



A People's History of Red Hook

by Jeff Golden
December, 2006

*"The significance - and ultimately the quality - of the work we do
is determined by our understanding of the story
in which we are taking part."*

- Wendell Barry



Did you know?...

The Taconic Mountains to the west of here are part of the same mountain chain as the Atlas Mountains in Morocco. (p.5)

350 million years ago this land was in the heart of a mountain range, it was south of the equator, and a massive sea stretched from here to what is today Nevada. (p.4)

The first humans arrived in this area about 12,000 years ago, which accounts for the disappearance of the giant beavers and mastodons that lived here before that. (p.9)

600 generations of people lived here before the first Europeans arrived, landing on Kruger's Island, 4 miles west of here. (p.10)

Within 50 years the population of Mohicans fell from between 25,000-50,000 to 1,000, and most of the survivors were forced to move to Wisconsin. (p.11 & 12)

Europeans settled here in the 1700s, most of them Dutch-speaking. In 1790, 10% of the population was slaves of African descent. (p.14)

The house 300 feet down across the street is one of the oldest in the area, dating to the early 1700s. They had 11 slaves. (p.16)

A tenant rebellion across the river in 1839 involved 10,000 families and 1.8 million acres. (p.17)

It wasn't until 1827 that New York's slaves were freed (50 years after Vermont), though less than 300 of the state's 3,000 blacks were allowed to vote. (p.17)

Tivoli (the village we are located in), was named by a French aristocrat who purchased much of what is today the village in order to create a "utopia". (p.18)

Dutchess County has been listed as one of the twelve most threatened agricultural areas in the country. (p.20)

NOTE: I originally wrote this document to share with the people I lived with in the Common Fire Housing Co-op and the many people who visited us there. (You can learn more about that at www.commonfire.org.)

As such, I didn't take care to cite the sources of the information presented here, something I regret and hope you'll forgive. There is a brief list of some of the major sources I used. Any other facts or topics you want to verify or learn more about can probably be found pretty easily by just doing an Internet search.

When the document refers to "here" or "this land", it is referring to the housing co-op which is located in Tivoli, near the corner of West Kerley Corners and Old Post Road (CR9).

- Jeff Golden, November, 2009

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A Portrait of Land and Life in the Hudson Valley

↵ Putting it All in Perspective ↵

The story of this place is fundamentally the story of the land and the struggle of life to make its way here.

When viewed on an intimate scale, the story of this place is dramatic and miraculous: the sudden flashes of water molecules as they are frozen into ice crystals, or as they are suddenly given up to the air by wind or sun or lightning; the dramatic flare of color in leaves every year as their cells are starved in preparation for winter; the constant explosion of meteors overhead as they blaze out in the atmosphere; the ecstatic sparks of life born each moment in countless species, and the precise point for each being at which life forever crosses over to death; all the while the earth speeds around the sun at 67,000 miles an hour, and the solar system races through the galaxy at 155 miles each second.

But when one steps back and surrenders to the vast sweeps of time, this drama disappears and the story of this place becomes one primarily of continuity, with changes measured not just in thousands but in millions and billions of years.

The main features of this area have been roughly the same for about 15,000 years. It was then that the Hudson River, which flows just 4 miles west of here, was born as the last ice age receded. But the Catskill Mountains visible in the distance to the west and the Taconic Mountains hidden just out of view to the east have been around as we know them today for about 65 *million* years.

65 million years is probably, technically speaking, impossible for the human mind to really fathom. Yet in the big picture even these seemingly permanent features are extremely young and transitory, since the “big picture” began some 14 *billion* years ago with the Big Bang, when all the matter in the universe was created. If the history of time since the Big Bang were a day, these mountain ranges were formed about 7 minutes ago.

You have to skip the first 16 hours of this 14-billion-year day to even get to the formation of our planet, some 4.5 billion years ago, from pieces of asteroids clumping together. (The moon joined the Earth only “two minutes”, or twenty million years, later.)

↵ The Mountains and Rivers ↵

If you could travel back in time to visit this area about 350 million years ago you would find yourself in the heart of the Acadian Mountain range with peaks extending several thousand feet into the air. A massive sea extended to the *west*, covering everything between here and Nevada. (By the way, you would also be *south* of the equator). The Acadians were the grandparents of today's

Catskills. As the Acadians were worn down over millions of years their mass was carried down to the basin below where it piled up in layers thousands of feet deep and became compacted into rock. The entire area was later lifted up and then slowly worn down by streams and glaciers, yielding the geography we see in the Catskills today.

The Taconic Mountains, meanwhile, are part of the Appalachian range that runs most of the length of the east coast of the US. They were born when the combined continents of Europe and Africa collided with the land mass that would later be North America, one of the main collisions that created Pangaea, the supercontinent that included almost all land on Earth today. This collision drove massive amounts of rock skyward, creating the Appalachian Mountains on this continent, and the Atlas Mountains in Morocco and the Sierra Nevada range in Spain. This is how those three ranges form part of the same mountain chain despite being separated by the Atlantic today.¹

The Hudson River, perhaps the most significant feature of this area today, only revealed itself some 15,000 years ago (less than 1/10th of a second ago in our 14 billion year day). It was at that time that the last ice age ended, the massive glacier that largely carved out the Hudson Valley finally melted away, and the Hudson River was born. Rain and snow that falls around the co-op that isn't absorbed into the earth makes its way to the creek in the woods 200 feet to the east, and flows north into Stone Creek, sweeping west through Tivoli to join the Hudson River, contributing to the 160,000 gallons of fresh water that empty from the Hudson into the Atlantic every second.

