

“THE HUDSON RIVER: A VOYAGE THROUGH TIME”

Section 1 – Battery to Palisades

Come aboard! Welcome to the steamboat *Empire*.

We make daily scheduled runs between the Battery in New York City and the Albany area, 150 miles up river.

I'm R. B. Macy, Captain of the *Empire*, which was built in 1843 and measures 304 feet in length. In 1807 Robert Fulton piloted his steamboat, the *North River* up to Albany. For 32 hours he coaxed his 139-foot boat, known as *Fulton's monster*, northward. Curious onlookers lined the Westchester shoreline, watching in utter amazement. Fulton and his partner, Robert Livingston, revolutionized travel on the river, holding a monopoly on steamboat travel until the U. S. Supreme Court acted to create competition. The busy river you see today is a result of Fulton's enterprise and that decision by the Supreme Court.

We go much faster today, and it costs you less. I call that progress.

I'll be your guide today, while my experienced first mate, Mr. Dobbins, will handle my piloting duties.

When you were boarding you probably noticed the crowds here at the Battery--a sure sign that most steamboat travelers prefer the 7am morning departure. This time of day will allow you to enjoy the splendid scenery.

I want to assure you that in spite of all the stories you've no doubt heard about explosions and dangerous boilers spread by the *street barkers* of our competitors, this is a very safe ship.

This special Westchester excursion will make several stops and will conclude at Peekskill in the early afternoon. Then the *Empire* moves on to Albany.

Today's fare is one dollar; meals are, of course, extra at 50 cents each. Some second-class boats take passengers at half these rates, but they generally carry freight, make many long stops, and leave tourists unhappy.

Now, please go to the "ticket office" and purchase your ticket for the trip, When you have your ticket, make your way up to the promenade deck, choose a seat and make yourself comfortable.

Many of you are making this trip for the first time, and to help you, and especially our foreign guests, and those on the Fashionable Tour of Saratoga and Niagara Falls, we are offering a pocket-sized panorama map sketched and engraved by William Wade, a prominent New York mapmaker. The cost for the black-and-white is \$1.50, color \$2.00.

The fold-out map is in a scale of one inch to one mile and will help you identify historic sights, the beauties of the river and will make you feel proud of our country. The map covers both shore lines because Mr. Wade sketched from mid-river looking east and west.

We will embark shortly in order to take advantage of the incoming flood tide carried into the Hudson by the currents of the Atlantic Ocean. This is better than battling the ebb tide of the river, which rushes down to the sea from the fresh water sources of the Adirondack mountains. The Indians called the Hudson the river that flows both ways.

Look sharply to the port side. Rising almost 500 feet up are the Palisades, a rock formation extending a distance of about 20 miles like the solid wall of a fort. As we glide swiftly by, I am always impressed by the Palisades. They are a great work of God—certainly equal to any European natural wonder.

[Section 2 – Spuyten Duyvel Creek to Yonkers](#)

Thirteen miles north of the city of New York, Spuyten Duyvel Creek flows into the Hudson. It connects with the Harlem River and forms the northern boundary of New York City, separating it from Westchester County.

According to some of my sloop captain friends, who still speak Dutch, Spuyten Duyvil comes from the Dutch phrase *spuit den duyvil* (in spite of the Devil). It was first used to describe the strong flow of water caused by

the double tide I spoke of earlier. Your panorama marks this spot with the words, “the end on N. York Island.”

As you look back to the Creek, let your eye carry you inland toward Kings Bridge, which was constructed by Frederick Philipse in 1673. It crosses the Harlem and connects Manhattan to lower Westchester on the great road from New York to Albany. These links are critical for the movement of people and goods between New York City and Westchester. Kingsbridge was also one of the local battle grounds of the American Revolution in the summer of 1778.

On the north bank of Spuyten Duyvil, near the mouth, cast your eyes upward, and you will see Fort Independence, where the flag is waving.

As we head north of the Harlem River we see Westchester County, a 470-square-mile area of great natural beauty, attracting many New Yorkers to the country. The county has many farms, which provide New York City with the food needed to sustain a growing population. Thriving villages, town settlements and country estates tell you this is a prosperous place. Even greater wealth may come to Westchester when it takes advantage of its many deposits of marble, iron ore, copper and the sulphur spring in Sing Sing.

