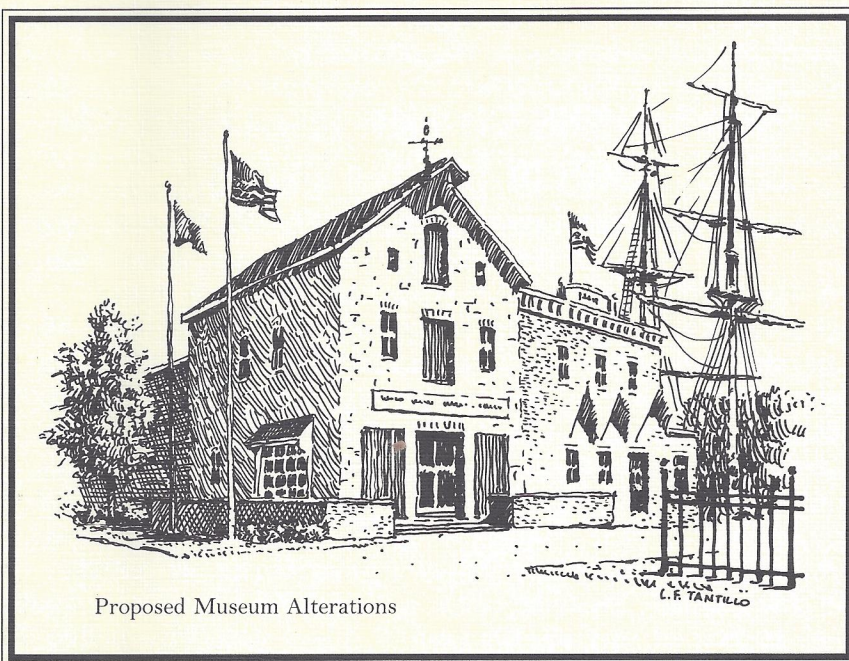


THE PILOT'S LOG

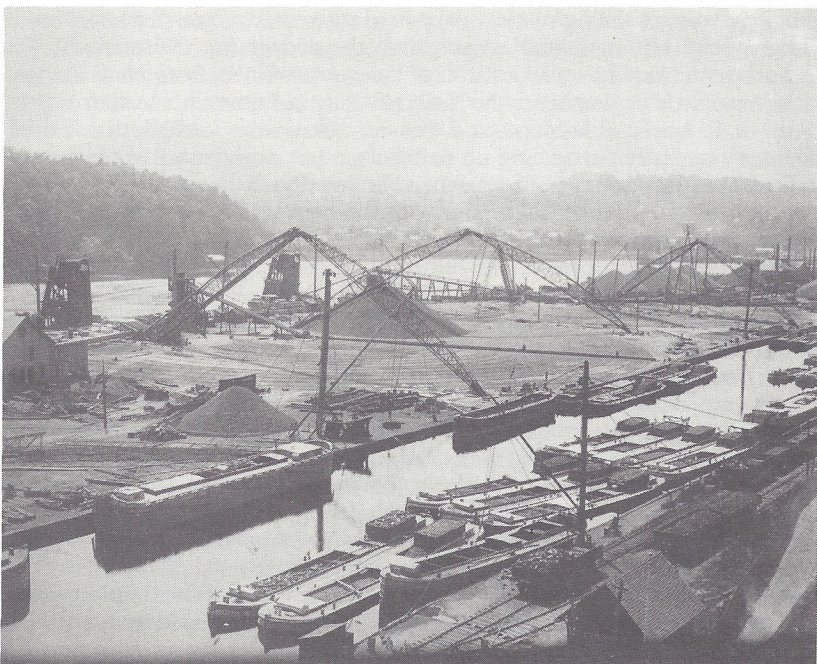


THE HUDSON RIVER MARITIME MUSEUM

Our future is our past.

1999 EXHIBIT: HUDSON RIVER CARGOES AND CARRIERS

Allyne Lange - Curator



Coal yard, Rondout

The Hudson River was used as a road for hundreds of years for transport of people and goods before there were paved roads or railroads. The major form of transport on the river from the early 1600s to the early 19th century was the Hudson River sloop, an adaptation of a Dutch single-masted boat which was brought here by the Dutch settlers who were the dominant group among the early European settlers in the Hudson Valley. Everything and everybody traveled by Hudson River sloop, but they didn't travel fast. In those pre-engine days, it could take a week to sail between New York and Albany. According to ads of the times, the sloops operated on a two week schedule (one week down and one week back), to allow for the vagaries of the wind and the time it took to fill the boat at various landings and towns. For passengers in a hurry, or perishable freight, such a schedule could be a problem.

After 1807, with the advent of the steamboat, life for passengers on the Hudson in a hurry became much better. From a one week trip between New York and Albany, the time was reduced to slightly more than one day, and then

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became even faster as better and better steamboats and engines were built. However, freight continued to travel by the slower sailing vessels because it was much cheaper to ship cargo that way. As more and more steamboats came onto the river and competition made shipping on these boats cheaper, perishable freight like fruit, vegetables and milk traveled by steamboat. Less perishable bulk cargoes traveled in barges pulled by steamboats especially built for towing. Even so, sailing vessels, sloops and schooners still carried bulky heavy cargoes like bluestone and cement until the end of the 19th century. The schooners included a steady traffic of coastal schooners from New England which would bring lumber to the Hudson Valley and return home with cargoes like coal, bricks, bluestone and cement. Ironically, though, the coastal schooners usually did not sail up the Hudson but were towed in convoys by steam towboats or tugs. The smaller Hudson River sloops and schooners, whose scale was more in keeping with the narrow reaches of the Hudson, could sail the river.