↔ The Emergence of Life ↔

The antecedents of life in this area can be found in those first 9.5 billion years of time that we skipped to get to the formation of our planet. Carbon, the element that is the very foundation of life on Earth, was formed in those years. Only three elements – hydrogen, helium, and in much smaller quantities, lithium – were formed at the time of the Big Bang. The universe initially expanded and cooled too fast for carbon to be formed. The necessary conditions for the creation of carbon were only found later in the cores of stars, which can reach temperatures of one billion degrees Fahrenheit. Take a moment to look at your hands before you and feel the weight of your body: the very matter you are made of, a significant portion of it anyway, used to be fuel at the heart of a star where it was forged. We are literally star dust.

Life first emerged on Earth about 4 billion years ago, around the end of the “Late Heavy Bombardment”, a period of massive meteor activity on the Earth and moon. For half that time, roughly 2 billion years, all of life on the planet was

¹ For anyone counting, the Appalachians first emerged from this collision about 680 million years ago. But by the end of the Mesozoic era, the Appalachian Mountains had been eroded to an almost flat plain. It was not until the region was uplifted during the Cenozoic Era, 65 million years ago, that the Appalachians, and Taconics, rose again.

single-celled. And for the first 1.3 billion of those years the atmosphere was virtually devoid of oxygen. But that shifted dramatically as photosynthesis became widespread, leading to a massive die-out of life known as the “Oxygen Catastrophe”. Life on Earth up to that point had been accustomed to the carbon dioxide-rich atmosphere and oxygen was toxic for it. So the dramatic success of photosynthesis proved to be a little too successful for the cells responsible for it as they essentially poisoned the atmosphere for most of life, including themselves.

However, some forms of life survived and adapted to thrive in the new atmosphere. Around the time of the Oxygen Catastrophe (1.5 billion years ago) the first cells rose up from the oceans onto land. Over hundreds of millions of years there evolved forms as complex as fish, insects, reptiles, and amphibians.

Then 250 million years ago there was another massive upheaval on the planet where a full 90% of all species were wiped out. The cause remains uncertain. But out of that catastrophe emerged opportunities for new species to emerge and diversify, and 210 million years ago a new kind of creature evolved out of the reptiles. It had certain characteristics that would prove to give it critical advantages over other kinds of life. These creatures – mammals (and one kind of mammal in particular) would come to play a major role in the story of the Hudson Valley and the world in general.

↪ An Opening for Mammals ↪

Reptiles have several bones that form their jaws, but in the course of the evolution of mammals the rear two bones shifted back and became more and more sensitive to vibrations, eventually becoming ear bones. This allowed mammals to hear better than any creatures before then (or since), conveying to them a significant advantage in their ability to detect the movement of other creatures. Their back teeth evolved to become molars, allowing them to grind their food to derive more nutrition from it. They also developed a placenta, which served as a barrier between them and their offspring, allowing the offspring to stay in the mother’s body longer without the mother’s immune system attacking the offspring as foreign. This gave the offspring a developmental head start before entering the world. They were also warm-blooded, produced breast milk, and had hair.

For 150 million years these creatures diversified but never grew larger than today’s cats. This was the age during which the dinosaurs ruled the earth and they were such effective predators that there was simply no room on the planet for a large mammal.

But that all changed 65 million years ago, around the time the Taconic and Catskill Mountains were formed, when a meteor 6 miles across slammed into the earth in what is today the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico. The massive explosion that resulted unleashed enormous tsunamis and earthquakes, and as much as 25% of the earth’s biomass was torched by the resulting fires. Dust and soot in

the air are believed to have caused a significant cooling of the planet and to have significantly reduced photosynthesis by plants.

While the impact was much less than the earlier mass extinction, nonetheless a full 50% of all animals died, including the dinosaurs. Once again, the massive die-out afforded tremendous opportunities to the surviving species and within a few million years there was an explosion in the diversity and size of mammals.

That diversity was assisted further 50 million years ago when there was intense global warming. There were forests even near the north and south poles. Throngs of Asian mammals crossed to North America via the Bering Strait, populating new areas that were previously too cold and ice-covered for them, including this region.

But the fate of mammals in this area shifted again some 11,000 years ago. By that time the previous tundra in the region had come to be dominated by spruce and pine forests, which in turn gave way to the modern deciduous forest about 6,000 years ago. But long before then all of the larger mammals had disappeared.

To tell that story, and to tell the story of this place after that time, requires an introduction to a unique medium-sized mammal that had emerged and came to live here.

The Human Experience

◀ The First People ▶

In the story of this place it is only in the last breath of the last sentence, almost as a postscript, that one utters the word “humans”. Humans arrived here less than 1/10th of a second ago in our “day of 14-billion-years”. Or, to use a vastly more conservative scale, if we take the last 7 minutes of that day – the 65 million years since the formation of the Taconic and Catskill Mountains – and call them their own day, humans arrived on the local scene in the last 16 seconds.

