Fenimore Cooper wrote in *The Pioneers* (1823) that the Leather-stocking Natty Bumppo looked out upon the vista and declared that a man could stand there and see "Creation! . . . all creation."² Tourists in the 1830s wrote paeans to the panoramic view of the Hudson River valley from this cliff edge, a view stretching 50 miles. As the European traveler Harriet Martineau wrote in 1835, "I shall never forget, if I live to be a hundred, how the world lay at my feet."³

Despite the vanished wilderness and the inroads of development since the 1820s and 1830s, the valley's beauty continues to draw tourists, one of the recurring themes in the region's history. That attraction reinforced notions that love of nature and of living close to it was a primary American attribute. Andrew Jackson Downing's writings and efforts as a landscape gardener in the 1840s would transform the American domesticated landscape and form the basis for the development of landscape design "adapted to North America," and landscape architecture as a profession. In his *Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening, Adapted to North America; with a View to the Improvement of Country Residence* (1841), Downing remarked on the extensive reshaping of mid-Hudson valley landscape by the estates that fronted on the Hudson River in the rural areas separating the villages and small cities: "There is no part of the Union where the taste in Landscape Gardening is so far advanced, as on the middle portion of the Hudson."⁴ During the mid-nineteenth century, the countryside was becoming domesticated, creating a more refined sense of the picturesque outside of the rugged wildness of the Hudson Highlands. In the twenty-first century, the region became hospitable to the arts once again, tourism became important for valley prosperity, and so did conserving the landscape along the river. That led to a successful push in 1997 for the U.S. Congress to designate the Hudson River valley as the "Landscape that Defines America."⁵

The Hudson remained the chief artery for the transportation of goods and people throughout the first two centuries of European settlement, but not without major change as the quality of its water declined through human pollution. In the late twentieth century, river cleanup became a regional preoccupation. The river actually is an estuary or drowned river valley, sometimes described as an arm of the Atlantic Ocean. Called by Native American Indians, the original inhabitants of the region, "great waters constantly in motion," or "the river that flows both ways," its tidal range stretches northward as far

inland as Troy, while a salt front, usually in the vicinity north of Peekskill, may reach the Poughkeepsie area during summer drought conditions when the water flow is low. The river channel reaches a depth of 700 feet near West Point in the Hudson Highlands, and deepwater along the Poughkeepsie shore and the subsequent development of deepwater docking facilities has been a significant factor in the city's economic history. Dredging of shallower reaches of the river to the north of Poughkeepsie has allowed oceangoing vessels to sail up to Albany.

For most of its length, and during most months of the year, the Hudson offered fair sailing, although the winds in the narrow passage through the Hudson Highland gorge could be treacherous. Eventually, however, sailing ships, schooners, and sloops gave way to steamboats after Robert Fulton and his father-in-law Robert Livingston built their boat the *Clermont*, named after the Livingston estate, in 1807. Their attempt to monopolize steamboat traffic failed, and competition for passengers and trade exploded. Steamboats became floating palaces, and fares plummeted. By the mid-nineteenth century, travel time from Albany to New York City had decreased to a matter of many hours rather than days as steam power eliminated the reliance on wind and the difficulties of passage through the Highlands.

From the earliest days, the fishing industry held an important role in the economies of riverfront communities all along the Hudson River. Tons of shad and sturgeon were shipped downriver to the growing urban markets throughout the nineteenth century. Unfortunately, declining fish stocks due to overfishing and river pollution during the twentieth century virtually eliminated fishing as a commercial industry. Ice harvesting, which once served as a major industry during the winter months, has disappeared altogether. Ice blocks cut from the frozen river and stored in gigantic icehouses all along the shore were shipped to city dwellers to preserve their food during summer heat in the years prior to electrification and refrigeration. With this drastic change in their industries, both fishermen and ice cutters had to adapt by finding other employment.

An easily distinguishable physical region, the middle portion of the valley had the clarity of highly visible mountain boundaries and the continuity of a vast geological time scale. The Hudson Highlands are composed of one-billion-year-old crystalline igneous and metamorphic rocks, such as granites and gneisses, that are highly resistant to erosion and extend from Storm King Mountain on the west bank, just north of the military academy at West Point, across the Hudson River to Breakneck Mountain and Mount Beacon on the east bank. Northeast from the Hudson Highlands, the Taconic mountain range forms a boundary between New York and Connecticut. Its erosional remnants are generally less than 2,000 feet in height, yet their relatively unbroken mass has been a barrier to east-west movement.

