The Erie Canal opened in 1825 and instantly became America's most important waterway, linking the Great Lakes with New York City and the Atlantic Ocean. After eight years of construction, the Canal allowed ships to travel from the Great Lakes to the East Coast, significantly reducing transportation costs and stimulating economic growth. The Erie Canal was a testament to the power of engineering and the potential of waterways to transform commerce.

The Catskill Mountains, located along the banks of the Hudson River, quickly became a popular destination for tourists and artists. The region's stunning natural beauty, including the Kaaterskill Falls and the Catskill Mountains, attracted artists such as Thomas Cole, who established his home in Catskill and dedicated his life to capturing the beauty of upstate New York.

In 1836, Thomas Cole married Maria Barrow and settled at Cedar Grove, a hillsides farm in Catskill. From the porch of his home, Cole could see the Catskill Mountains. Although much of his work remained regional, Cole experimented with allogorical and religious themes in such works as The Course of Empire (1836–38), a series of five paintings, and The Voyage of Life (1842). For two years, Cole shared his home and studio with his student, Frederic E. Church.

Church was one of the first artists to recognize the artistic potential of the Catskill region. In 1860, Church bought a farm in the Hudson Valley, and over time, he designed a Persian style mansion high on a hill across the river from Cedar Grove. He called his home Olana, which means “lookout” in the Algonquin language, and it became a virtual art museum. Among the earliest American artists to build a home as a work of art, Church managed to make a living by charging admission to view some of his masterpieces. The mansion and its 250-acre estate are now Olana State Historic Site and Olana State Historic Site, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation.

The Hudson River School marked a decisive break with traditional European academic painting, and the later 19th century American style developed by Cole, Durand, and other artists is known as the Hudson River School. By the 1850s, the Hudson River School was a fully formed and well-recognized group, and the influence of Cole and Durand was widespread. The Hudson River School was one of the few American styles of art to achieve international recognition, and its influence can be seen in the work of many of the world’s greatest artists.

The Hudson River School continued to flourish throughout the 19th century, and the paintings it produced continue to be admired today. Today, visitors can view hundreds of Hudson River School paintings in museum galleries across the United States and around the world. Visitors can appreciate the beauty of the Hudson River Valley through the eyes of these great artists, as well as gain a deeper understanding of the American character and the nation’s cultural history.
Upper Hudson

One of the nation’s oldest museums, the institute includes more than 300 paintings and oil sketches by members of the Hudson River School and has over 150 sketches, drawings, letters, photographs, and other materials in the collection. www.albanyinstitute.org

Although intended to appear natural, the landscape was extensively designed by Church in the picturesque style he used in landscapes on canvas. The house is fully furnished and decorated to appear as it was during Church’s lifetime. The collection includes numerous paintings and sketches by Church and works by other Hudson River School artists Thomas Cole, Martin Johnson Heade, James McNeil, and Sanford Gifford. (National Historic Landmark) www.fllac.vassar.edu

Hudson River School Art Trail
The Hudson River School Art Trail takes visitors to several sites in the valley that inspired Thomas Cole, Asher Durand, Jasper Cropsey, Stanford Gifford, and other artists. The trail currently includes the homes of Cole and Church, views of Catskill Creek, Kaaterskill Clove, Kaaterskill Falls, North Lake and South Lake, and Brown Founder’s Monument, a stone monument dedicated to the memory of Brown and a battle of the American Revolution. The park is open seven days a week, except when closed for maintenance or for national holidays. For more information about the trail, contact the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation, & Historic Preservation, 10 Morris Ave, Cold Spring, 845-265-3040, or visit hudsonrivervalley.com.

Mid-Hudson

Senate House, 208 Fair St., Kingston, 845-334-2750. Built in 1768, the Senate House is arguably America’s oldest public building and the site of the first New York State legislature. The museum houses the largest collection of works by John Vanderlyn (1775-1852), of America’s first internationally recognized artists. Vanderlyn painted portraits, classical scenes, and landscapes at a time when American artisans were struggling for recognition. His Landing of Columbus hangs in the U.S. Capitol. Although under-appreciated in his lifetime, Vanderlyn is now considered an important forerunner of American painting. www.senatenoahouse.org

The Hudson House of Painting Collection is located at 21 Spring St., Catskill, 518-943-7465 or 518-943-9350; or visit hudriverarttrail.org. The Hudson House, which includes artwork adorning the walls, has been maintained in its original condition. The Newington-Cropsey Mansion, the collection includes Hudson River School paintings by Morey, George Inness, Sanford R. Gifford, and Henry Ward Ranger. (National Historic Landmark) www.hudsonrivervalley.com

Kaaterskill Falls B&B, 25 Appleby Rd., Catskill, 518-943-7465 or 518-943-9350; or visit hudriverarttrail.org. This 1830s Greek Revival mansion, the collection includes Hudson River School paintings by Morse, George Inness, Sanford R. Gifford, and Henry Ward Ranger. (National Historic Landmark) www.hudsonrivervalley.com

Washington’s Headquarters, near by Fort Putnam, 10.5 miles. Washington’s Headquarters was reconstructed in 1993, includes a room devoted to the Hudson River School. The paintings are on permanent display, including works by Cole, Church, Gifford, and Morse. www.fsl.cuse.edu

Van Alen Institute, 900 Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn, 718-638-5000. The institute offers a range of educational programs and courses in the arts, including painting, sculpture, drawing, and photography. The museum’s extensive collection of 19th-century American art includes works by Thomas Cole, Albert Bierstadt, and Asher Durand. In addition, the institute presents a wide range of exhibitions, lectures, and workshops throughout the year. www.vanalinstitute.org

The Frick Collection, 1 East 70th St., New York, 212-288-0700. The Frick Collection is one of the nation’s leading private museums, with a collection of American art that includes works by Thomas Cole, John日下午 5 pm. www.frick.org.

The New York Historical Society, 170 Central Park West, 212-873-3400. The New York Historical Society is a museum and research center that focuses on the history of New York City and New York State. The museum’s collection includes works by Thomas Cole, Martin Johnson Heade, and Sanford Gifford. 10 Morris Ave, Cold Spring, 845-265-3040, or visit hudsonrivervalley.com.

The American Museum of Natural History, 79th St. at Central Park West, 212-769-5000. The American Museum of Natural History is one of the largest and most comprehensive museums in the world, with a collection of more than 30 million specimens. The museum’s collection includes works by Thomas Cole, Martin Johnson Heade, and Sanford Gifford. www.amnh.org.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1000 Fifth Ave., at 82nd St., New York, 212-600-7100. The Metropolitan Museum of Art is one of the most important art museums in the world, with a collection of more than 2 million works of art. The museum’s collection includes works by Thomas Cole, Martin Johnson Heade, and Sanford Gifford. www.metmuseum.org.


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Visit the sites along the Hudson River School Art Trail to see the sites that inspired the Hudson River School, Hudsonrivervalley.com.