Humans first emerged as a species in Africa about 200,000 years ago (about 4 minutes ago in our 65 million year day). At that time – some 250 million years after the first mammals had evolved and about 7 million years after apes started walking upright on two legs – a variety of human-like creatures evolved, of which only homo sapiens would survive. Homo sapiens represented a significant shift in how life on this planet strived to survive and reproduce. 20% of humans’ energy went to powering their brains, just 2% of the body tissue, an extraordinary divergence – and risk. But it was a risk that has served them very well, at least in the short term.

Since that time humans have migrated across the continents and have slowly made their way to this region both from the west via Asia, and the east via Europe.

About 70,000 years ago humans crossed out of Africa into Asia (about the same time they started wearing clothes). They would continue to migrate towards southern and southeast Asia and on to Indonesia, as well as spreading north throughout Asia. At some point descendents of the people who had settled in southern Asia (today India) migrated westward and their descendents reached Western Europe about 35,000 years ago.

In the meanwhile the migration of people north and east through Asia continued until about 15,000 years ago when the first humans crossed over to North America. It was the tail end of the last ice age so the sea level was low (with much of the water frozen in massive ice caps at the poles) and Asia was connected with North America by an ice bridge at the Bering Strait. The interior of North America was still covered with ice sheets so the descendents of these people migrated down the coast.

The first humans to walk the land of the Mid-Hudson Valley were descendents of those people, in particular a group that had settled in what is today the southwestern US. As the planet warmed and the ice sheets melted ever

Shared Ancestry

About 5 million years ago the evolution of humans diverged from that of chimpanzees and bonobos. 99.4% of our critical DNA is the same as a chimp’s, and very slightly more as a bonobo’s.

The common ancestor of mice and humans lived 100 million years ago. Our DNA is 85% the same.

The common ancestor of humans and pufferfish, the most simple form of vertebrate (the group of animals with backbones that includes humans) and humans lived 400 million years ago. We share 75% of the same DNA.

northwards, the descendants of these people began to cross the continent. Over the course of roughly 20 generations (500 years) they traveled through the Ohio Valley into the Great Lakes region and southern New York. Near a rock shelter just a three-days walk south of here, the Dutchess Quarry Cave, points from the end of spears were found near the remains of now extinct caribou and giant beavers that have been carbon dated to 10,580 BCE. There is evidence of mastodon hunting in what is today Hyde Park, just a day's walk to the south, from around 9,000 BCE.

About 600 generations of these people – over 12 millennia – lived in this area before the first humans reached this continent from the east, crossing the ocean from Europe. It was then that the Vikings reached Greenland. (That was some 5000 years after the first Asian descendents had made it to Greenland, but the Vikings didn't know that because the Asian descendents there had succumbed to the harsh conditions some 800 years earlier.) 300 years later, in 1007, the Vikings got quite a bit closer, establishing a village of about 60 people in present-day Newfoundland. However, that was still about 1500 miles from here and it was abandoned within a few years.

↵ The Mohicans ↵

At that same time there was a group of people living in this area known as the Mohicans. The name Mohican means People of the Waters That are Never Still, a reference to the Mohicanituk River (later named the Hudson). At the time the fledgling Viking settlement was struggling to stay alive the Mohicans were settling into a period of great prosperity that would last 500 years.

At their peak, 500 years after the Vikings had abandoned their settlements, the Mohicans were living in an area that included land on both sides of the Hudson as far west as the Schoharie River (north of Woodstock), as far east as the Berkshire Mountains from northwest Connecticut to southern Vermont, and went as far north as the southern tip of Lake Champlain. On the east side of the river the Mohicans lived as far south as Red Hook near the river and a little further south over near and across the Connecticut border.

The Mohicans lived in villages of typically 20 to 30 mid-sized longhouses of bark and trees. They adopted farming, which drastically changed their lifestyle and caused their population to grow. They ate primarily squash, beans, pumpkins, and corn, and they would hunt game in the winter and fish and smoke shad which ascended the river by the millions every spring.

By 1600 there were between 5,000 and 12,000 Mohicans. But then a new wave of migration began that would transform both the human and the natural environment.

↪ The European Expansion ↪

It was about 500 years ago that a French ship captained by Giovanni da Verrazano reached the Atlantic Coast of North America. Searching for a way to Asia, he traveled the coastline north past the Chesapeake Bay and landed on Staten Island where he had some interactions with the people living there. He then headed into Lower New York Bay, but in a stroke of good luck for the Mohicans and others on the mainland, a storm forced him away from land and he continued on, sailing past Nova Scotia and returning to Europe. This was good luck because his crew unwittingly infected the people of Staten Island with the small pox. Thousands died -- only about 500 survived.

Another European face was not seen in the area – and not seen at all by the Mohicans – for almost a hundred years (though there were some French explorers further north primarily in what is today Canada). But on September 15, 1609, a group of Mohicans met a man named Henry Hudson and his crew as they made their way up the Mohicanituk River in an 80-ton ship, also searching for a route to Asia. Just four miles east of the co-op is a little peninsula known as Kruger’s “Island”. Hudson spent two nights there and it was near there that Mohican canoes greeted the ship and gifted the men food and beaver pelts.