The Catskill Mountains frame the western horizon. Reaching heights of 4,000 feet, the flanks of the Catskills show their sedimentary origins as layers

of sandstone and shale especially clearly in the low light of winter after a dusting of snow cover. Between the Catskill front, or Wall of Manitou, and the Hudson River lies the Shawangunk Ridge, a highly resistant formation of quartzite conglomerate that extends more than 100 miles south to New Jersey where it becomes the Kittatinny Mountains. The glacially scoured top of the ridge with its exceedingly thin soil cover, the steep escarpment, and the masses of fallen talus at its slopes are micro-ecological habitats for rare plant communities, such as the only high altitude pine barrens in eastern North America.

The regional landscape of the past thirteen to fourteen thousand years offered early inhabitants a host of natural resources whose use and exploitation have changed dramatically over time, sometimes to near extinction of a species like the beaver. Europeans cut down chestnut-oak forests and pines for firewood, lumber and charcoal for iron furnaces, hemlocks for tanning, and opened up large areas for farming. Riverbank clay was formed into bricks, limestone into cement, and sand and gravel for construction.

The soils of much of the mid-Hudson valley are fertile and friable and, from the beginning of European settlement, the land has been a productive agricultural region, primarily in grains and fruit orchards. After the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825, lands in the western part of the state and eventually the Midwest supplied the wheat for the nation, while commercial agriculture in the mid-Hudson concentrated more on its dairy products for the growing markets in Connecticut and metropolitan New York. With the decline of dairy farming in the twentieth century, farmers have once again had to adapt, often by leaving farming altogether or developing new agricultural specialties and new ways of marketing,

VALLEY PEOPLE

The ethnic and racial composition of the valley's human population has changed periodically and dramatically since the early settlements in the seventeenth century. The Dutch and English settlers who traveled north from New York to the mid-Hudson valley in the seventeenth century found a region with highly visible natural boundaries, abundant natural resources, and an indigenous population of usually friendly Indians. The European newcomers initially preferred the high, dry west bank of the Hudson with some of the province's best agricultural land, in what is now Orange and Ulster counties. Dutchess County on the east bank was less attractive, "thought to be low, swampy, and heavily wooded."⁶ The first European settlement in Dutchess probably occurred near Rhinebeck, across the river from Wiltwyck (Kingston) on the west bank that had been chartered as early as 1661.

Settlement in the Poughkeepsie area did not begin until about 1683. The first patent in Dutchess was the Rombout in 1685, a purchase by two New York City residents of about 85,000 acres from the Wappinger Indians

included both the Wappinger and Fishkill valleys. The Rombout encompassed the current towns of Fishkill, East Fishkill, Wappinger, the city of Beacon, and parts of Poughkeepsie and LaGrangeville. Other large patents in the county in the 1680s were the Great Nine Partners and the Beekman family's upper (Rhinebeck) and interior southeastern patents. Marked economic inequality in landholdings characterized Dutchess County in its earliest days, but would be reduced in the wake of the American Revolution.

Whereas the owners of smaller patents on the west bank moved sooner to divide and sell their lands, creating a society of mostly medium-sized and small freeholds, the larger patentees on the east bank preferred leasing to tenants, resulting in conflicts over ownership and the terms of leases in the mid-eighteenth century and slower settlement. As late as 1733, Dutchess County numbered only 389 families, half of them settled on leased lands on Henry Beekman's Rhinebeck and interior patents. By mid-century, the central precincts of Dutchess County, including Rombout, Poughkeepsie, and Amenia, had many freeholds, but to the north and south, large landlords predominated like the Livingstons and the Philipses whose tenants still owed some feudal services. Loyalist holdings provided the majority of land confiscated and sold in Dutchess as a result of the Revolution. The number of individual landholders increased twelvefold and most of the new owners came from the lower classes.

