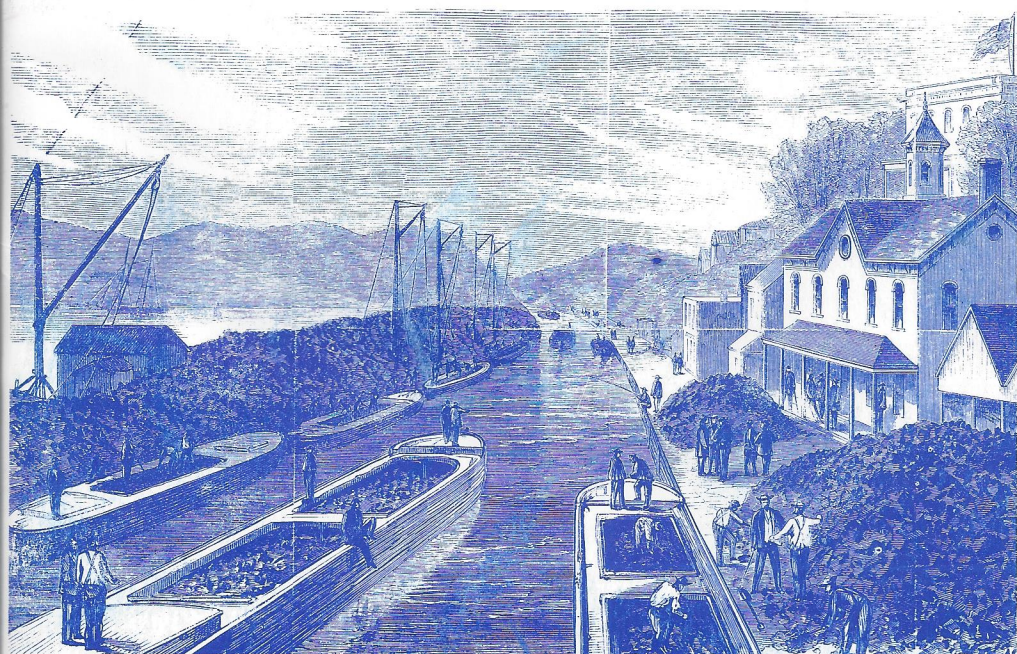


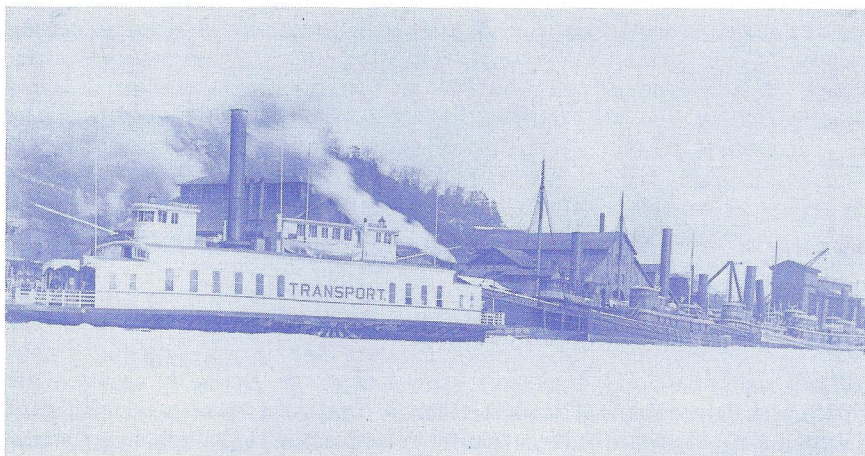


THE LOG

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Rondout: Hudson River Port 1850-1950



Rhinecliff Ferry and Cornell tugs.

Rondout is the port of Kingston. It has been a section of the city of Kingston since 1872, but was once a thriving independent town with its own port, industries, schools, and post office. It sought status as an independent city, but was instead joined to the village of Kingston, three miles away inland, and lost its independence as it became just a part of the larger community. However, Rondout did not lose its identity or its colorful history.