Hudson’s crew of 20, half Dutch and half English, named the spot “Roed Hoeck”, or “Red Point” after the sumac and Virginia creeper that were going through their fall colors. (The name would stick, though just where people were referring to when they used it moved around a little.) Continuing on up the river, just a week later, Hudson found it too shallow to continue and turned back just beyond present-day Albany. He returned to Europe, but his legacy in the region had been sealed. Little did the Mohicans or other people living in the region know – nor could they have comprehended – that Hudson had “claimed” the entire region on behalf of a group of people in Holland organized as the Dutch East India Company.

Only four years later (1613) a small number of Dutch established a trading post at the tip of Manhattan. The next year more Dutch established a fort in present-day Albany. The population of European traders, and later settlers, continued to grow, though very slowly over the next forty years. There were less than 100 when the forts were established and there were still only 2,000 in 1655, though there were 9,000 in 1664, about half of them Dutch.

Though there were few of them, their impact on the local communities (and that of the French further north) was devastating. Within 50 years there were less than 1,000 Mohicans left (of their original 5-12,000) and virtually none left in the Hudson Valley.

Like those that came before, the Europeans sparked repeated fatal small pox epidemics. Between 50-90% of the native people died from small pox and other diseases over the next fifty years.

Even more devastating on a fundamental level was the violence the Europeans unleashed in the region. Their lust for beaver pelts made a potent combination with their national rivalries (at first between the French and Dutch and later involving the English and Swedes). It was like fuel on the fire of the tensions that already existed among the native people (which to some degree involved access to the shells used to make the sacred wampum beads).

The Mohicans' long-standing enemies to the north, the Mohawk, came under intense pressure to secure firearms to defend themselves against the French and tribes allied with the French who were pressing southward from today's Quebec. This began even before Hudson had arrived in this area. So as Dutch traders became active in the Hudson Valley the Mohawks saw an opportunity to secure the arms they needed. But to get to the Dutch they had to go through the Mohicans.

The Rise and Fall of Shekomeko

In 1740 a mission was set up by Moravians, a Protestant sect, in Shekomeko, near today's Pine Plains, a day's walk to the east. In 1742 it was established as the first native Christian congregation in America. The Moravians spoke German but also learned the Mohican language. They wore common clothing and planted corn alongside the Mohicans. They didn't build parsonages, demand tithing, or receive a salary. By that time alcohol had taken a tremendous toll on the Mohicans and the Moravians' discipline around not drinking had a significant effect on the quality of life of the converts and others influenced by the community. The Moravian missionaries exposed traders illegally selling alcohol to the Mohicans and provided legal advice that kept them from being cheated.

All of this meant Shekomeko became very popular among the Mohicans in the area, and two satellite missionary outposts were established further east.

It also meant it became very *unpopular* with many of the white settlers. Rumors of false atrocities by the Mohicans were spread, some settlers fled their farms, and authorities were called to intervene. It was demanded that the Moravians exercise with the local militia and swear allegiance to the King of England. It was against their beliefs to bear firearms or to swear any type of oath, so they refused. They were repeatedly detained and fined.

In 1744 a law was passed forbidding anyone from residing with Indians in order to "Christianize them". Local settlers began to keep a watch to prevent visits from other Moravians, thereby cutting the missionaries and their converts off from outside help. A month later Governor George Clinton ordered the Moravians to "desist from further teaching and depart the province." And then in 1746 locals petitioned the governor to issue a warrant authorizing the killing of "Shekomeko Indians". The petition was denied, but word of it spread and all remaining residents, forty-four Mohicans in all, left Shekomeko to seek refuge elsewhere.

Under these and other pressures, the Mohicans and Mohawks fought frequently over the next decade, and with increasing effectiveness as they were supplied with firearms by the Dutch. The Dutch actually preferred that the conflicts be resolved as quickly as possible, the better to continue their trading. But a major war broke out in 1624. The Mohawk were better warriors but hadn't been able to compete with the Mohicans' superior numbers previously. But smallpox took a much higher toll on the Mohicans and by 1628 they had been defeated and abandoned all of their villages west of the Hudson River.

Repeated waves of smallpox epidemics and violence – both with the Mohawk and increasingly with white settlers – drove the Mohicans further and further east. By 1664 they had abandoned almost all of the Hudson Valley, including their ancient capital at Shodac, and their council fire was held in today's western Massachusetts. By 1669 their population had fallen to less than 1,000.

The Mohicans (increasingly blended with other tribes that fell in together to support each other) were one of the few tribes to support the American colonists in the Revolutionary War (half their population died in the war) and many converted to Christianity. Nonetheless, most of them were eventually forced off their land and compelled to move again, this time westward, first to Stockbridge, New York in the 1780s – when the total Mohican population hit a low of about 600 -- and later to Shawano County, Wisconsin in the 1820s and 1830s. In Wisconsin, they settled on reservations (originally 40,000 acres, later reduced to 16,000) along with the Munsee (who had previously lived further south and across the Hudson River from here). The two were jointly known as Stockbridge-Munsee and today the reservation, west of Green Bay, is known as that of the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians (Stockbridge-Munsee Community).

