

Dayline steamer *Hendrick Hudson*  
HRMM Ringwald Collection, Painting by William G. Muller

# Hudson River Maritime Museum

## Pilot Log 2010 / 2011

# The Golden Age of Steamboats

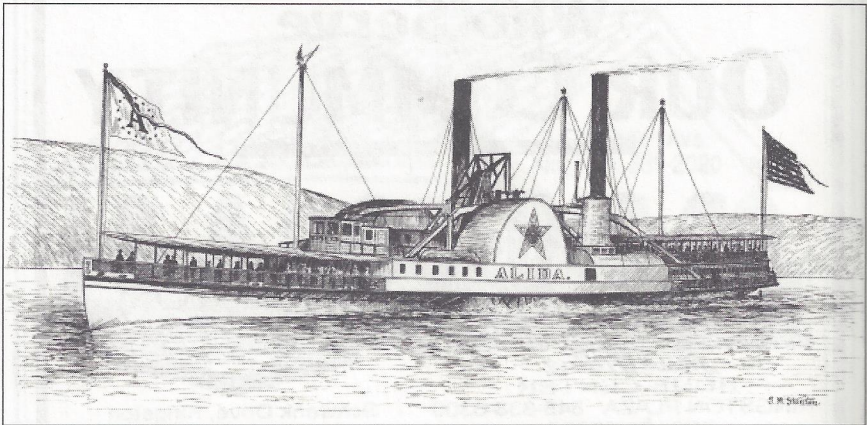
Allynne H. Lange, Curator  
Hudson River Maritime Museum

In 1807 Robert Fulton's *North River Steamboat* launched a revolution in transportation on the Hudson River which had broad-reaching effects. However, until 1824 when the monopoly on steamboat operation held by Fulton and his partner Robert Livingston was broken, high fares kept the experience of steamboating limited to the well off. After 1824 competition brought many new steamboats to the Hudson lowering fares and allowing many more people to experience the river by steam.

In the 1820s the Hudson Valley began to be painted by artists like Thomas Cole, and travel books with scenes of the river were soon published in Europe. Visitors to New York from Europe knew that a trip by Hudson River steamer to see the beauties of the Valley was a must on their itinerary. When the Marquis de Lafayette revisited this country in 1824, part of his grand tour was by Hudson River steamboat. International stars like Jenny Lind always traveled by Hudson River steamboats. Many distinguished visitors wrote about their voyages on the Hudson.

In 1824 the first of the great Catskill Mountain hotels, the Catskill Mountain House, opened, and those who could afford a vacation traveled to the mountains by steamboat. Travelers could choose to travel by dayboat and see the lovely scenery, or by nightboat and sleep in comfort on the steamer thereby saving travel time. Hudson River steamboats aimed to be elegant and comfortable with fine furniture, excellent dining rooms, live music, and fine art on board to attract passengers. Their owners also wanted the boats to be fast and to keep fares low for the same reason. As a result many people could enjoy the experience of seeing the Hudson

*continued on page 23*



*The Alida, a New York to Albany steamer built in 1846, was one of the fastest and most beautiful boats of her day.*

from one of the handsome steamers.

For those who could not afford a vacation at a mountain hotel, an outing on a Hudson River steamboat represented a one day mini-vacation. Over the decades millions of New Yorkers left the hot city for outings on the steamers. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries many groups took annual day trips to upriver parks. Many of those parks, such as Kingston Point Park and Indian Point Park, were built by the transportation companies as destinations for steamboat passengers. Bear Mountain Park, a New York State Park which opened around 1914, received perhaps the largest number of visitors from New York City by steamboat over several decades.

For over 150 years dozens and dozens of Hudson River steamboats carried millions of passengers on pleasant outings on the beautiful and historic Hudson River. Although the last Hudson River steamboat, the *Alexander Hamilton*, finished her career of nearly fifty years on the Hudson in 1971, people still have fond memories of trips on the Hudson by steamboat. The legacy of the boats is being preserved at the Hudson River Maritime Museum for future generations.



"The Grand Saloon of the Palace Steamer Drew" one of "The Grandest Palace Drawing Room Steamers in the World." This view of the main salon of one of the Peoples' Line Albany to New York nightboats in the 1870s shows the elegance of the Hudson River steamboats of that era, as well as the elegance of the passengers. It is easy to see why these boats were called "Floating Palaces," and why the fashionable and socially conscious wanted to travel on them.