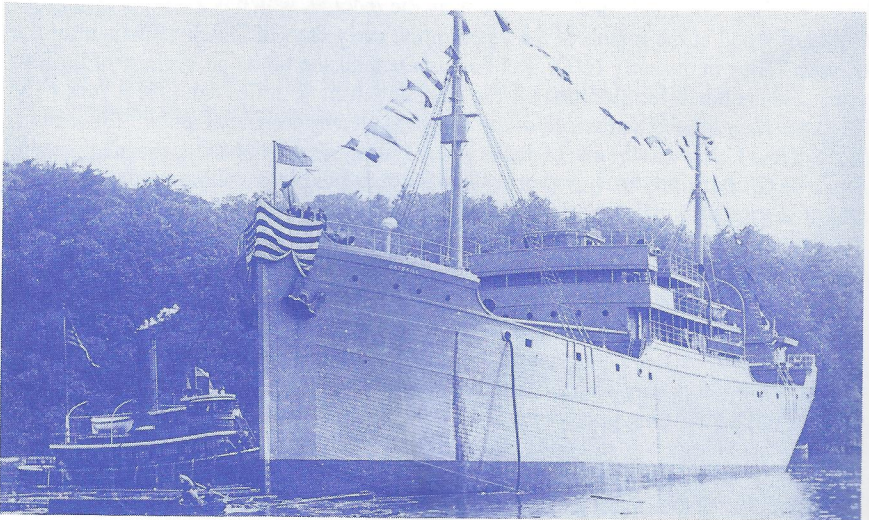
Rondout takes its name from the creek it is situated on, which is a tributary of the Hudson River. The creek takes its name from the redoubt, which is a type of small fort, that once stood at the mouth of the creek in the early days of Dutch settlement of the Hudson Valley in the early 1600s. Rondout is a natural site for a port because of its deep water and sheltered location just off the Hudson River, 90 miles from New York City. From the early days of settlement of the Kingston area by the Dutch in the 17th century, the Rondout Creek was the site of docks where sailing vessels departed, carrying passengers and the farm products grown in the area, returning later with manufactured and imported goods from New York and Europe. There were some farms and warehouses in Rondout along the creek, but it wasn't until 1828 and the opening of the Delaware and Hudson Canal that a real village grew up along the Rondout.

In that year, 1828, just three years after the opening of the Erie Canal, the dream of the Wurts brothers of Pennsylvania was realized to transport anthracite or hard coal from the coalfields of eastern Pennsylvania to tidewater by canal to reach the potentially huge market of New York City. Canal fever gripped the nation in the 1820s and 30s. Water was the best way to transport goods even if it meant building small rivers to achieve it! Road building technology was still poor, and the steam locomotive was just being introduced. Inexpensive labor in the form of newly-arrived immigrants was available and exploited in the building of the canals and many other projects in those premechanized days when muscles, picks, shovels, and dynamite were the tools used to construct the canals.