As a steamboat captain I have navigated both of Westchester’s shorelines--along the Hudson River and along Long Island Sound. This morning we will be traveling the county’s western boundary on the Hudson River.

Beginning in the 1820s, several wealthy New York families bought large parcels of land in lower Yonkers. They began building castles on the Hudson, recreating the Rhine River Valley in Germany. The first person to build a home here was William Lewis Morris, a prominent New York lawyer. Morris and his wife built a two-story stone house that looked like a temple, although it was called a manor. Much later it came to be known as Wave Hill. You can see how its hillside location offers a wonderful view.

On our port side, the steamboat *Niagara*, built in 1844, is about to pass us. It is a highly decorated, floating palace named after Niagara Falls, a most popular tourist attraction. Many of the great boats are named after places, but they also commemorate historic events like *Independence* and sometimes they pay homage to historical figures like the *Henry Clay* and the *General Jackson*.

Philipsburg or Yonkers, 16 miles from New York, is a thriving village of 3,000 inhabitants. It's very popular with New York City residents in the warm season when they take a steamboat to Yonkers to escape the heat of the city.

Section 3 – Yonkers through Dobbs Ferry

Yonkers stands on a site that was once inhabited by Algonquian-speaking Indians, but very few of them have remained in the area.

Fishing provides a good living for many residents of Yonkers, as it did for the Indians before them. You will notice many small fishing boats loaded with catches of shad, river herring and striped bass.

In 1646 Dutchman Adriaen van der Donck obtained a grant from the Dutch West India Company and purchased land from the Indians. He built a saw mill at the junction of the Hudson and Nepperhan rivers, which was known in Dutch as *De Zaag Kill* (the Saw Creek) and in English as the *Saw Mill River*. You will see many mills on our trip where smaller rivers and streams join the Hudson. I have been told that Yonkers attributes its name to Van der Donck, for he was a "jonkheer," or nobleman.

The area acquired by Van Der Donck passed into the hands of the Frederick Philipse family in the late 17th century. They erected Philipse Manor Hall near the junction of the Hudson and the Nepperhan rivers, and it still stands in its original location. It's the oldest building in Yonkers.

In 1831 Lemuel Wells constructed a steamboat wharf. You can see on your panorama map how it reaches out into the Hudson for an eighth of a mile. The locals were happy because they no longer had to row across to New Jersey to make a connection with a steamboat.

By 1825 Yonkers farmers were shipping their crops to New York City. Pickles are a specialty of the locals and Yonkers is known as the pickle port.

We will see many sloops on our trip this morning. They are the work boats of the Hudson. Just look for a ship with one main sail and jib.

A few industries are beginning to appear in Yonkers--the Waring Hat Factory and John Copcutt's mill on the Nepperhan River are among them. Copcutt's mill saws fine timber, which is then sent to New York.

Prince and Obed Paddock built a dam across the Saw Mill River. It provided power for their saw mill business. Mills, including grist, saw, plaster and felt-making mills, use the power of local rivers.

Hastings is a village between the Hudson and the Saw Mill River with a good landing, a button factory and one hotel. Local residents tell me they began to use the name Hastings around 1838 because they felt their village resembled Hastings, England.

The 340-foot *Hendrik Hudson*, built in 1845, is on our left. Why do they call it the Hendrik, I wonder, when Hudson's name was Henry. He was an Englishman, you know, not Dutch.

The Dobbs Ferry steamboat landing 22 miles north of New York is home to two churches, a tavern and 30 dwellings. The famous author Washington Irving attends church at Zion Episcopal. You can see the church's steeple from the boat.

[Section 4 – Irving to Tarrytown](#)

Irving is a small village 26 miles from New York City with a secure landing and about 20 dwellings. If you look to the port side, there is a wonderful view of one of the highest points on the Palisades. The village was named in honor of the writer Washington Irving, who lives on its northernmost border.