The Last of the Mohicans

This fictional book by James Fennimore Cooper was indeed based the Mohicans, but confuses some aspects of the Mohican culture, such as names and aspects of their history, with those of the Mohegans who lived in today's Connecticut. It was also not exactly a model of sensitivity or awareness in light of the many Mohicans that were still alive when it was published in 1826 and that are still alive today.

As Chief Quinney of the Stockbridge-Munsee Tribe indicated in a Fourth of July speech he returned to New York to deliver in 1854, there are issues that have never been addressed in regards to the continuing patterns of land ownership since those days. "Let it not surprise you my friends, when I say, that the spot on which we stand has never been purchased or rightly obtained; and that by justice, human and divine, it is the property now of the remnant of that great people, from whom I am descended. They left it in the tortures of starvation and to improve their miserable existence; but as a cession was never made and their title has never been extinguished."

↵ Life for the Europeans ↵

From the time of Henry Hudson's arrival through the next 50 years the Europeans stuck mostly to the trading posts of what are today New York City, Kingston (across the river from the co-op), and Albany, where they focused on the trade of beaver pelts. By 1630 and until 1669 the Dutch shipped over 10,000 beaver pelts to the Netherlands each year. (By the 1700s beavers were nearly extinct.) The Europeans numbered 9,000 in 1664, 50% of them Dutch. But the pieces were falling into place that would lead to far more people – from Germany, England and Africa – arriving in greater numbers and settling throughout the region.

The shift started in 1664 when the English sailed into New Amsterdam and in a bloodless coup took control of the Dutch colony. The beaver trade was literally dying out and the English feared French encroachment from the north. So there was a financial and strategic incentive to get people into the area farming and paying rents.

The pattern of land ownership in the region in the early years was in the feudal tradition – one of massive tracts of land held by wealthy individuals, with little opportunity for others to gain ownership. In 1670 the King of England “granted” tens of thousands of acres where the co-op is located to the first mayor of Albany, a Dutchman, though no Europeans lived here for another 25 years. Through a series of divisions and sales most of the land in the immediate area ended up in the hands of five Dutchmen. To settle their large landholdings and make them financially productive the owners leased their land to tenant farmers in lots between 25 and 200 acres. The leases were for at least two or three generations and sometimes “forever”. The owners retained title to the land and to minerals and the mill rights on the streams.

This attracted many people who valued the chance to make a go of it on their own farming and raising their families while paying rents, primarily in wheat. In 1715 there were 445 settlers in all of Dutchess County. The first Europeans to settle in this area were Germans who had been brought to the colony to produce pine pitch, spars and caulking for the British Navy. They were settled further north in today's Germantown, but that venture failed and in 1714 about 35 families were invited by Henry Beekman, who owned a lot of the land in this area, to become tenant farmers.

Apparently Beekman was more progressive than other landowners in the area, giving larger grants for less rent and showing greater leniency in hard times.

In 1710 the English ordered that a road be built four horses wide connecting New York City and Albany. It followed an old Mohican trail just a half mile west of here and came to be called the Post Road.

In the 1720s the first real community of European descendents in the local area was started in today's Tivoli, the village a few miles west of here on the Hudson

and the official address of the co-op. The Hoffman family established mills and a ferry that was a significant point for crossing the Hudson and continued until 1940.

One of the oldest buildings in the area is across the road from the driveway to the co-op (and a couple hundred feet to the west). It was built by a Dutch pioneer (family name of Heermance) about the same time or soon after the Hoffmans were getting under way. The road there, today called Kerley Corners, connected the ferry with Post Road at a point where several trails extended east into New England. That very intersection, basically where Kerley Corners meets 9, just a half mile to the east, came to be the largest community in the area for the next hundred years.

The community was known as Upper Red Hook (today's Tivoli, on the river and therefore lower than here, was the "regular" Red Hook). By the mid-1700s the village counted with an inn, a blacksmith shop, a store, and several large houses. The "Old Brick Tavern" which still stands today was built then, and in 1793 a Dutch Reformed Church was built, replaced by the one that still stands in 1871. In 1750 stage coach service was established between New York and Albany via the Post Road, and in 1797 a regular daily run was established. (It left at 10am from the City, and arrived in Albany at roughly 10am four days later.)

By the late 1800s nearly 200 people supported a post office, a school, a second tavern, a harness shop, and a carriage and wagon maker.

While the general way of life of people in the area was little changed by the independence won by the 13 British colonies in 1783, the war itself certainly had an impact. 10,000 New Yorkers met the Continental Congress' quota for soldiers from the state. In 1777, Major General Israel Putnam was based right here in Upper Red Hook, at the Old Brick Tavern to be specific.

Putnam failed to stop the British in their surge up the Hudson Valley and their attack on the rebel government, based out of the recently established capital of Kingston (just across the river). The British burned all but one or two buildings in the city, along with massive stores of wheat. The British also burned several of the large riverside estates on this side of the river and numerous mills, including the Hoffman mills in Tivoli.

By 1776 the area around Red Hook was a major producer of wheat and was known as the "Breadbasket of Dutchess County". The area supplied about 1/3 of the wheat the revolutionary troops ate during the war.

Despite the takeover of New York by the English from the Dutch in 1664, and all the way through independence in 1783, if you were to drop into one of the local taverns, or visit one of the nearby farms, or attend church services in this area you would have heard people speaking mostly "low Dutch", with the occasional German and English. However by 1800 English had become the most common language, which continues to this day.

