

THE
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RIVER
VALLEY
REVIEW

A Journal of Regional Studies

MARIST

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Tel: 845-575-3052

Fax: 845-575-3176

E-mail: hrvi@marist.edu

Web: www.hudsonrivervalley.org

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From the Editors

As we began assembling this issue, another colleague mentioned that Eleanor had once visited his grandparents, where his grandfather had been stationed in Japan. Eleanor mentioned them by name in her June 19, 1953 “My Day” column. “FUKOAKA, Japan...went to the Consul General, Mr. Zurhellen’s house. Mr. and Mrs. Zurhellen very kindly invited us to spend the night and it was a joy to see such a happy American family, four boys and a baby girl, all learning to be good Americans but at the same time all learning to speak Japanese in the most painless way. ...On the way up we had a glimpse of Fuji again, just the top floating in the clouds, and now we are catching up on mail which was awaiting us in Tokyo.”



*This issue of The Hudson River Valley Review
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Call for Essays

The Hudson River Valley Review is anxious to consider essays on all aspects of the Hudson Valley—its intellectual, political, economic, social, and cultural history, its prehistory, architecture, literature, art, and music—as well as essays on the ideas and ideologies of regionalism itself. All articles in *The Hudson River Valley Review* undergo peer analysis.

Submission of Essays and Other Materials

HRVR prefers that essays and other written materials be submitted as two double-spaced typescripts, generally no more than thirty pages long with endnotes, along with a computer disk with a clear indication of the operating system, the name and version of the word-processing program, and the names of documents on the disk. Illustrations or photographs that are germane to the writing should accompany the hard copy. Otherwise, the submission of visual materials should be cleared with the editors beforehand. Illustrations and photographs are the responsibility of the authors. No materials will be returned unless a stamped, self-addressed envelope is provided. No responsibility is assumed for their loss. An e-mail address should be included whenever possible.

HRVR will accept materials submitted as an e-mail attachment (*hrvi@marist.edu*) once they have been announced and cleared beforehand.

Since HRVR is interdisciplinary in its approach to the region and to regionalism, it will honor the forms of citation appropriate to a particular discipline, provided these are applied consistently and supply full information. Endnotes rather than footnotes are preferred. In matters of style and form, HRVR follows *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

Contributors

JoAnne Myers has been on the faculty of Marist College for twenty-three years, where she teaches Political Science and Women's Studies. She received her AB from Skidmore College and her Masters and Ph.D. from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. She currently is Chair of the Board of the Eleanor Roosevelt Center at Val-Kill.

Susan P. Curnan is an Associate Professor and the Director of the Center for Youth and Communities at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts. She is the author of numerous articles on management and education. Her scholarship and practice is grounded in the promotion of social justice and well-being for children, youth, and families.

Frank Futral is Curator at Roosevelt-Vanderbilt National Historic Sites in Hyde Park, New York. He has organized two exhibitions on Val-Kill Industries and is currently writing a book on that topic.

Marilee Hall is a retired teacher and resides in an original Arthurdale home. She has been actively involved in the community since the 50th anniversary of the homesteading of Arthurdale in 1984. She is the founder and editor of the Arthurdale Heritage, Inc. (AHI) quarterly newsletter. She presently serves on the executive board for AHI.

Thalia M. Mulvihill is Associate Professor in the Higher Education and Social Foundations of Education programs at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana, where she also serves as Associate Director of the Adult, Higher and Community Education Doctoral Program. Her manuscript *The Promise of Educational Communities in Nineteenth Century America: Communal Notions at Work in Emma Hart Willard's Educational Philosophy* (forthcoming) won the Dixon Ryan Fox Manuscript Prize for the best book manuscript on New York State History from the New York State Historical Association.



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THE HUDSON RIVER VALLEY REVIEW

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Regional History Forum

Each issue of The Hudson River Valley Review includes the Regional History Forum. This section highlights historic sites in the Valley, exploring their historical significance as well as information for visitors today. Although due attention is paid to sites of national visibility, HRVR also highlights sites of regional significance. Please write us with suggestions for future Forum sections.