Founding father Alexander Hamilton's son James built a mansion overlooking the Hudson in 1835. You can see it about halfway up the hillside. He named it *Nevis* after the British crown colony in the West Indies where his father was born.

I have just ordered first mate Dobbins to blow the whistle as we pass Mr. Irving's home, Sunnyside. It's easy to spot the house because it sits so close to the river. Sometimes with the aid of my spyglass I can see Mr. Irving sitting on his porch, so I give him another blast.

After Irving bought this old farmhouse, he drew on his many European trips for ideas on how to renovate it. It has some gables and something called a pagoda, which was just completed. I sometimes see him in his small rowboat moving about the inlet next to his home. Lots of passengers ask us to stop for a visit. Sorry, you'll have to do that on your own time.

In 1836 William Paulding, former New York City mayor and good friend of Washington Irving, bought property in Tarrytown on which to build a villa he would call "Knoll." Designed by the well-known architect A. J. Davis, this gothic, church-like building is about two-thirds of the way up the hillside.

Just in front of us off the bow, we will enter the three-mile-wide Tappan Zee, which extends northward 10 miles to Teller's Point, along the boundary between Rockland and Westchester counties. The word *Tappan* translates to "cold" and *Zee*, of course, is Dutch for sea. As you gaze over this body of water, you can feel why explorers and early settlers believed that they were not just on the river, but on a sea.

The Tappan Zee is also one of the river reaches or stretches of water visible between bands in the river. Sloop captains use the reaches to measure distances. The Tappan Reach extends seven miles to Teller's Point, and the third reach is the narrow point called Haverstraw.

Tarrytown was first settled in the 1680s. My Dutch friends insist on the Dutch naming of the town, *Tarwe dorp* or wheat town, in recognition of the wheat grown, milled and shipped from here. The town contains almost 1,000 residents, and 100 dwellings. A daily steamboat runs to New York City, and several locally owned sloops keep the waterfront busy.

Section 5 – Tarrytown to Croton

In September 1780 British Major John Andre traveled up the Hudson on the warship *Vulture* to meet the American traitor Benedict Arnold. After the meeting, he attempted to return to New York City by traveling through Westchester County. He was carrying plans for West Point in his boot.

Andre was stopped in Tarrytown by local militia men John Paulding, Isaac Van Wart and David Williams. Nobody around here forgets their names. They became suspicious, searched him and found the plans. Andre was

arrested, tried and hanged as a spy, just across the river at Tappan. This makes the Hudson so special to me, with all its connections to the Revolution. Sometimes I think it should be called, America's River.

Sleepy Hollow, the valley of the Pocantico River, is the setting of the famous Washington Irving ghost story, *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*.

For a time the Indian tribes, which had inhabited the area bordering the Pocantico, shared the lands with Dutch trappers and homesteaders, but before the 17th century had ended, the lands had passed to Frederick Philipse.

In the 1680s Philipse built a manor house, a mill, a dam and a church here. He invited Dutch families to settle nearby and during the next 100 years English, French and German settlers and even African American slaves came to Sleepy Hollow.

Sparta is a small village, one mile south of Sing Sing on Sparta Brook, which empties into the Hudson. It was an early subdivision that had an active landing dock, until Sing Sing's dock captured all the boat traffic.

The marble columns will help you identify the new female prison on the elevated ground to the south of Sing Sing, the New York State prison. Its well-furnished apartments for the matrons and the neat reception room for convicts are all in keeping with our special view of female prisoners.

The transportation of prison-made goods, supplies and prisoners required a dock with a 12-foot draft to accommodate the daily sloop and steamboat landings. State prisoners from New York City are ferried here from Greenwich Street in Manhattan, inspiring the phrase "sent up the river." This is ferrying work I try to avoid.

About one-half mile south of the village, you can see a long horizontal structure at the water's edge. This is the state prison, which today holds about 850 male inmates--all nasty characters. The prison's main building has 1,000 cells, workshops, chapel, kitchen, storehouse and an active quarry, which provides the stone for the prison as well as for other public buildings. It is a dangerous little city. Building of the prison began in 1825, and from the looks of things, it is still under construction.