↪ Slavery ↪

Not all who spoke Dutch, however, were of Dutch descent. Slavery was legal in New York and the Mid-Hudson Valley was one of the most significant sites of slavery outside the South. In 1776 there were 15,000 slaves in all of New York, only 1,000 less than in Georgia. The first slaves in New York came from Angola but the colonists found the Africans "proud and treacherous," and preferred to seek "seasoned" slaves from the West Indies, specifically Curaçao.

In 1715 there were 29 slaves in this county, 7% of the population. As of 1790 there were 421 slaves in the local "precinct" of the county, more than 10% of the population.

Almost half the slaves were with white families of three people or less. However the Heermance family across the street from the co-op had 11, making it the second largest slaveholder in the county. Most slaves lived in the attic or basements or in outbuildings.

Slaves were treated as cruelly here as anywhere in the South. They were branded with irons, and notched in the ears, like cattle. Sometimes they were punished with castration or in some cases they were burnt alive at the stake. By 1682 it was illegal for four or more slaves to meet together on their own time, and in 1702 that was reduced to three and each town was required to appoint a "Negro Whipper" to flog violators. This law effectively limited slaves' social and family lives.

However, under the Dutch there was some intermarrying between blacks and whites, and, in theory anyway, blacks had coequal standing with whites in the colonial courts. Free blacks were allowed to own property (unlike Jews) and in some cases owned white indentured servants. Slaves were armed on occasion, including in some fights against native people and to help put down a tenants revolt by whites.

Sojourner Truth

Sojourner Truth, the famous abolitionist and feminist who delivered the speech, *Ain't I a Woman?*, was born just across river from here in 1797 (up Rondout Creek, where the Swartekill meets the Wallkill). She was raised speaking "low Dutch" and later in life when speaking English she had a Dutch accent. Over time she was owned by five different families, all just across the river, and she was beaten viciously by one of them who only spoke English and was angry she only spoke Dutch.

She ran away to Canada with her daughter when she was about 30. She later sued (successfully) for her son's freedom in court in Kingston after he had been sold to a family in Alabama just months before black children were freed in New York.

She became a traveling preacher and in 1841 she joined a "utopian community" 100 miles east of here. They owned a silk mill and sought to ensure that "the rights of all are equal without distinction of sex, color or condition, sect or religion." It didn't work out financially and disbanded after five years, but it was there she met William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglass and Wendell Phillips. Soon after that she wrote her memoirs which launched her to fame.

She later lived in Wisconsin, where she collected supplies for the Union during the war, moved to DC after the Emancipation Proclamation to work with former slaves, then returned to Battle Creek, WI, where she spent the rest of her life.

Support for slavery ran strong in the valley's politics, and among the wealthy plantations that were established on the river the atmosphere was intensely hostile to abolitionism.

There did emerge, however, a very strong anti-slavery element in the area as well. Dutchess County had the largest concentration of Quakers outside Philadelphia, and just east of today's Millbrook, 30 miles southeast of here, was the most important abolitionist institution in the valley—and one of the most important in the country: the Nine Partners School. This Quaker school may have been a sort of “command center” for the underground in the entire region. The school had a profound influence on students who went on to shape the abolitionist movement—and other reform movements. They included abolitionist and women's rights advocate Lucretia Mott, and Daniel Anthony, later a stationmaster on the Underground Railroad and the father of Susan B. Anthony.

The town of Hudson, 17 miles north of here, was 2/3 Quaker and was an active stop on the Underground Railroad. And closer to home, the “chateau” known as Rose Hill, in Tivoli, was reportedly a stop on the Railroad as well.

In the mid-1700s almost all blacks in New York were slaves, but by 1790 1/3 were free. Over time the majority of escaped slaves were taken north by ferry, and many of the ferries were owned and piloted by free blacks.

Emancipation came grudgingly in New York, and not completely until 1827 -- fifty years after Vermont, 47 after Pennsylvania, and 44 after Massachusetts. But the new state constitution of 1821 disfranchised almost all black men by requiring they prove they owned at least \$250 worth of property, a restriction not imposed on whites. Less than 300 of the state's 30,000 blacks could vote.

The Guinea Settlement

In Hyde Park, 20 miles south, there was a black hamlet known in the nineteenth century as the Guinea Settlement. The settlement was populated mainly by former slaves who had worked on the big plantations on the river. It also provided shelter to fugitive slaves.

The community was more or less under the protection of the local Quaker meeting, some of whose members lived there.

It was abandoned in the 1870s and the site was lost until recently, but archeological work is underway there today.

↔ Class Revolts ↔

The tensions among whites themselves – specifically between the wealthy landowners and tenant farmers – exploded several times in the 1700s and 1800s. 40 miles north of here the Rensselaerwyck holding was a million acres. In 1766 some of the tenants there claimed some of this land for themselves but weren't able to get satisfaction in the courts and turned to violence. In Poughkeepsie, 30 miles south, an astounding 1,700 armed tenants closed the courts and broken open the jails. (The population of the village was less than 1,500 total.) But the uprising was eventually crushed.

