

# Dutch & Native American Heritage in the Hudson River Valley



Edward Moran. 1892. *Henrik Hudson Entering New York Harbor, September 11, 1609*. Courtesy of the Berkshire Museum, Pittsfield, Massachusetts, USA

The cultural heritage of the Hudson River Valley reaches back at least 10,000 years to the indigenous peoples who hunted, migrated, and settled throughout the region. These Native communities maintained spiritual traditions honoring the natural environment and used the rivers to build a far-reaching and vibrant trade economy. When Dutch explorers arrived in the 17th century, they saw opportunities in the valley's rich natural resources and existing trade networks and began building permanent settlements, founding the Dutch colony of New Netherland. Today the cultural influences of the Native American and Dutch communities remain. Setting precedents for federalist government, a free trade economy, cultural and ethnic diversity, and religious tolerance, the philosophies of these societies laid foundations for the political and cultural development of the United States and continue to shape the heritage of the Hudson River Valley today.

## Indigenous Peoples of the Hudson Valley

Prior to European arrival, the Hudson River Valley was home to many Native American societies—from the Munsee Indians of the lower valley (also known as Lenape), to the Mohicans and Mohawks of the upper valley.

Early Dutch settlers, about one-half of whom were not ethnically Dutch, learned important survival techniques from Native Americans, and adapted many of their diplomatic, cultural, and social practices. Manhattan retains the Munsee Indian name *Mannahatta*, "the island of many hills." The Mohawk Indians were the easternmost branch of the Six Nations of the Haudenosaunee

Confederacy (also known as the Iroquois), whose structure inspired the United States' federalist government system.

Trade with the Dutch gave Native Americans access to fabrics, glass beads, and steel tools, but exposed them to decimating diseases. As the Dutch colony grew, so did conflicts. Many tribes were forced to migrate west.

Today, New York State is home to eight federally-recognized tribes and over 220,000 people who identify as American Indian or Alaska Native.



Henry Hudson's Half Moon, 1609  
Library of Congress

## New Netherland

In 1609, Henry Hudson sailed into what is now called the Hudson River Valley. Exploring for the Dutch East India Company, his *Half Moon* crew traded with Lenape and Mohawk villages. Although they failed to discover a northwest passage to Asia, Hudson returned to Amsterdam to report of beautiful land, rich in resources, and navigable by "as fine a river as can be found."

Dutch traders soon dominated the economy. At **Fort Orange** (1624), Mohawk and Mohican trappers served as an important source for beaver pelts, which were then in high demand in Europe. The trade was so critical that the northern outpost was called

Beverwijck (loosely translated as Beaver District), which was subsequently renamed Albany.

In the 1620's, the Dutch West India Company began "purchasing" land from the Native peoples for Dutch landowners called *patroons*. The first was Kilaen Van Rensselaer's estate. Granted in 1629, Rensselaerswijck encompassed the land surrounding Albany. **Crailo State Historic Site**, the family home until 1924, is now a museum, the interpretive focus of which is the Dutch culture of the upper Hudson Valley.

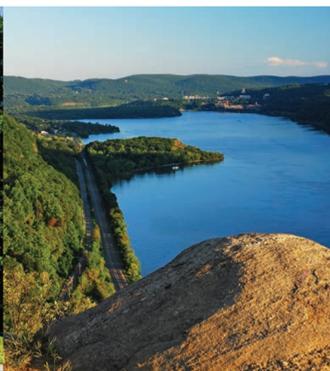
Goods from Beverwijck were transported south to other Dutch settlements, including Esopus and New Amsterdam. Esopus, later renamed Kingston,

attracted farmers who encroached on land used by the Esopus Indians. The Peach Tree War, other regional conflicts between Europeans and Native Peoples, and the Esopus Wars led the Dutch to build a defensive stockade around their town in 1658. The **Uptown Stockade District** in Kingston is the largest remaining early Dutch settlement in New York State.

When English ships seized New Amsterdam in 1664, Dutch governor Peter Stuyvesant oversaw New Netherland's peaceful transition to become the Province of New York. The terms of surrender allowed Dutch inhabitants to continue their way of life, which flourished during the course of the 18th-century.



The Jean Hasbrouck House on Historic Huguenot Street, New Paltz, NY



Hudson Highlands State Park



Eleanor and Franklin at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, Hyde Park, NY



Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site, Hyde Park, NY



Crailo State Historic Site, Rensselaer, NY

## Harmony with Nature

Known for its breathtaking scenery, the Hudson Valley's landscape was largely shaped by its indigenous communities. Using controlled burning, Munsee and Mohican tribes cleared woodland to create crop fields. These sustainable practices provided open meadows and views that inspired Hudson River School painters.