Four landings for steamboats and sloops, which carry farm produce and travelers 33 miles south to New York City, make Sing Sing a crowded waterfront. It has a ship yard, an iron foundry, one grist mill, and Brandreth's Pill Factory. The village has a population of 2,500 and is known for its marble quarries.

The Croton Aqueduct, built from 1837-1842, is the most important and extensive project of its kind ever undertaken in this country. Most people don't realize its magnitude or its utility.

A great dam on the Croton River, which enters the Hudson right here, leads to a 40-mile-long tunnel, running parallel to the Hudson River. The tunnel provides New York City with pure Croton water. The entire system is an incredible feat of engineering!

On your panorama map the words "Croton Aqueduct" tell you that you can follow the route of the tunnel by spotting the ventilators located every mile on its journey to the Harlem River.

[Section 6 – Croton to the End](#)

Croton is a village located on the west side of the Croton River. It has one tavern, two stores and about a dozen dwellings. The landing provides steamboat service to New York City.

The two-mile peninsula known as Teller's Point or Croton Point, which separates the Tappan Zee from Haverstraw Bay, lies immediately above the mouth of the Croton River. It was called Senas-qua by the Indians. William Teller purchased it from the Indians for a barrel of rum and 12 blankets.

The Underhill family has owned this property for generations, and they have planted beautiful vineyards and orchards here. They seeded about 80 acres with Isabella and Catawba grape vines. They also grow fine apples and melons.

Haverstraw Bay is an extension of the Hudson River, lying opposite the town of Haverstraw in Rockland County.

The relationship between the Hudson Valley brick industry and New York grew as the need for building materials increased. For every brick transported to the city, I see a hole left in a Westchester hillside.

Kings Ferry connects Verplanck's Point on the east side of the Hudson, with Stony Point on the west. It was the southernmost crossing point and communication line for Americans during the Revolution, connecting the New England states with the rest of the colonies.

In July of 1779 Brigadier General Anthony Wayne led American soldiers in a daring midnight assault against the British forces at Stony Point. They waded through the shallow waters of Haverstraw Bay south of Stony Point and secured an important victory. The American victory at Stony Point was the last major battle in the North during the Revolutionary War.

Verplank's Point is a small village of 15 to 20 dwellings four miles south of Peekskill. It too has a steamboat landing. Henry Hudson's ship, the *Half Moon*, dropped anchor in the waters off this point in 1609.

During the Revolution several military works were built in Verplanck to assist Stony Point in protecting Kings Ferry. It provided an invaluable staging area for Continental troops defending any British effort against West Point, the principal American fortification along the river.

Peekskill is a village on Annsville Creek at the mouth of Peekskill River. It has a snuff factory, a wire factory and a busy wharf. Its 200 dwellings and eight churches are home to 2,000 inhabitants. Six iron foundries produce stoves and plow castings. A hanging tree still stands on Oak Hill where two British spies were executed during the Revolution.

In 1826 the government built the first lighthouse on the Hudson River. It was not a dwelling, but there was a keeper's house. The lighthouses along the river were lit by whale oil, then coal oil.

(End of Westchester)

As we swing out into the river, look north at the Hudson Highlands, a range of mountains 100 to 1,600 feet above sea level, extending on both sides of the Hudson River from Haverstraw to Newburgh Bay.

Here the river narrows into the Horse Race and creates a rugged landscape that has attracted many painters, inspired writers and impressed many tourists and passengers on steamboats like ours.

The Highlands were important during the American Revolution—here the Continental Army held the river valley and prevented the British from cutting off New England from the rest of the colonies. A Chain, one of two cast locally, was stretched across the river in an effort to prevent the British from going up the Hudson.

For those of you who are leaving us in Peekskill, I hope you've enjoyed our Hudson River excursion, and that your panorama map will serve as a reminder of our trip, the sights we saw and the stories of our history that were told today. All the years that I have served as a river captain have helped me appreciate the words of Washington Irving when he thanked God that he "was born on the banks of the Hudson." He traced much that was good in his life to his early "companionship with the glorious river."

Permission to go ashore.