During the revolution a decade later tenants were promised land to motivate their support. But the farmers who enlisted found that as privates in the army they received \$6.66 a month, while a colonel received \$75 a month. They watched local government contractors become rich, while the pay they received in continental currency became worthless with inflation.

The tenants became a threatening force in the midst of the war. Many stopped paying rent. The legislature, worried, passed a bill to confiscate Loyalist land and add four hundred new "freeholders" to the 1,800 already in the county.

The most spectacular tenant rebellion in US history began in 1839, again on the Rensselaerwyck holding, though it gradually engulfed the other large estates of eastern New York. At its height in 1845, the uprising involved approximately 10,000 tenant families in eleven counties with a total of 1.8 million acres.

In 1839, the owner of Rensselaerwyck died. To settle his estate, back rents of farmers were to be collected, despite the national depression at the time. The farmers refused to pay. They organized themselves into Anti-Rent associations and farmers throughout the region followed suit.

The owners sent land agents and sheriffs to conduct court ordered sales of farmers' possessions to pay the rent. They would be met by anywhere from fifty to a thousand armed Anti-Renters; dressed in calico, hooded, and disguised as "Indians". They would be turned back, or if a sale did take place, the Anti-Renters would be present, making it unlikely that anyone would bid for the farmer's possessions. Sometimes the land agents were tarred and feathered.

In 1845 shots were exchanged across the river between Anti-Renters and a sheriff and his deputies trying to sell a farmer's cattle for back rent. A deputy was killed. A posse of 150 men wreaked havoc in the area searching for Anti-Renters and the Governor declared Delaware County in a state of rebellion and called in 300 state troops. Two new prisons were built to hold the arrested Anti-Renters. 94 Anti-Renters were indicted for murder, 148 for other crimes.

The judge instructed the jury that merely being present in disguise at the scene of the crime made the accused guilty of murder. Those who pled not guilty were condemned to death once they were convicted, while those who pled guilty were given a reduced sentence of manslaughter and seven years in jail.

In November, 1845, less than a month after the trials had come to a close, elections for New York's Legislature took place. Though the direct action aspect of the movement was shattered, many people were shocked by the heavy handedness at the trials and the farmers were united under the Anti-Rent Party. The Anti-Renters won many seats, and a call for a New York Constitutional Convention carried by 200,000 votes.

The Legislature passed a law for the first time taxing the rental income of landowners and forbid the sale of a farmer's possessions to pay rent. Land

leases over 12 years were prohibited. Soon after that a new Governor was elected on the promise that he would pardon all the imprisoned Anti-Renters. He kept his word.

Over the next decade, most farmers of the Catskill region gained possession of the land where they had built their homes and farms by buying it from their landlords.

↔ Modern Transformation and Challenges ↔

The story of this place and the transformations that have occurred since that time is one largely related to advances in transportation -- and the significant increase in the continued migration of people of European descent to this area and the shifts in the use of the land and how people earned their livelihood.

In the late 1700s there was an economic boom in the northeast. There were more roads, more markets, and more access to purchase or lease land. Oxen or horse-drawn carts would take surplus crops, primarily wheat, to the river where sloops and barges would take them to New York City 100 miles south, a 10 to 12-day round trip.

Sheep were the most important livestock and in 1813 alone 16,000 yards of cloth were woven in Red Hook households by women.

In 1807 steamboats arrived on the Hudson, able to make a roundtrip to NYC in a single day. By the 1840s steamboats were running day and night, stopping regularly for passengers and produce in Tivoli.

In the 1830s, with the introduction of canals up north, there was greater competition for local farmers who had to switch away from wheat to products like dairy, livestock and produce – pork and apples in particular -- where they had a competitive advantage being able to get perishable products to the City faster than communities up north. In 1875 Red Hook produced 22,640 bushels of apples and 1,200 gallons of apple cider. (At its peak in 1954 Red Hook farmers produced 328,128 bushels.)

Tivoli as Utopia

Around 1790 an aristocrat who fled the French Revolution came to the area and devised a plan to create an ideal community. He purchased a large portion of land from the grandson of the original Hoffman who established the local mill and the ferry.

He mapped out a village with a pattern of streets with names like Peace, Plenty, Liberty and Commerce laid out neatly around a central area named Zephyr Square. He named the village Tivoli.

His plans for the community didn't really pan out -- he went bankrupt and was sent to Poughkeepsie's debtor's prison. But the name Tivoli stuck and Friendship, Flora, and Diana streets remain to this day.

In 1851 a railroad was built along the river, reducing travel time to the City to 3½ hours with multiple trains running daily. (Travel by railroad and car today both take less than two hours.) This served to further stimulate a number of manufacturing businesses that had been started in what became the main center of the Town of Red Hook, which had shifted south to where it is today. Two of the most successful enterprises were a tobacco factory which survived for 90 years and a chocolate factory which lasted 40 years.

The population in the area spiked in the late 1800s (with a notable increase in Irish immigrants). Tivoli's population reached an all-time high of 1,250 people in 1890. It fell to half this number in the 1970's when the railway station was demolished, and only passed 1,000 again in 1990. The population of Red Hook was 4,471 in 1880 and fell to 3,400 by 1940 after many people fled to the City to find work during the Depression, though the Red Hook population began to rise again from there.