For a glimpse of the valley as it appeared in its more natural state during the 18th-century, one can hike the trails of **Hudson Highlands State Park Preserve**, **Harriman State Park**, and **Clarence Fahnestock Memorial State Park**.

The Dutch left their mark through distinctive architecture. Original farmhouses like the **Bronck Museum** (1663 & 1738), the **Luykas Van Alen House** (1737), the **Madam Brett Park and Homestead** (1709), and the **Jacob Blauvelt House** (1832) preserve features like gambrel roofs, overhanging eaves, and compact layout designs.



Harriman State Park, Sloatsburg, NY



Luykas Van Alen House, Kinderhook, NY



Jacob Blauvelt House, New City, NY

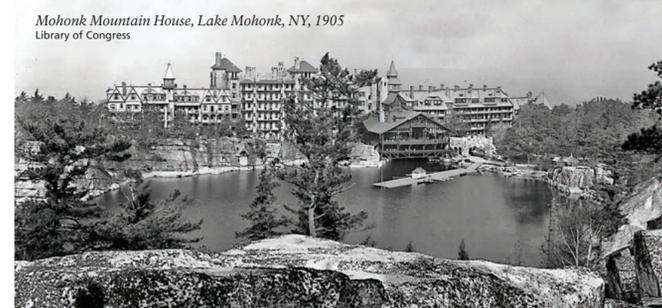
## Cultural & Political Influences

In the 17th-century, Dutch society was the most progressive in Europe, so New Netherland also embraced modern ideas like ethnic diversity, religious freedom, and free trade when applied to other Europeans. Dutch, Munsee, Mohican, Mohawk, African, and other European people lived within the same region. The relationships between these groups ranged from cooperative trade, to exploitive slavery, and outright warfare.



Daniel Ninham, a *sachem*, or chief, of the Wappinger Indians, was an 18th-century political hero. Indian Field in **Van Cortlandt Park** honors him and other Stockbridge Munsee Mohican warriors who died fighting in the 1778 Battle of Kingsbridge. Ninham memorials throughout the region include Ninham Mountain State Forest and Ninham Mountain Fire Tower.

From 1883 to 1916, the **Mohonk Mountain House** was the site of the annual Lake Mohonk Conference of Friends of the Indian, where leaders discussed ways to make Native Peoples adopt European ways and culture.



Mohonk Mountain House, Lake Mohonk, NY, 1905  
Library of Congress

The **Van Schaick Mansion** (1735) served as military headquarters for the English during the French and Indian War, and the Continental Army during the American Revolution.

The Roosevelts, who trace their ancestry to the earliest Dutch immigrants, became one of America's most influential political families. Theodore Roosevelt, the 26th U.S. President, was the first to prioritize protecting the country's natural resources. As governor of New York, he founded the Palisades Interstate Parks Commission, an organization that maintains **Bear Mountain** and **Storm King Mountain State Parks**.

Visit the **Home of President Franklin D. Roosevelt National Historic Site** in Hyde Park to learn how FDR expanded the National Park Service to protect historic sites, including nearby **Vanderbilt Mansion** (1899). A lifelong resident of the Hudson Valley, Roosevelt incorporated Dutch style into his family's home Springwood (1915), his retreat **Top Cottage** (1937), and his wife Eleanor's retreat **Val-Kill** (1924).



Bear Mountain State Park Pool, 1935  
Below: View from Bear Mountain State Park

## Ongoing Cultural and Environmental Advocacy

Seasonal festivals, museum exhibits, and commemorative events celebrate the Native American and Dutch influences that still shape the Hudson River Valley.

The Hudson River Sloop Clearwater, a reconstruction of an 18th-century Dutch sloop-rigged sailing ship, was launched in 1969 through a campaign for stronger environmental protection that was spearheaded by legendary folk musician Pete Seeger. It's now a traveling museum with a home port at the **Hudson River Maritime Museum** in Kingston.

