

# PILOT LOG 2002

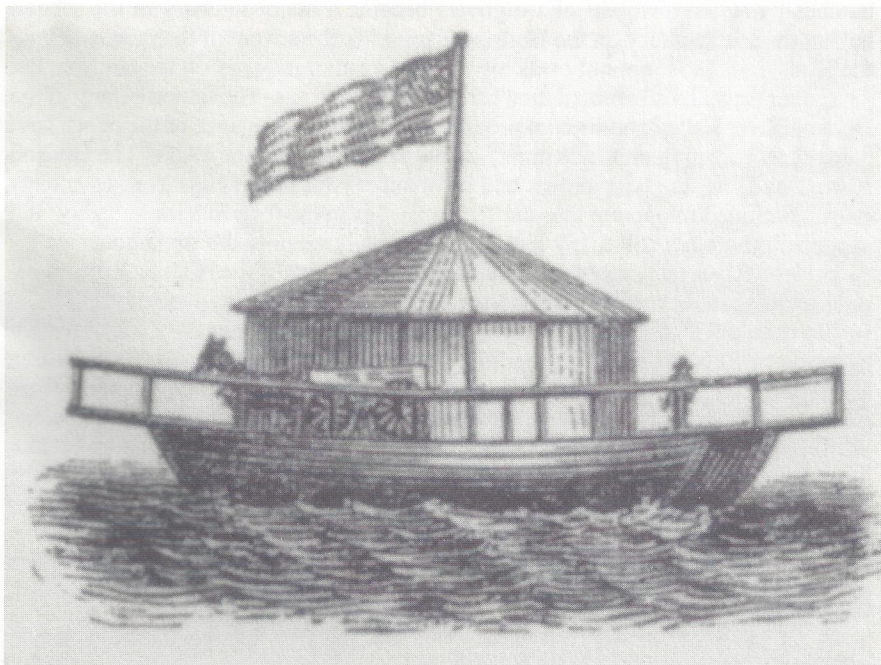


## 350 Years of Hudson River Maritime History

2002 marks the 350th anniversary of the first European settlement of Kingston in 1652. In commemoration of that event, the Hudson River Maritime Museum has put together an exhibit which surveys the major periods in the maritime history of the last 350 years. In 1609 Henry Hudson explored the river that now bears his name. Export of furs from New Netherland, as the Dutch called the Hudson Valley region, was of primary interest in the early years, and transport of the furs was by Indian canoe and small Dutch-type sailing vessels. As settlers came into the valley people and goods were transported by these Dutch-type sailing vessels which came to be known as Hudson River sloops. These attractive sailboats continued to be used on the Hudson River for carrying freight as late as the end of the 19th century. During the 19th century, as Hudson River School artists portrayed the beautiful and Romantic scenery of the area, Hudson River sloops often found a prominent place in those works.

The Hudson River Valley was a major theatre during the Revolutionary War, with the British attempting to take the Valley to cut off New England from the rest of the former colonies. The British did take New York City and remained there for the rest of the war, but they were not successful in taking the Hudson Valley. There were a number of battles for forts in the Hudson Highlands and an attempt made to

### **An early nineteenth century horse-powered ferry**



capture West Point, still a fort at that time. A British fleet sailed up the Hudson in 1777 firing on areas known to house patriots. At Kingston the British came ashore that October and burned the village because, as the state capital, Kingston was known as a hotbed of patriot activity. There were attempts by small American vessels to repulse the British fleet but these were not successful. However, the Battle of Saratoga, where Gen. Burgoyne was defeated, finished the British drive to take the Hudson Valley. While diplomats worked out the treaties formalizing the end of the War after 1781, Gen. George Washington was headquartered in the Valley at Newburgh with troops stationed nearby in case things flared up again.

The 19th century saw the dawn of the era of steam transportation on the Hudson River with the advent of Robert Fulton's first successful steamboat in 1807. With his partner and backer Chancellor Robert Livingston, Fulton inaugurated faster, more reliable passenger traffic on the Hudson. Whereas a sloop could take anywhere from more than 24 hours to seven days to travel between New York and Albany because of the vagaries of wind and tides, a steamboat could do the same trip in 24 hours in the early days and considerably less as time went on. This was truly a transportation revolution.

After the Fulton-Livingston monopoly on steam transportation on the Hudson River was broken in 1824, competition for trade by steamboats on the Hudson opened up and overnight it seemed there were dozens of steamboats plying the river. The New York to Albany passenger boats got ever larger and grander until they became known as "floating palaces." Every good-sized town like Yonkers, Newburgh, Poughkeepsie, and Kingston, was a landing place for the New York to Albany boats, while smaller towns like Saugerties and Catskill had their own lines of boats. Transport of freight on barges, scows, and coastal sailing vessels towed in batches by steam towboats and tugboats became a major industry in the second half of the 19th century on the Hudson. Even after the advent of the railroad along the Hudson in 1851, not only was towing still a major industry on the Hudson, but passenger travel by steamboat then entered its golden age. The famed beauty of the Hudson River Valley and its cool breezes, as well as the elegance of the boats, kept passengers traveling on the steamers in large numbers into the 1920s. The Hudson River Day Line, the best known and most successful of the New York to Albany lines, continued to operate into the 1950s, and even the '60s in a limited way, and as a result there are still many older people who remember the steamboats well.

Hudson River ferryboats were also an important part of the Hudson River maritime scene with their cross-river routes. Starting out with every type of small boat, ferries developed into businesses by the 18th century, some by royal charter such as the ferry line at Newburgh in 1743. Various types of sailing vessels including something called a periauger, which resembled a flatboat rigged with sails, were used as ferries. Horseboats were also used at various locations along the Hudson. Horseboats were flat-bottomed boats with either one paddlewheel in the center between two hulls or twin side paddlewheels. The motive power was provided by horses walking either in a circle or on a treadmill with either two or four horses being employed. After the advent of the steamboat, ferries became steam powered double-enders with side paddlewheels. In the 20th century ferries were built with propellers rather than paddlewheels. Ferries ran as long as ice in the river permitted. Other passenger boats ran only in the warmer months.



The first bridges built across the Hudson were railroad bridges at Albany and one at Poughkeepsie built in 1866 and 1887 respectively. When automobiles became more common after World War I, the first passenger bridges were built. Bear Mountain Bridge, a beautiful suspension bridge, was built by the Harriman family and opened in 1923. Another pretty suspension bridge was built across the Rondout Creek at Kingston and opened for traffic in 1921, replacing the well-known steam-powered chain ferry Riverside (also known as the Skillypot.) As bridges were built across the Hudson and its tributaries, ferry routes were abandoned. In 1963, with the opening of the Newburgh-Beacon Bridge, the last of the upriver ferry routes shut down, ending hundreds of years of ferry service on the Hudson River.

At the end of the 20th century after several decades of cleanup of the Hudson River's former industrial and other types of pollution, the river once again became a busy setting for recreational boating. New passenger excursion vessels appeared at various towns. Though without the glamour of the old steamboats, the new passenger boats attract tourists interested in seeing the Hudson's scenic beauty as well as its historic sites. Private recreational boating is very popular, with many types of boats from kayaks to jet-skis to large motor yachts represented. The towing business on the river is much reduced because of competition from the railroads and trucks. Freighters and tankers are seen much less frequently than they were twenty years ago. But the Hudson is making a comeback and having a renaissance of interest in its history, beauty, and recreational possibilities.

— Allynne Lange

### **Waiting to board the "Central Hudson" at Kingston Point**