Before the Revolution, Dutch and English farms had covered the land between the Highlands and the Catskills; in 1790, Ulster County had the highest proportion of residents of Dutch descent in the mid-Hudson region, 30 percent compared to 18 percent or less in Columbia, Dutchess, and Orange counties. The west shore Dutch had been joined by Scotch-Irish immigrants in settling the western uplands. After the English conquered New Netherland in 1664, the ethnic mix of the colony had become even more complicated. Both the English and the Dutch brought African slaves to the valley.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE FIRST INHABITANTS?

The landscape the white newcomers preempted had not been empty, but the native Americans whom they encountered, the Algonkians, had not aggressively resisted the whites' encroachment. The natives lost their best lands during the seventeenth century. Small remuneration or trickery in the unending pressure of whites for land purchases, coupled with native lack of immunity to the Europeans' diseases, had already reduced the Indian population on both sides of the river—to about 300 by 1774, if Governor Tryon's estimation can be believed. During the eighteenth century, a wandering group of displaced Indians variously known as Wappingers, Lenape, and Pomptons eked out a marginal existence in unoccupied or thinly settled areas in the Hudson River Highlands. They were led by members of the Nimham family who served as

cultural brokers, translating and negotiating for their people. Daniel Nimham learned English, became a Christian, and pressed—ultimately unsuccessfully—their claims to land with the governments in New York and London. Feeling betrayed by the British, he joined the patriot cause during the Revolution, dying in battle. Soon thereafter his people lost nearly all the land of which they still had use.

The remnant largely disappeared from public mention and historical memory until the end of the twentieth century. A notable brief exception is the guide prepared by the Federal Writers' Project, under the WPA. It notes the unhappy experience in Dutchess County of the short-lived (1740–1744) Moravian congregation of Indian converts at Shekomeko, ordered to leave after four years. The guide adds that the “compulsory emigration of the Indians of Shekomeko was but an instance of the many migrations north, south, and west in which the native population of Dutchess melted away during the eighteenth century. Large numbers wandered into Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Maryland, and many more into Ohio.”⁷ As they left, a new stream of white newcomers pushed into the Hudson valley from the east.

The westward push of New Englanders into Dutchess and Columbia counties during the late eighteenth century brought a burst of Yankee entrepreneurship. Movement of individuals and families among the region's localities became more frequent as did consciousness of variation within the region, especially in the population's origins and opportunities. Richard Smith, a land speculator, noted in 1768 the “divergent customs of newly arrived New Englanders, of long established ‘low Dutch,’ of remnants of the palatine emigration of 1708, and of the close, mercenary, and avaricious Dutch and English of Albany.”⁸ The Dutch tended to maintain their linguistic and theological separateness longer, but gradually a new sense of regional identity developed as Yankees mixed and married with Yorkers of English and Dutch descent. Thus began that succession, and subsequent intermingling, of white newcomer groups in the mid-Hudson valley that has continued right down to the present, especially the great waves of Irish and German immigrants in the 1840s and 1850s and of central, southern, and eastern Europeans at the turn of the twentieth century.

More Yankees and tenant farmers on large patents held by landlords could be found in Dutchess County on the east bank of the Hudson than in Ulster County on the west bank. In Ulster, Dutch ancestry remained predominant and a majority of the farmers occupied small freeholds averaging a little less than 200 acres. But the goals of most mid-eighteenth-century farmers throughout the valley remained similar: achieve subsistence and increase comfort, add to one's land, and pass it on to the next generation. While some farmers already participated in long-distance trade, most obtained the goods and services they couldn't supply for themselves through local exchanges with a variety of partners, especially neighbors and storekeepers. “The distribution

of liabilities and debts among numerous fellow villagers increased their dependence on each other as well as their security.”⁹ In Ulster County, swapping of products remained common until the mid-1830s when storekeepers increasingly demanded cash for the goods they sold. As local exchange diminished, market orientation increased.

A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD?