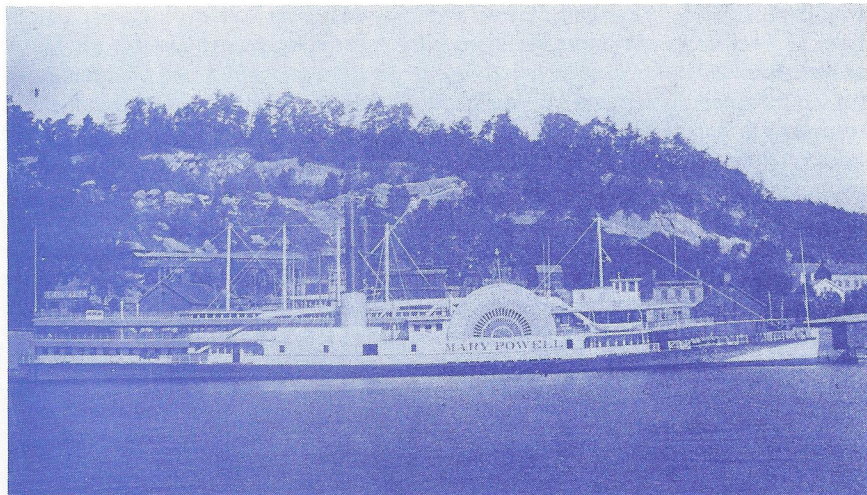
Honesdale, Pennsylvania, marked the western end of the Delaware and Hudson Canal, where coal fresh from the mines was loaded onto the canal boats for the 108-mile journey to Rondout, following the valleys of the Delaware and Wallkill Rivers and the Rondout Creek. Some 108 locks and several aqueducts were required to bring the canal boats loaded with coal and pulled by mules or horses to Lock #1 at Eddyville, a tiny hamlet three miles west of Rondout on the Rondout Creek. Tugboats or small towing steamers brought the loaded canal boats to the Island Dock at Rondout, where the coal was unloaded. Then the coal was loaded into larger canal boats or barges and transported by tugboats to other destinations, but mostly to New York City. Coal was beginning to be used for heating homes and as fuel for the burgeoning numbers of types of steam machinery for manufacturing and transportation from steamboats to the new steam locomotives. As the 19th century continued, the demand for coal expanded rapidly, and the D&H Canal remained in continuous operation until 1898, by which time the railroads had taken over much of the transport of coal.

Rondout, the village, jumped into existence rapidly with the arrival of the D&H Canal and its coal. Not only did the facilities for unloading and transshipping the coal appear, but also all the support businesses that went with the new industry, like boat building, supply businesses of all types, banks, and saloons. During the heyday of the D&H Canal, the population of Rondout reached and surpassed that of its sister village of Kingston. Kingston, which had been founded by the Dutch in 1652 as a farming community located on the Esopus Creek about three miles inland from the Hudson, was a much quieter and more settled town than Rondout. The citizens of Kingston were not altogether pleased with the rough-edged community on the Rondout despite the money it brought into the area. The new arrivals, mostly Irish and German immigrants, mostly young men, were rough and ready. Saloons were numerous in Rondout, and fights, even brawls, were not uncommon for awhile. As time passed the new Rondouters settled down.

Houses appeared and began to creep up Rondout's hills- small insubstantial buildings at first, but larger and better houses as time and fortune allowed. Churches appeared as soon as new arrivals were settled, and by the 1860s numerous steeples pierced the



WWI freighter built at Rondout.



Mary Powell "Queen of the Hudson"

skies as sanctuaries of all faiths were built, many to hold congregations of 800 to 1000 people. Wurts Street, named for the originators of the canal, should have been named Church Street for the stately procession of handsome churches which climbed its hill. Overlooking Rondout from West Chestnut Street were, in time, the biggest houses, the homes of the most successful Rondout businessmen, the Coykendalls, the Dwyers, the Schoonmakers, and others.

Although the coal transportation industry was the main event in Rondout, other industries developed during the 19th century. In 1845 the Newark Lime and Cement company began removing and burning limestone from the hillside behind the Ponckhockie section in the eastern part of Rondout. This thriving business hollowed out the hill there while producing natural cement, which then was also transported down the Hudson to New York City. In the course of the building of the D&H Canal, great deposits of the same natural limestone were also discovered, creating another industry along the course of the canal, especially around Rosendale. Rosendale cement was famous in the late 19th century for being extremely durable and able to set well under water. It was used for the base of the Statue of Liberty and the building of the Brooklyn Bridge, both in the 1880s.