Val-Kill: Where Eleanor Emerged as an Individual

Lindsay Moreau

The life of Eleanor Roosevelt, the most influential First Lady in the history of the White House and a significant social leader, is being celebrated this October on the 125th anniversary of her birth. She accomplished much of her most important work while living at Val-Kill—the personal retreat that was her only true home.

Following the death of her parents, Eleanor grew up under her grandmother's care. She was a lonely child, plain and quiet, who did not truly find herself until she studied at Allenswood, a school for girls in England. At the age of eighteen, she returned to the United States. In 1907, she married her fifth cousin, Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

As her husband began his political rise toward the White House, Eleanor was searching to find her purpose. Her family, which grew to include five children and her strong-willed mother-in-law, Sara Delano Roosevelt, split their time between the Roosevelts' Springwood estate in Hyde Park and their New York City townhouse. Eleanor constantly lived under Sara's thumb. However, she loved Springwood and enjoyed spending time outdoors amid its grounds. A favorite spot of hers was located two miles east of the mansion, near the Fall Kill Creek. One day, while picnicking with Franklin and her two good friends, Marian Dickerman and Nancy Cook, Eleanor lamented how she would miss their Hyde Park home during their wintertime sojourn in Manhattan.¹ Franklin suggested the three friends should build a cottage in their favorite picnicking spot, so they could spend time there year-round. The three women quickly accepted the offer.

Franklin was just as excited about building the cottage as the three women. He hired Henry Toombs, a budding architect who assisted him in designing and

constructing a stone replica of a vernacular Dutch colonial cottage. Completed in 1926, the building cost \$12,000, which was paid by the three women.² They named it Val-Kill, in tribute to the creek.

During the cottage's construction, Eleanor, Marian, and Nancy met with Caroline O'Day, a leader in social change and a member of Congress from New York.³ The group began discussing the economic conditions of the Hyde Park area. The majority of inhabitants were farmers, which left them idle and without income during the winter months. The women decided to start Val-Kill Industries, a furniture-making company where local employees could learn a craft during the off-season. Nancy Cook, who was in fact a former shop teacher and skilled carpenter, designed all of the furniture.

The factory also was built on the Val-Kill property. Val-Kill Industries operated from 1926 to 1936 and grew to include a pewter forge and homespun weaving enterprise. It was moderately successful, but eventually became a victim of the Great Depression. Operations were shut down in 1936 with the exception of the weaving enterprise, which continued until the 1940s.⁴ Currently, pieces produced at the factory have become prized antiques, with collectors spending tens of thousands of dollars to acquire them. Any piece that was given away as a gift was signed by Eleanor herself, making these particularly sought after.

After Val-Kill Industries was shut down, Eleanor converted the factory into a personal retreat. She remodeled the interior to include several bedrooms, two sitting rooms, a kitchen, a dining room, an apartment for her live-in friend and secretary, two porches downstairs, and a sleeping porch upstairs. Outside, a swimming pool, gardens, and a stable were constructed. Franklin and Eleanor had twenty-nine grandchildren, and it was typical to have at least nine at Val-kill at any one time. Barbecues were popular, and Franklin enjoyed cooking on the large outdoor stone fireplace. Once he died in 1945, Val-Kill truly became Eleanor's permanent residence. Here she hosted thousands of guests and wrote thousands of articles. She went on to become one of the most influential women of the twentieth century.

Eleanor's guests included royalty, world leaders, celebrities, politicians, students, and even troubled youth. She always had her guests' comforts in mind. Upon arrival, they would find a bouquet of their favorite flowers adorning their room, along with a freshly baked plate of their favorite cookies and a book Eleanor believed would be of interest to them. She also used cheap china; she never wanted guests to feel bad if a plate or cup was accidentally broken. It was common for Eleanor to have upwards of twenty people over for dinner. Guests would come from all walks of life, but every meal was served family style to encourage camaraderie.

derie and equality. Eleanor often chose to invite guests with differing viewpoints; she enjoyed hearing a variety of opinions. She also hoped these discussions would broaden the minds of her guests.

At Val-Kill Eleanor met with politicians such as John F. Kennedy and world leaders such as Haile Selassie, the King of Ethiopia. Each summer she hosted a retreat for 150 troubled boys from the Wiltwyck School. She also wrote her “My Day” columns and read hundreds of public policy articles as part of her job as a United States delegate to the United Nations. Val-Kill was where Eleanor not only found herself, but became the inspirational leader revered by so many, earning universal admiration as the “First Lady of the World.”