During the American Revolution, residents of the Hudson Valley held separate allegiances to the British and American causes. In 1777, in an attempt to divide the colonists, the British forces, along with some of the valley’s Loyalists, marched north, captured forts in the Highlands, and sailed up river to burn Kingston. However, the British defeat at Saratoga failed to secure the valley. The story of Benedict Arnold’s capture in 1780 would later add romantic legend for nineteenth-century tourists, while General George Washington’s headquarters in Newburgh from 1782 to the cessation of hostilities in 1783, and the rebuilding of Clermont, the home of Robert Livingston, after having been burned by the British, would add historic “association” to the valley landscape. After the capitol moved from Kingston to Poughkeepsie, the city played its most significant role as the site of the ratification of the Constitution by New York State. Land and people, formerly divided, became united, as many Tories fled to Canada and their lands redistributed.

Confiscation of Loyalist estates was initially a boon to speculators. But the speculators mostly sold small tracts to settlers, so that freeholders soon increased dramatically in Westchester and Dutchess counties. When the New York legislature forbade primogeniture and entail and eliminated all feudal tenures, most landlords sold rather than continue leasing, with the Van Rensselaers and Livingstons, patriots during the Revolution, holding out until the 1840s.

Sixteen miles of historic properties along the Hudson in the townships of Rhinebeck and Red Hook can be traced back to one source, Chancellor Robert R. Livingston. In 1774, he inherited the vast lands of his grandfather, father, and his mother’s father, Colonel Henry Beekman, that included 17,000 acres of Clermont in Columbia County, Beekman patents and purchases in Dutchess County, and the 240,000-acre Great Hardenbergh Patent in the southern Catskills. The Livingstons’ chain of great estates included Grasmere, The Pynes, Wildercliff, Montgomery Place, Rokeby, and Edgewater, each mostly having 300 acres and depending on a staff of servants and slaves. They were joined by rich businessmen from New York like the Roosevelts, collectively forming a river gentry that stretched from Fishkill to the southern border of Columbia County. Between 1742 and 1925, these families created eighty estates, half of them still in the original families in the 1920s.

The old families who made up the river gentry in the twentieth century had long before lost the entrepreneurial spirit that had made their fortunes in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Their descendants viewed tenants as social inferiors who must be kept in their place, and as river gentry they also looked down on the citizens of nearby river towns who sought to make money in trade and other ungentlemanly callings. Martha Bayne, writing in 1937, noted one continuity in rural Dutchess over two centuries: "Just as there was a contrast between the small land owners and their wealthier neighbors before the Revolution, there is now a split between the few remaining estate owners and the 'dirt farmers.'"¹⁰ The legacy of their landed wealth continued into the twentieth century when some of their mansions now became museums open to the local public as well as visiting tourists.

WHY SO MANY SLAVES IN THE VALLEY?

Left out of the gradual process during the eighteenth century of white ethnic amalgamation were the African slaves brought to the Hudson River valley, first by the Dutch West India Company and later by the Royal African Company monopoly, providing forced labor for Dutch and English settlers. The first census of Poughkeepsie in 1714 enumerated thirty slaves in a population of 445. In Ulster County, slaves constituted as many as one-tenth of all inhabitants. By 1790, the Hudson valley accounted for 60 percent of all the slaves in New York State. The fertility of valley soils encouraged white farmers to look for sources of cheap agricultural labor outside their own families. They turned to slaves who could be expected to develop the needed versatility of skills as valley farms in the eighteenth century moved beyond their mainstay of grains for export to more diversified production. Advertisements for male slaves regularly included the "phrase 'understands all kinds of farm work.'"¹¹

One-fourth of the households in the townships of Fishkill, Poughkeepsie, and Rhinebeck had slaves. Manumission was rare and overall the valley was the most politically and racially conservative area in the state. In 1799, the state adopted gradual abolition by freeing those born after that date, but compensated their owners by giving them the labor of these children until African American males reached the age of twenty-eight and females, the age of twenty-five. So the legal end of slavery became 1827. Moreover, the slave owners successfully insisted on limiting the rights of free blacks. African Americans contributed to the early development of the valley as involuntary members of its labor force.

Yorkers and Yankees made the economic decisions that set the character and future direction of the mid-Hudson region. White male residents of the mid-Hudson valley's four major river towns by 1800—Hudson, Kingston, Newburgh, and Poughkeepsie—soon exploited new opportunities for growth.

