



BETHLEHEM AND THE HUDSON

The Hudson Fulton Champlain Quadricentennial invites us to remember Bethlehem's history and anticipate its future. Bethlehem's association with the Hudson River played a significant role in the town's development. Ready transportation for people and produce, full of fish, providing ice and recreational opportunities, the Hudson is a significant natural resource.

After Henry Hudson's journey in 1609, early settlement of what was to become the Town of Bethlehem began along the Hudson, Norman's Kill, and Vloman's Kill. In 1649 the name Bethlehem referred to the settlement at the confluence of the Hudson and Vloman's Kill. One of the town's earliest extant homes, the 1720 Parker-Winne House on Creble Road, is located within 100 yards of the Vloman and reflects Dutch style architecture. In the 1630's the Norman's Kill was sprouting sawmills.

As the town grew inland and established hamlets at the cross roads, the Hudson River provided transportation for farmer's cash crops. Barges at Winne's Dock at Cedar Hill shipped oats, hay, apples and ice southward to New York City. People continued to travel on the Hudson. Van Wies' Dock became the bustling terminal of the Hudson Steamboat Company in 1835. Passengers disembarked here for the bumpy stage coach ride to Albany.

Later, ice was an important commodity, harvested from the Hudson in winter, much of it sent south in the summer. George Best operated the Best Ice Company and its enormous ice house at today's Henry Hudson Park. His stately home can still be seen on Barent Winne Road on the way to the park. Vloman Kill water was later flooded into the flat area where the ballpark is today, creating cleaner, purer ice for consumption.

Fishing on the river was an important subsistence activity for early Bethlehem residents and is still enjoyed by many today. Shad, striped bass, eels, sturgeon, and sunfish are some of the catch.

Today, the Hudson River is an important transportation route and recreational outlet. The Port of Albany, on land formerly in the Town of Bethlehem, ships everything from generators to cocoa beans. People take part in boating and fishing, walking and hiking river side parks. The Hudson River and its tributaries will continue to enhance Bethlehem's quality of life into the future.