Eleanor passed away in 1962 and left the Val-Kill estate to her son John. At the time, John’s financial state was unstable. To make money, he converted the Val-Kill cottage into four rental units. He eventually auctioned off the majority of Eleanor’s belongings. In 1970, he sold the property to two doctors from Long Island, who planned to convert the estate into a senior citizen facility complete with a nursing home, assisted living apartments, and health care clinics.⁵

While a rezoning request for Val-Kill was going through the Hyde Park Town Council, several local residents began to worry that the property’s historic significance would be lost forever. The group of preservationists from the Hyde Park Visual Environment committee joined forces with the Roosevelt family, the New York State lieutenant governor’s office, the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library and National Historic Site in the effort to save Eleanor’s home from commercial development.⁶ In the end, the rezoning request was denied.

President Jimmy Carter took note of the growing movement and decided to turn Eleanor’s estate into a national park in 1977. As he signed the bill, he stated,

...I am deeply touched that this new addition is to be a living memorial to the former First Lady, Anna Eleanor Roosevelt. This law establishes her home, Val-Kill, in Hyde Park, N.Y., as the Eleanor Roosevelt National Historic Site.... I think that it was in the area of human rights that Mrs. Roosevelt made her greatest contributions. In her many projects, she appealed to the best qualities and instincts of humankind and fought to break down the barriers of prejudice, discrimination, and injustice which divided people against each other. Her memory stands as an inspiration to us today as we continue to strive for the higher ideals which she articulated.... I hope that this site will serve as an inspiration for our generation and the generations to come.⁷

Thus, the Eleanor Roosevelt National Historic Site was created—the first dedicated to a First Lady. It took years for the park to open, as the buildings had

fallen into severe disrepair. Fortunately, a few days after Eleanor's death, pictures had been taken of every room from several different angles, allowing them to be refurnished almost identically. Some of the furniture at Val-Kill today is original, but many pieces are from the period.

The park officially opened in 1984. Today it attracts close to 80,000 visitors annually. They are allowed to wander through the gardens and displays that explore Eleanor's works toward affecting social change. A guided tour of the estate is available and lasts about forty-five minutes. A typical visit starts in the playhouse (formerly the pewter forge) with a brief video about Eleanor; it is followed by a walking tour through the Val-Kill and Stone Cottages, where guides expertly describe Eleanor's life—both public and private. The grounds, which are open dawn to dusk, feature trails for hiking and biking. On select summer days, children kids can enjoy an hour of free outdoor activity with a National Park Service Ranger. Participants explore the trails behind the cottages and create a nature guidebook on Eleanor's Woodland Walk.

Along with the creation of the historic site, the Eleanor Roosevelt Center at Val Kill (ERVK) was established in 1977. This non-profit organization's mission is to "to preserve Eleanor's home in Hyde Park and provide programs inspired by her values and example." One of ERVK's most successful programs, the Girl's Leadership Workshop, began in 1997. It brings groups of young, talented female leaders to Hyde Park for nine days. Workshop participants learn about social justice, personal responsibility, human rights, feminism, citizenship, and leadership while meeting with successful female leaders and visiting organizations such as the United Nations and UNICEF. The program's objectives include:

- Developing the self-esteem, confidence, and skills needed to exercise leadership.
- Providing opportunities for self-awareness, self-definition, and growth.
- Nurturing sisterhood, citizenship, and social responsibility.
- Celebrating the life and legacy of Eleanor Roosevelt.⁸

In addition to training young women to be tomorrow's leaders, ERVK also celebrates and honors individuals who contribute to society today. Persons who play a significant role in bettering society in ways similar to those Eleanor championed are awarded the Eleanor Roosevelt Val-Kill Medal. Past recipients include Hillary Clinton, James Earl Jones, Susan Sarandon, and many Hudson Valley natives such as Hamilton Fish, Jr., and several members of the Dyson family. The ceremony is held annually in October on Val-Kill's grounds.