Life in the area saw a tremendous shift in the early 1900s with the arrival of electricity, phones, cars, movies, and more. Symbolic of the era were two exciting local events. In 1908 the Post Road to Albany was the first leg of the 10,000 mile New York to Paris Automobile Race, and in 1909 Glenn Curtiss and Orville Wright flew up the Hudson River in a race to Albany for \$10,000.

Farmlife was transformed with the arrival of tractors and trucks, mechanized milking machines, harvesters, and electrical cold storage houses. Pesticides came into use in 1915. Farming in the area in general entered a long decline, most pronounced among the small diversified farms and dairies.

Farmers began to use migrant laborers in the 1920s. They were initially poor white and black people, many up from the south. In the mid-1900s more and more latinos came to the area and they make up the vast majority of farm labor these days.

Between 1950 and 1960 Red Hook's population grew by 50% and the number of farms fell by 30%. This was in part fueled by the construction of the 7,800 foot long Kingston Rhinecliff Bridge spanning the Hudson about 5 miles south of here. While that growth was exceptional, the general trend has continued.

Bard College

In 1860 an Episcopal seminary was founded about 3 miles southwest of here near the river. Starting in 1919 it started to broaden its curriculum and in 1928 it became an undergraduate school of Columbia University. In 1934 it adopted the name Bard College in honor of its founder. In 1944 Bard became co-ed and as a result severed its relationship with Columbia.

Besides being a highly esteemed, progressive college, serving about 1,500 students, Bard is also a vibrant resource for the local community through the range of speakers, films and events Bard hosts, in particular the Bard Music Festival, held every summer.

Migrant Labor Today

Migrant workers harvest the most of the fruits and vegetables in the US, though they are among the nation's lowest-paid laborers, earning an average of less than \$10,000 a year. New York counts with approximately 47,000 migrant farmworkers - about 40,000 of them Latinos, mostly from Mexico.

When federal labor legislation was established in the 1940's, southern legislators worried about workers getting these rights in industries that were heavily African American, notably agriculture and domestic service. These workers have to this day been excluded from some major protections such as the right to overtime pay and to collective bargaining. Until 1966 agricultural workers were exempt from the federal minimum wage as well.

Dutchess County has been listed as one of the twelve most threatened agricultural areas in the country. In 2000 the last dairy farm in Red Hook closed after operating for more than 100 years. The County experienced population growth of 8% in the past decade, and the rate of land consumption was more than twice that. For those counted in the census, the Red Hook population in 2000 was about 10,400 people, with 95% of them white. (The median household income was \$46,700 while about 9% live under the poverty line,

below the national average of 12%.)

It was only in the last quarter century that concerns primarily relating to preserving the rural character of the area led to Red Hook adopting regulations for zoning, building, water quality, and wetlands conservation. In the 1990s a revised master plan was devised, though zoning laws have not been changed to reflect that plan. The Hudson Valley does count with one of the largest concentrations of private non-profit preservation organizations in the country. 25 acres of land to the east of the co-op are currently under a conservation easement through the Dutchess Land Conservancy (which has protected over 23,000 acres in the county, including the 24 acres under easement here at the co-op).

With the increase in population has come an increased demand for electricity. And on top of that annual consumption of electricity per person grew 5.3% between 1990 and 2002. 28% of the electricity in New York is from nuclear power, 27% natural gas, 16% coal, 16% hydroelectric, and 10% oil. Each of these sources has consequences that connect our decisions about energy consumption with communities near and far. Nuclear plants statewide kill millions of fish each year due to the discharge of heated water (used to cool the reactors) into rivers. The Indian Point nuclear plant alone, located 50 miles south of here, will have produced 2000 tons of radioactive waste by 2030.

Shad and PCBs

In the 1960s, there was a \$40 million fishing industry on the Hudson. Over the past 50 years General Electric dumped 1.3 million pounds of PCBs in the river leaving most fish too toxic to eat. General Electric is still resisting cleaning up the PCBs despite a number of legal rulings against them. In the meanwhile, shad – the fish that was a cornerstone of the Mohican diet, is one of the few fish from the Hudson that can be eaten today because shad spend most of their lives in the ocean, coming upriver only briefly to spawn, thus picking up fewer of the PCBs.

Meanwhile, the Hudson Valley has some of the worst air quality in the country, though it is due primarily to coal-fired power plants located in the Midwest, not in New York. Petroleum and natural gas are the leading sources of greenhouse gas emissions in the United States. (The co-op produces 100% of its electricity on-site with solar panels.)

↵ A Brief Conclusion ↵

Few people desire to live the way the Indians did here for so long. Yet there are many warning signs that the general way of life of people in Red Hook, and throughout the Hudson Valley and beyond, is neither sustainable nor necessarily one where people are happy, healthy, and secure.

I hope that the broad sense of place that this history can provide those of us alive in this time can help us orient ourselves towards a future that both honors our past and sets the stage for our children, and our children's children, and so on, to live in this valley for as long a time as the Indians did, with each generation being a little more healthy, happy and secure.

Sources: I stole liberally from many sources, often copying large portions word-for-word, other times cobbling together a story based on snippets of info from multiple texts to give life to stories not often told. The following are only a few of the sources I used. I give thanks to them, and to all the other anonymous victims of my plundering. – Jeff, Dec. 2006

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