RIVER TOWNS TAP THEIR HINTERLANDS

Commercial access by water to a larger regional market extending from Long Island to Albany fostered the growth of the river towns after 1800, spurring them to build transportation networks to exploit their overlapping hinterlands. The city of Hudson in Columbia County led the way in tapping its hinterland for agricultural produce to supply New York City. By 1807, it had built three turnpikes to reach the western Connecticut and Massachusetts trade.

By the early nineteenth century, farmers had thickly settled all the good arable land of Dutchess, Orange, and Ulster counties, with wheat as their primary crop. Newburgh had built its first turnpike in 1801 and, by 1820, the village had established in distant Ithaca a branch office of the Bank of Newburgh. In 1808, Poughkeepsians built Dutchess Turnpike eastward to Sharon, Connecticut, connecting it with an existing turnpike to Litchfield. By that year, only Kingston had failed to push a major turnpike into its hinterland. All four towns embraced improvements in river transportation. First sailing vessels, then steamboats, carried produce that had been brought from the interior to urban markets. From Poughkeepsie's river landings in 1813, sloops sailed for New York City; the next year the village became a steamboat terminal.

However, by 1825, the opening of "Clinton's folly," the state-constructed Erie Canal from Albany to Buffalo, dashed any ambitions of Hudson river towns to capture trade west of the Catskills. The great population shift within New York State between 1785 and 1820 also favored use of the canal. In the earlier year, three-quarters of New Yorkers lived in the Hudson valley or along the Atlantic coast. By 1820, three-quarters lived in the newer counties to the north and west of Albany. Farmers in the more fertile land of the Mohawk valley and Genesee regions now preferred traveling the shorter distance north to the canal.

So, needing to adapt their production in order to survive economically, Hudson valley farmers began experimenting with a variety of other grain crops, like barley, along with raising sheep and cattle. Commercial agriculture in the valley also turned to fresh vegetables, fruits, and juice for urban markets in Connecticut and metropolitan New York. In the end, most farmers in the region chose a new specialization in dairying, at first supplying butter and cheese. Many farmers in Ulster County supplemented their dairy products with domestic manufacture of barrel staves. Both kinds of production remained firmly in the household's control, unlike the putting-out system in New England where the merchant providing materials and selling the finished product set the terms. With the coming of railroads by mid-century, fresh milk would be added to valley specialization in dairying. Together with improved transportation and the growing interest in a more businesslike and "scientific" agriculture would gradually modify valley farmers' daily round of life, increasing the trend to a market-oriented family. As late as the 1830s, a young farmhand

in LaGrange illustrated the mix of simple methods of production with the ambition, the literacy, and the sociability of a self-consciously proud and independent rural white population, especially those of Yankee descent.

The day after Christmas 1833, Vincent Morgan Townsend, still a bachelor at age twenty-one on his family's farm in what is now the outer suburb, LaGrangeville, told his diary that "Pap" let him have a horse for an evening social if he would take a load to the river landing at Poughkeepsie [about 10 miles from the farm], which he did. "Smoked 2 segars, drank a glass of beer and cut for hop. . . . Stopped at the mill and got a grist of buckwheat," hoping for buckwheat cakes every morning that winter. Next day, Townsend had "company in the evening. Talked mostly about how to get rich, regaled with nuts and apples til 10."¹² The next night he read the newspaper and a chapter in Scott's biography of Napoleon. Twice he reported participating in debates at the Nelson House in Poughkeepsie, once successfully on the question: Is Novel Reading Beneficial?

In the mid-Hudson region, towns along the river, settled as economic ventures, vied for supremacy as the major population center between New York City and Albany. At first glance, considering their remarkably similar size, rates of growth, and ethnic composition, Hudson, Kingston, Newburgh, and Poughkeepsie seem sufficiently alike to be easily generalized. But they took very different paths to prosperity, partly as a result of their differing ability to capture the trade of their hinterlands. They also had varying degrees of success in establishing strategies for economic development. Their histories up to the end of the nineteenth century indicate why Poughkeepsie with its more diversified manufacturing began the twentieth century as the leading urban center in the region.