Eleanor Roosevelt's life and her accomplishments are interesting and inspiring. A woman of true character, dignity, kindness, and strength, she helped

pave the way for social equality. Her legacy lives on through the works and programs of ERVK. Her presence is still felt at Val-Kill.

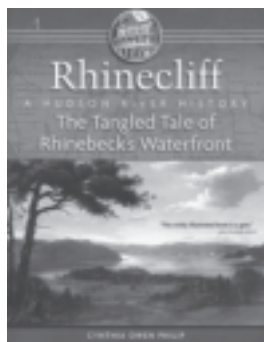
As the Eleanor Roosevelt National Historic Site, Val-Kill is open daily May through October from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm. It is open November through April on a limited schedule with tours available at 1:00 and 3:00 pm. The grounds are open daily year-round, sunrise to sunset. For more information about Eleanor Roosevelt and Val-Kill, call 845-486-1966, or visit: www.ervk.org, www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu, www.nps.gov/elro.

Endnotes

1. Maurine H. Beasley, (Editor); Holly C. Shulman, (Editor); Henry R. Beasley, "Val-Kill," *Eleanor Roosevelt Encyclopedia*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc, 2000. P. 572. <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/marist/Doc?id=10018065&ppg=572>
2. Ibid.
3. Paul DeForest Hicks, "Caroline O'Day: The Gentlewoman from New York," Historic Cooperative Database, New York State Historical Association, 2007, <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/nyh/88.3/hicks.html>
4. Ibid.
5. Beasley, 574.
6. Ibid.
7. John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, *The American Presidency Project* [online]. Santa Barbara, CA: University of California (hosted), Gerhard Peters (database). <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=7595>.
8. "Girls Leadership Workshop Brochure," Eleanor Roosevelt Center at Val-Kill, <http://www.ervk.org/html/glw.html>



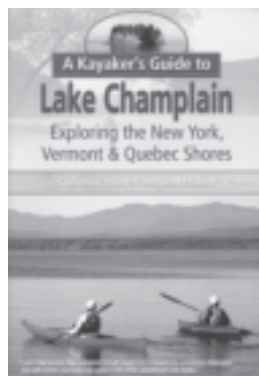
New & Noteworthy Books Received



Rhinecliff A Hudson River History: The Tangled Tale of Rhinebeck's Waterfront

By Cynthia Owen Philip
(Hensonville, NY: Black Dome Press Corp., 2008).
216 pp. \$24.95 (paperback). www.blackdomepress.com

These “tangled tales” present the story of the Hudson River Valley and American history as viewed from the hamlet of Rhinecliff, perched on the Hudson River. This comprehensive record provides a well-illustrated look at the families and institutions that make up Rhinecliff’s history, while also describing the changes in American industry and culture as viewed from this small transportation hub. While often combined with the much larger town of Rhinebeck, Philip captures the charm and character that Rhinecliff possesses all on its own.



A Kayaker's Guide to Lake Champlain: Exploring the New York, Vermont & Quebec Shores

By Catherine Frank & Margaret Holden
(Hensonville, NY: Black Dome Press Corp., 2009).
308 pp. \$17.95 (paperback). www.blackdomepress.com

A truly comprehensive guide to Lake Champlain and its surrounding areas, *A Kayaker's Guide to Lake Champlain* comes with enough information to satisfy anyone interested in exploring the outdoors. Complete with maps, directions, and photographs, the guide divides the lake into eight regions to investigate from the water. To complement the information, Frank and Holden provide thoughtful narratives documenting their own experiences and create a useful list of dos and don'ts for any nature lover visiting the Lake Champlain region.

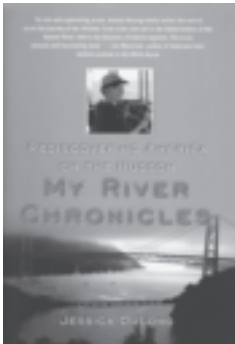


**Dutch New York:
The Roots of Hudson Valley Culture**

Edited by Roger Panetta
(Yonkers, NY: Hudson River Museum/Fordham University Press, 2009).