By the mid-19th century the railroad began to come on the scene in the Hudson Valley to compete with the boats. The railroad had the advantage of being able to run in the winter when the river was frozen and closed for boat traffic, so it steadily gained favor with shippers. However, the river retained a large amount of freight traffic because it was still a cheap way to ship things.

Towing was a big business on the Hudson River during most of the 19th century into the early 20th century. The towing steamers were at first outmoded passenger steamers with cabins and extra decks removed. Then steamers especially made for towing were built, like the famous *Norwich*, the *Oswego*, the *Austin* and others which still resembled stripped down passenger steamboats with the usual side paddlewheels. However, around the time of the Civil War a new type of towboat with a screw propeller appeared on the scene. This was the tugboat which we are still familiar with today, a small but powerful vessel, whose attractive shape is easily recognizable and used in many work situations worldwide. Towboats and tugs pulled long strings of barges, often as many as forty, carrying many types of cargoes slowly up and down the Hudson day and night from the late 19th into the early 20th centuries. Usually a second helper tug was employed to take barges on and off the tow as it moved along, helping with the towing also as needed.

Often the individual barges had captains who lived in tiny houses onboard their boats, sometimes with their families accompanying them. It was not unusual to see laundry hung out on the backs of the barges or dogs and children playing on deck. Small children were usually tethered with some sort of rope to keep them from falling overboard. Small supply boats called bumboats came alongside the tows as they moved slowly along to sell groceries and other necessities to the barge families.

Rondout was the home of the Cornell Steamboat Company, which was the dominant towing company on the Hudson from the 1880s through the 1930s, with a fleet of up to 60 tugs and towboats of all sizes. Rondout was also the home of a number of boat builders who built hundreds of barges and canal boats over the years to carry many different types of cargoes on the Hudson and on the canals like the Delaware and Hudson which fed into the Hudson. Most of the towns along the Hudson had boat-building operations in the early

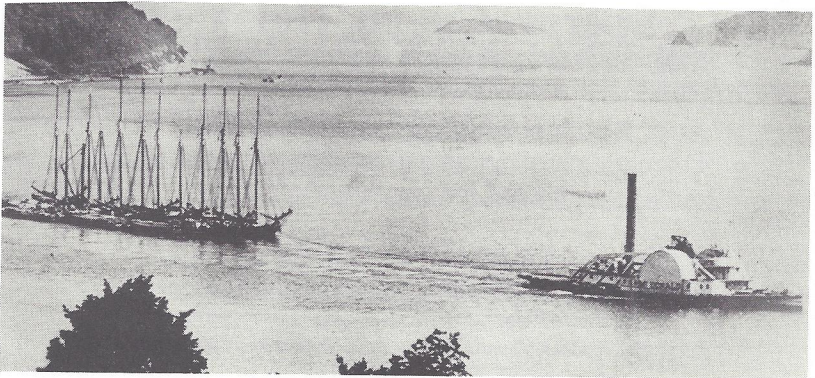
HUDSON RIVER CARGOES & CARRIERS

days of the sloops, but by the late 19th century boatbuilding was concentrated in fewer places, like Newburgh and Rondout.

What were the cargoes carried on the Hudson River by boat? Farm products and wood dominated the trade from the 17th into the 19th centuries. Industrial products, particularly building products like cement, bluestone and bricks produced in the Hudson Valley in the 19th and early 20th centuries, were the major cargoes traveling on the river to New York City to build the city. Coal was also a major cargo, coming to the Hudson on the Delaware and Hudson Canal in the 19th century, and later by rail from eastern Pennsylvania. Ice cut in the Hudson and lakes along the river was also another major cargo from the mid-19th century into the 1920s transported in fleets of covered barges. Grain from the west was carried on the Hudson, and fruit produced in the mid and upper Hudson regions was transported in huge quantities by steamer through the 1930s.

In the 20th century, self-propelled freighters served to carry cargoes not handled by towboats and barges. Sometimes these were cargoes that traveled through the canals. Often these were cargoes that traveled to or from distant ports, sometimes across the ocean or halfway around the world. Some cargoes that had previously come by coastal schooner, like lumber, now arrived by freighter. Liquid cargoes arrived by tanker including oil and molasses. Fuel oil is today the dominant cargo on the Hudson and it travels by barge and by tanker. The molasses which used to go to Albany by tanker was used as a component in cattle feed. Gypsum remains a cargo carried by freighter on the Hudson.

Of the old cargoes carried on the Hudson, few remain today. Only cement and crushed rock or traprock remain of the old building materials excavated and produced along the banks of the Hudson and carried by barge. Most cargo moving along the Hudson today goes by rail or road. Where water was once the cheapest way to ship along the Hudson, it is no longer necessarily true. The industries that shipped by water are gone for the most part. Also much of the bulk cargo that once traveled to Albany from all over the world like bananas or foreign cars now go elsewhere. Those colorful days are gone and are missed by those who remember them.



A Tow of Schooners