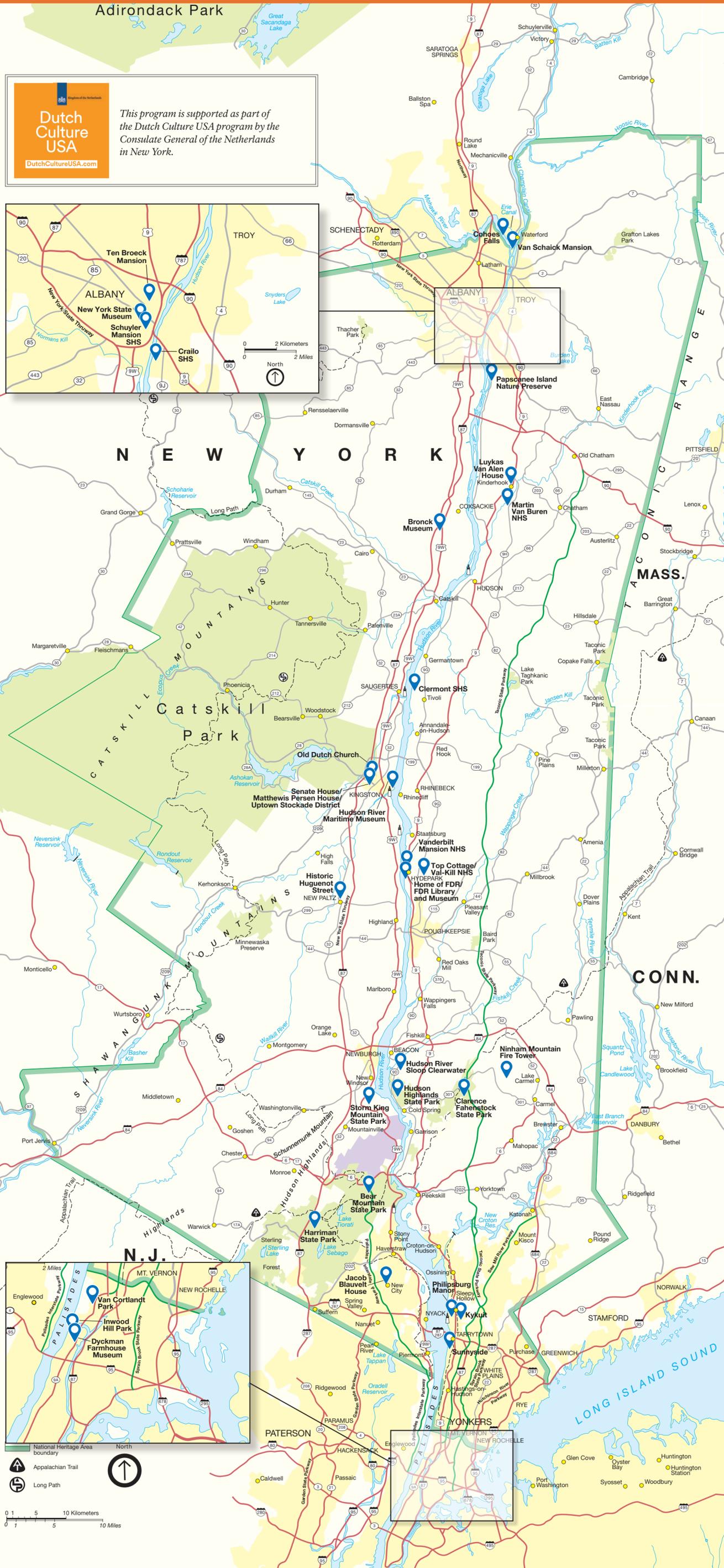
The **Redhawk Native American Arts Council** ([www.redhawkcouncil.org/](http://www.redhawkcouncil.org/)) hosts programs year-round to educate people on the history of indigenous peoples in the U.S. and celebrates active Native communities.

The annual **Albany Tulip Festival** takes place in Albany's Washington Park every May to observe the city's rich Dutch heritage.



Hudson River Sloop Clearwater





**Dutch Culture USA**  
DutchCultureUSA.com

This program is supported as part of the Dutch Culture USA program by the Consulate General of the Netherlands in New York.

The Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area is a federally funded program created by Congress in 1996. The mission of the Heritage Area is to recognize, preserve, protect, and interpret the nationally significant cultural and natural resources of the Hudson River Valley for the benefit of the nation. The Heritage Area and the National Park Service funded the production of this map and guide. Please send your comments or map revisions to Hudson River Valley Greenway, 625 Broadway, 4th Floor, Albany, NY 12233-2995; call 518-473-3835; or email [hrv@gudsongreenway.ny.gov](mailto:hrv@gudsongreenway.ny.gov).