454 pp. \$29.95 (paperback). www.fordhampress.com
www.hrm.org

The celebration of the 400th anniversary of Henry Hudson’s voyage to the Hudson River Valley has led to a reexamining of Dutch influence and the significance of Dutch heritage on the region. The thirteen essays in *Dutch New York* explore a wide variety of topics to create a balanced representation of Dutch influence in the region over the from the past five centuries. Topics include commerce, religion, and slavery, with particular emphasis on how the legacy of Dutch culture and heritage has evolved and changed since its introduction to the Hudson River Valley in 1609. The book also contains a collection of over forty color images and a forward by historian Russell Shorto.



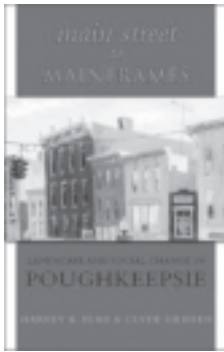
**My River Chronicles:
Rediscovering America on the Hudson**

Jessica DuLong
(New York, NY: Free Press, 2009).

308 pp. \$26.00 (hardcover). www.simonandschuster.com

This is the tale of DuLong’s journey of becoming “one of the world’s only fireboat engineer” and the appreciation of hands-on labor that grew out of her experiences. *My River Chronicles* provides a modern context for the great tradition of jobs that take place on the Hudson River and weaves a modern-day narrative within the region’s rich history. DuLong’s experiences put a strong emphasis on the preservation of what is becoming a lost way of life and the necessary conservation of waterways to maintain it.

—Andrew Villani



**Main Street to Mainframes:
Landscape and Social Change in Poughkeepsie**

Harvey K. Flad and Clyde Griffen
Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009. 451 pp.
www.sunypress.edu

Main Street to Mainframes is an ambitious examination of Poughkeepsie and the broader Mid-Hudson region in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Its authors, respectively a geographer and historian, each of whom taught at Vassar for more than thirty years, witnessed the city's tragic decline. Deeply involved in various causes in Poughkeepsie and environs, they used the city as their classroom and have produced an impressive analysis of how and why a community they clearly love has changed so dramatically. This is a sad, at times quietly angry book that examines the racism and public policies that resulted in disinvestment in the city and subsidized suburban sprawl, but one that also expresses admiration for the many people who have struggled over time and against daunting obstacles to make Poughkeepsie a more just and vibrant place.

Although most of the book covers the twentieth century, the first three chapters investigate the formation of Main Street before 1900. Poughkeepsie, like Kingston but unlike Newburgh, did not grow inland from the Hudson River. Instead, its earliest occupants and industries located on higher ground along the Fall Kill, a creek that cascades into the Hudson near the northern end of the city. Only in the 1830s, when Matthew Vassar located his brewery on the waterfront, did the city begin to expand there, and industrial development along the river intensified following construction of the east shore railroad, which extended from Manhattan to Albany in 1851.

Poughkeepsie's population grew quickly as immigrants, largely from Ireland and Germany in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, arrived in the city looking for work. As Griffen pointed out in an earlier book, *Natives and Newcomers* (co-authored with Sally Griffen), cultural conflict became a fact of life as the number of immigrants increased and experienced hostility from native-born residents, who rightly feared that the recently arrived would compete for jobs and depress wages. As the village evolved into a small city, neighborhoods became stratified by class and ethnicity: economic inequality defined the spatial as well as the social geography of Poughkeepsie.

By the dawn of the twentieth century, when a new wave of immigration from southern and eastern Europe was well underway, Poughkeepsie could boast a diverse manufacturing economy. But what had once been a compact community was reshaped by the introduction of the trolley, which made possible the develop-

ment of residential neighborhoods beyond the city. Yet even as they promoted suburbanization, the trolleys brought riders downtown, and Main Street became a thriving commercial center that attracted shoppers from throughout Dutchess County. At the same time, the city constructed a modern infrastructure of utility lines and sewer service and paved and straightened its streets. The intersection of Main and Market streets became the symbolic heart of city and county, home not only to shops and department stores but to governmental offices, banks, and cultural institutions that erected buildings in the Beaux Arts classical style, which had become symbolic of civic improvement nationwide in the aftermath of the World's Columbian Exhibition, held in Chicago in 1893. But despite the efforts of reformers such as Vassar professor Lucy Maynard Salmon, Poughkeepsie did not fully embrace a range of Progressive goals, including the implementation of a comprehensive urban plan that might have structured urban growth in the decades to come.

