

Chapter Introduction

The Hudson River Valley was at the forefront of the Industrial Revolution in America. Industrialization of the region not only transformed life along the river, but it reached beyond and affected the American way of life as a whole. Robert Fulton's steamboat was only the beginning of new and inventive technological advances to the region. Canal construction connected the Hudson River with other bodies of water and made it feasible for New York industry to spread beyond the river valley. These advances combined with entrepreneurship gave birth to rich industry and commerce in the bustling cities along the Hudson, and contributed to the industrialization of greater America.

The construction of canals, such as the Erie, Delaware and Hudson, in addition to steamships, enabled trade to flow further and more quickly. Coal, a commodity of great importance to the new industrial era, was transported along the canals and the Hudson to emerging manufacturing areas and to New York City. In the mid-19th century, the textile, iron, and cement industries all saw growth in the area. Ice harvesting and brick making also became important sources of commerce up and down the river.

The industrialization that occurred in the Hudson River Valley had a long-lasting effect on the region itself and contributed to the development of the United States as a whole. However, advances in construction methods and the invention of refrigeration made some of the river's largest industries outdated. Towards the end of the 19th century, railroad construction took off and soon surpassed canals as the preferred means of transporting goods. The Delaware and Hudson Canal Company converted to railroads in the late 1800s. Railroad expansion and exhaustion of resources drew focus away from the Hudson River Valley at the dawn of the 20th century. However, the river region continued to be important to American industry.