## Upper Hudson Valley



Cohoes Falls was an important meeting point for the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) and Dutch fur traders. The adjacent Falls View Park is a popular site for visitors to see this spectacular natural landmark.

The Papscaene Island Nature Preserve, named for 17th-century Mohican sachem Papsickene, was the site of a Mohican village dating back thousands of years. This 156-acre nature preserve offers access to two miles of the Hudson River shoreline.



Built in 1737, the Luykas Van Alen House is a designated National Historic Landmark and home museum authentically representing rural 18th century Dutch colonial life.

The Van Schaick Mansion is near an original Mohican village site called "Moenem's Castle." It was a strategic meeting point for Haudenosaunee and Dutch traders, and later became a critical military headquarters.



The Martin Van Buren National Historic Site honors the 8th President of the United States; born and raised in Kinderhook. Van Buren named it Lindenwald in 1839 during his presidency, then lived here until his death in 1862.



In Albany, Ten Broeck Mansion (pictured above), Crailo State Historic Site, and Schuyler Mansion State Historic Site preserve examples of the Dutch colonial lifestyle, and honor three of the most influential families in the city's history.

The New York State Museum hosts an exhibit on the culture of the Haudenosaunee Indians, as well as a Mohican display and an exhibit on the city's trading post origins.

Clermont State Historic Site was the Hudson River seat of New York's politically and socially prominent Livingston Family. Seven successive generations of the family left their imprint on the site's architecture, room interiors and landscape, all of which may be visited.

## Mid-Hudson Valley



The City of Kingston is on land originally farmed by the Esopus tribe. In 1652, Dutch colonists founded the village of Wiltwijck. Visit the Senate House Museum, the Matthewis Persen House, and the Old Dutch Church to learn the history of the Uptown Stockade District in Kingston, which is the largest remaining early Dutch settlement in New York State.



President Franklin Roosevelt was proud of his family's Dutch roots, and incorporated this heritage into his Hyde Park estate. The Home of Franklin D. Roosevelt National Historic Site includes FDR's lifelong home Springwood, his personal retreat Top Cottage, and Eleanor Roosevelt's cabin Val-Kill.



Walk through the Hudson River Maritime Museum to learn how the Hudson River has shaped regional life.

Historic Huguenot Street, in New Paltz, dating to the 1670s, tells the story of the French Huguenots, who set sail for the Dutch colony to escape religious persecution. By the time they reached their destination, the English had taken control. The settlers decided to build a community and purchased 40,000 acres from the Esopus Munsee tribe.

Hike through the Hudson Highlands State Park or Clarence Fahnestock State Park and take in natural scenery as it likely appeared during the 18th century.

The Ninham Mountain Fire Tower honors the Wappingers sachem Daniel Ninham, and offers a fantastic view of the Hudson River and surrounding mountains.

Bear Mountain State Park and Storm King Mountain State Park are protected and maintained by the Palisades Interstate Parks Commission, an organization co-founded by New York State Governor Theodore Roosevelt, before he went on to become the first "Conservationist President."

## Lower Hudson Valley



In Tarrytown, Sunnyside offers a look at the life of Washington Irving, America's first internationally-famous writer. Explore the setting of Irving's famous "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" with a walk through the Old Dutch Church of Sleepy Hollow and Sleepy Hollow Cemetery. Visit at Halloween to catch a performance of the spooky tale!



Kykuit, the Rockefeller estate, exemplifies the Gilded Age lifestyle of a prominent New York family. Learn about the Rockefellers' contributions to business, government, and philanthropy as you take in their art collections, spectacular gardens, and scenery.

Philipsburg Manor in Sleepy Hollow, together with Philipse Manor Hall in Yonkers, were once part of the 52,000 acre estate of the Philipse family. The former now features a restored 18th-century trading and milling living-history museum, an 18th-century Dutch barn, and education about the enslaved Africans who made up the chief labor force of the manor.

Van Cortlandt Park was the site of the Battle of Kingsbridge on August 31, 1778. Indian Field honors Native Americans who died fighting the British, including Chief Daniel Ninham and other Stockbridge Museum Mohicans. This site was previously occupied by the Wiechquaskeck Lenape until Europeans settled the Bronx in 1639.

Inwood Hill Park offers recreation areas amid the last natural forest and salt marsh in Manhattan. Shorakkopoch Rock commemorates Peter Minuit's infamous 1624 exchange with the Lenape to allow Dutch settlement. Around the corner, the Dyckman Farmhouse Museum is the oldest surviving Dutch homestead in Manhattan.