In several chapters, Flad and Griffen analyze economic change in the first three decades of the twentieth century—the loss of some longstanding businesses and factories, the arrival of new ones, industrialists' efforts to suppress wages, the impact of the Great Depression on city and region. But more than half of *From Main Street to Mainframes* involves the impact of IBM on the Mid-Hudson Valley. Because Poughkeepsie was already densely built and the City's attempt to annex the township in the 1920s had failed, IBM located in the suburbs: beginning in 1941 it erected a series of large, campus-like facilities south of the city, and later built massive installations in Kingston and East Fishkill as well.

IBM brought prosperity to the region, and, with the shift from punch-card operations and building typewriters to computers, a more highly educated and well-paid workforce. But this prosperity was unevenly distributed: IBMers lived mostly in the suburbs, near their places of work, and as the suburban population exploded retail followed the customers to suburban malls, which soon vanquished Market and Main as the shopping destination of choice. Moreover, the IBM facilities paid taxes to suburban townships and school districts, not the city, which was faced with a population with many impoverished racial minorities who had difficulty finding jobs at IBM or, indeed, even of getting to work in the expanding suburbs.

The city's efforts to revitalize downtown through extensive clearance of the older, deteriorating neighborhoods along the river and in the north end—more than 1,300 dwelling units were razed, as were numerous factories and other businesses—as well as through the introduction of a pedestrian shopping mall on Main Street (which many other cities adopted, usually with no more success than

Poughkeepsie), simply could not succeed. Even with federal urban renewal and antipoverty funds and gains that resulted from the Civil Rights movement and antidiscrimination laws enacted by Congress in the mid-1960s, the challenges were much greater than the resources: federal policies had tipped the developmental playing field by subsidizing suburban growth through tax policies and spending programs. By the 1970s, Flad and Griffen conclude, “For all practical purposes, the city as vital core for the larger community had ceased to exist” (p. 225). As the city’s population of racial minorities increased along with fear of crime, white flight accelerated, as did Poughkeepsie’s downward spiral. An aging, impoverished city was surrounded by prosperous suburbs, which Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton have described as “American apartheid.”

Even as Poughkeepsie’s residents struggled to overcome the segregation that afflicted every Hudson River Valley city I know, IBM’s loss of market share in the manufacture of personal computers resulted in a dramatic downsizing of its operations and workforce. Although the Poughkeepsie region managed to recover from the loss of high paying jobs, the future remains uncertain. To be sure, the continuing vitality of its two hospitals and three colleges (Vassar, Marist, and Dutchess Community as well as the Culinary Institute of America, all located outside the corporate limits of the city)—“meds and eds” in planning and development discourse—is a major driver of the postindustrial economy. So are the efforts of conservation organizations such as Scenic Hudson and the Hudson River Valley Greenway in protecting the quality of life. Nevertheless, the process of subdividing farms and transforming productive agricultural land to commercial or residential use continues largely unchecked; tax and spending policies still redirect investment from city to suburb; and parochialism and racial divisions still inhibit the development of a shared sense of community between Poughkeepsie and its neighbors and across the racial divide.

In broad outlines, this is an all-too-familiar story to historians of urban and suburban America. What gives *Main Street to Mainframes* its distinctiveness is its broader focus on the region: while Poughkeepsie remains the centerpiece, the authors tie its destiny both to competition with other cities in the Hudson Valley in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and to the racial, cultural, and economic divisions that have increasingly separated the city and its suburbs over the second half of the twentieth century. Flad and Griffen bring to their study a devotion to Poughkeepsie as community and shared landscape and present a compelling argument for why understanding history is essential to shaping a more inclusive society and economy in the decades to come.

—David Schuyler, *American Studies*, Franklin & Marshall College

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The Hudson River Valley Institute

The Hudson River Valley Institute at Marist College is the academic arm of the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area. Its mission is to study and to promote the Hudson River Valley and to provide educational resources for heritage tourists, scholars, elementary school educators, environmental organizations, the business community, and the general public. Its many projects include publication of the *Hudson River Valley Review* and the management of a dynamic digital library and leading regional portal site.

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