Bluestone was another natural building material which, though not quarried in Rondout, was finished and transported from several bluestone yards along the Rondout wharves in the 19th century. The bluestone, which was quarried in the Catskills not far from Kingston, was brought to the waterfront on wagons. Transported mainly by sloops and schooners (apparently the cheapest form of water transport at the time), the bluestone was used for sidewalks and curbing throughout the Hudson Valley, in New York City and in cities up and down the Eastern seaboard. It may still be seen today in Hudson Valley towns as well as New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore.

Boatbuilding was a major business from the time that the D&H Canal opened until the mid-1950s. Canal boats and barges were built by the hundreds in numerous small yards, and tugboats to pull those barges were built here as well. Many boats came here to be repaired or to be converted for other use or even to be dismantled, like the famous Mary Powell, whose homeport was Rondout. During the wars of the 20th cen-

tury, the U.S. Navy called upon the boat and shipyards of the Rondout to supply various types of wooden vessels as part of the war efforts. Freighters were built in World War I, as were subchasers. In World War II, more subchasers were built as well as ocean-going tugs, minesweepers, lighters, and barges. At the time of the Korean War, landing craft were built in Rondout. All of this shipbuilding provided a great deal of employment for local people, and was a source of tremendous pride for the community.

Passenger vessels of all sizes called at Rondout, from the small "yachts" or water buses like the C.A. Schultz which connected the small communities along the creek, to the large famous New York steamers like the Mary Powell. The Mary Powell traveled to New York and back from Rondout daily in season between 1861 and 1917, and was so beautiful, fast and beloved, that she was known as the Queen of the Hudson. Nightboats like the James W. Baldwin and the William F. Romer left Rondout and traveled to New York at night carrying passengers and freight, as did other boats for many years. Ferries crossed the Rondout at several points until bridges were built in the 20th century. Also the cross-Hudson River Kingston-Rhinecliff Ferry made its homeport at Rondout for many years until a bridge was built in 1957.

Towing was the main boating activity out of the Rondout in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The Cornell Steamboat Company, which controlled all the towing on the Hudson in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, was headquartered at Rondout with forty to sixty tugs, making it the largest towing company in the east at the time. Hundreds of men were employed by the company, either as crews on the boats or working in the machine, carpentry, and boat repair shops along the creek. During its heyday there was always a northbound and a southbound tow on the Hudson, day and night, consisting of dozens of barges and scows carrying all manner of things including bricks, ice, cement, and coal. One large towing steamer with side paddlewheels or one or two screw propeller tugs were used to tow each long string of barges, with a small tug used as a helper to take barges on and off the larger tow as it passed along the river without stopping.

All these businesses continued actively employing many workers in the Rondout-Kingston area for decades. Rondout was the most important port between New York and Albany. However, once the Depression of the 1930s set in, Rondout declined as did most other areas of the country. There was an upsurge during the World War II years of the 1940s, particularly in the boat-building industries in Rondout which continued to prosper through the mid-1950s. After that the decline continued as all the old industries were gone and residents, businesses, and even some churches, left Rondout for other areas, or even, for some businesses and churches, closed down entirely. In the late 1960s a Federal program called Urban Renewal was used to destroy much of downtown Rondout in an effort to clear blighted areas. This program, which destroyed old rundown neighborhoods in many small cities in the northeast, produced no solutions in Rondout or other nearby communities such as Newburgh where the destruction of old neighborhoods was even more extensive. Old problems were not necessarily solved and improvements were not necessarily provided. It was not until 1980 when businesses like restaurants and shops, and museums like the Maritime Museum arrived in Rondout, that a real revival of the neighborhood began. Since then more restaurants and businesses have come to the area, marinas have expanded, bringing more recreational boaters, housing has been built, and Rondout has become a real tourist destination. The City of Kingston works hard to promote the Rondout area with festivals and events, and there is a New York State Urban Cultural Parks Visitors Center in the neighborhood. Though Rondout's present may not be as colorful or complex as its past, there is still much here to celebrate.