HUDSON, KINGSTON, AND NEWBURGH BEFORE 1900

An infusion of New Englanders into Columbia County created a new river community almost overnight after 1785. Quaker whaling families from Nantucket established the city of Hudson. Within three years, Hudson had fifteen hundred inhabitants, shipbuilding yards, a sperm oil works, and many shops. With twenty-five seagoing boats, it became one of the busiest ports on the river. For its well-planned layout of streets, enterprising Hudson adopted the grid system, well before New York City's 1811 choice of the grid. The Hudson plan included a parade ground at the city's western end on a rock promontory rising above the river where residents enjoyed the spectacular views at sunset with the Catskill Mountains in the distance. The whalers experienced ups and downs in prosperity, until the bottom dropped out of the market for sperm oil by the 1840s. Farming in Columbia only partially compensated for that economic loss. Enjoying moderate prosperity subsequently, Hudson by 1870 had less than half the population of the valley's other three major river

towns. However, in the late twentieth century, the city's siting would lend itself nicely to becoming a center for antique dealers serving second-home owners and visitors from New York City to Columbia County.

In contrast to the sudden burst of entrepreneurial energy that created Hudson in the late eighteenth century, Kingston remained a quiet, largely Dutch farming trade center in 1820. An unexpected project begun by outside investors during the mid-1820s radically transformed Kingston's economy, population, and orientation to Rondout Creek. Many of the old Dutch families reacted to the impact of the construction—completed in 1828—of the Delaware and Hudson Canal with a shock like that of Rip Van Winkle waking up from his long sleep. The canal connected the anthracite coal fields of Pennsylvania by water with the Hudson River at Kingston and thus to river towns and ports throughout the Northeast. In addition to coal export, the demand for canal building materials spurred a major cement, limestone, and bluestone industry, located not in the old hilltop village but along previously undeveloped Rondout Creek. In Rondout, lots of backbreaking “dollar-a-day” jobs moving coal and stone and lots of heavy, dusty work in the lime and cement plants required lots of unskilled or semiskilled workers.

These poorly paid workers constituted half of Kingston's labor force by 1860 whereas they accounted for only one-third in Poughkeepsie and other cities with more diversified economies. More than one-third of Kingston's population was Irish-born compared to one-fifth of Poughkeepsie's. Squeezed together in the shanties of Rondout's “New Dublin,” they competed with native firemen or less skilled natives and together rioted with a group violence unknown to the village. Soon the river town came to seem very different from its hinterland where Dutch-descended farming families continued to pride themselves on the stability and relative quiet of their households and hamlets.

By the 1840s, Newburgh faced a different threat. Like all the region's river ports at the beginning of the steamboat era, the village quickly built turnpikes to gather agricultural exports from its hinterland. In the 1810s, Newburgh's freighters invested in the ambitious project of linking Newburgh with Ithaca, hoping to bring produce overland from the Finger Lakes and Genesee country for transshipment to the New York City region and beyond. But the Erie Canal had ended that dream and by 1841 the Erie Railroad posed a new challenge by laying track from New York City to Goshen about 20 miles away from Newburgh. Goshen's new ability to bypass its rival in shipping butter and pork had a calamitous effect on Newburgh's freighting business, resulting in loss of population, shop closing, and plummeting real estate values. For rich freighting families who had put their profits in local real estate as a secure investment, the choice now was to leave town or innovate.

In sharp contrast to Poughkeepsie's diversified manufacturers and Kingston's businesses dependent on the canal built by outsiders, Newburgh's

freighters chose united and bold innovation. Following the example of Boston's merchant princes who abandoned overseas trade to build cotton textile factories, the freighters established in 1844 the Newburgh steam mills employing three hundred workers, mostly women. They constructed their huge factory building, still standing, at riverside, facilitating river transport of raw materials and finished product. Soon an industrial complex grew up, with mills and nearby iron foundries to create textile machinery.

SLOWING URBAN GROWTH

The next century would see major changes and differences between the four major river towns, but their relative size would remain remarkably similar. In 1850, Poughkeepsie numbered 13,944 inhabitants; Newburgh, 11,415; and Kingston and Rondout combined, 10,232 while Hudson lagged well behind with 6,286. The towns continued to compete for advantage in attracting customers, new businesses, transportation facilities, and large public employers, like state hospitals. But the towns' relative sizes remained similar in 1870; by 1900, the differences of the larger three narrowed to hover around 24,000 with Newburgh and Kingston slightly ahead of Poughkeepsie. Over the next few decades of the twentieth century, Poughkeepsie nearly doubled in size as it gained far more than any of the others. Overlapping hinterlands brought continuing competition and rivalry.

Sharing the lower part of the continuous waterway from New York City to Buffalo, the four river towns also shared in the flow of immigrants northward up the Hudson from the 1830s onward. Some came for specific job opportunities like Irish immigrants taking unskilled work near the Delaware and Hudson Canal or constructing the Hudson River Railroad to Poughkeepsie in the late 1840s. Others, like some German craftsmen, stopped short of intended westward destinations to try practicing their trades in the valley. By 1870, Kingston had nearly 27 percent foreign-born, Newburgh, 26 percent, Poughkeepsie, 22 percent, and Hudson 19 percent. Proportions of colored residents ranged between 2.4 percent in Kingston and 4 percent in Hudson. The arrival of so many immigrants with alien cultures unsettled older native residents, making them more conscious of what they shared with each other. They became less concerned with "lingering Yankee-Yorker antagonisms. In this way the deep-rooted cultural distinctiveness of the Hudson-Mohawk region tended to fade in significance."¹³

Also fading during the late nineteenth century was the region's economic importance and relative population growth within New York State. The four river towns continued to be centers for local trade, depending on manufacturing for further growth, but they did not develop strong specialized industries comparable to those of the upstate cities they had once hoped to surpass, like Utica, Syracuse, and Rochester.

KNOCKOUTS IN THE 1890s

All three of the mid-Hudson region's larger river towns, now small cities of more than twenty thousand inhabitants, entered the 1890s in a mood of pride and prosperity. But that decade saw dramatic reversals in fortune for both Newburgh and Kingston. In Newburgh, the steam mills closed in 1892. Then the Panic of 1893 bankrupted several machinery factories. This time the city's moneyed class did not invest in any bold new venture, let alone help struggling manufacturers stay in business. Recovery in Newburgh came inadvertently. The national panic in 1893 lowered rents enough to create inexpensive housing. That made Newburgh attractive for garment factories and sweatshops that required little capital but ample cheap labor, usually of immigrants. Several clothing companies moved to Newburgh, often occupying vacated premises of the former iron and engine works. Old-timers might deplore these alien newcomers, but the new industry thrived in Newburgh until the 1930s.

The 1890s punished Kingston more severely. Unable to compete with the low rates and the speed of railroad transportation, the Delaware and Hudson Canal ceased operation in 1898. The city's waterfront section, previously the center of business and population, now became a rundown neighborhood on the edge of the city. Almost all of the industries that had helped fuel Kingston's growth during the late nineteenth century either disappeared or suffered badly, including ice, textiles, tanning, and cement. Local cement production had been hurt by the new Portland cement process, but some production continued at Hudson and Cementon.

By the end of the century, all the river towns had embraced the railroad and turned away from the river traffic that once made their waterfronts so lively. The transition came earliest in Poughkeepsie. The village, soon to become incorporated as a city, had through service to Albany by 1851, linking up with lines to Buffalo that became the New York Central system. The west shore towns initially had high hopes of achieving competitive railroad connections, but only got their own line to New York City in 1884. It never became a major trunk line and soon was absorbed by the New York Central system. The last railroad competition between the river towns centered on their rivalry in trying to become a gateway city linking New England and Mid-Atlantic railroad systems; the aim was to bypass metropolitan New York's traffic congestion. Poughkeepsie triumphed over Newburgh and Kingston by bridging the Hudson in 1889, though the triumph brought much less economic benefit to the city than had been anticipated.

Although Poughkeepsie generally resembled its three neighbors along the Hudson in many particulars—size, ethnic composition, and economic booms and busts—its development during the nineteenth century differed in its railroad connections, the diversification of its manufacturing, and its greater ability

correspondingly to weather economic downturns. Like its rivals, Poughkeepsie continued to depend on its surrounding agricultural hinterland throughout the nineteenth century. The urban nodes of the mid-Hudson valley knew the importance of farm prosperity to their own prosperity and constantly talked about the ebbs and flows of farmers coming to market.