

June 15, 2009

OUR TOWNS

## Two Births, Miraculous but Unfinished

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HUDSON, N.Y.

All week long, the grand flotilla, led by a replica of Henry Hudson's Half Moon, has made its way up the river. It sailed under the Rip Van Winkle Bridge here Thursday afternoon, marking the anniversary of the ship's voyage 400 years ago.

Part history lesson, part spectacle, part celebration, Hudson 400 in many ways marks a fragile, incomplete miracle — the way the river, a foul industrial cesspool just three decades ago, has been brought back to life.

But if the river, in large part, has been reclaimed, the future of the towns along it is a more complicated business. And few places reflect those complications more than Hudson, about 100 miles north of New York City. Once a raucous industrial city spewing pollutants into the river, then a boarded-up postindustrial corpse, now, like the river, it's both a marvel of reclamation and a problematic unfinished story.

If you wanted a snapshot of the Hudson Valley reborn, you could have done worse than to have been in Hudson on Saturday when the Flag Day Parade rolled along the main drag, Warren Street, for almost two hours. On and on they came, from the Pearl Harbor survivor who was the parade marshal, to the Uncle Sam on stilts, the veterans, police officers, fire trucks and local politicians, to the Federation of Polish Sportsmen and the Squeeze Play Accordion Band.

They rolled past Le Gamin Country Cafe and Boutique, past Bodhi Holistic Spa and Shoppe, past Baba Louie's wood-fired organic sourdough pizza, Omnia Nouveaux designer clothing, Pilates Hudson, a zillion art galleries and antiques stores. It was both vintage Americana and the new, hip Hudson Valley 2.0 exemplified by the art gallery and antiques store mavens who over the past two decades have brought this town back to life.

The result: a slice of SoHo along the Hudson, with a new waterfront park that has a sense of vitality most small towns could only dream of.

But, as always, there's a catch. Most in the crowd — men in their Harley-Davidson or Orange County Choppers T-shirts, kids in black do-rags, working families in old creaky vans — don't have much connection to Hudson 2.0. It's fine, but it's not for them.

And the Hudson that once supported them continues to wither away. Two of the remaining manufacturing employers, a furniture plant and one that made dehumidifiers, are closed or closing, costing hundreds of blue-collar jobs. The biggest debate of the past decade was over a proposal by a Canadian company, St. Lawrence

Cement, to build a mammoth plant with a smokestack 40 stories high. The proposal had the town, which long ago had two cement plants on the river, divided between old and new. Its defeat was viewed as a significant environmental victory and a blessing for the downtown, but not necessarily for those for whom the fancy galleries are way out of reach.

“I put in countless job applications and no one even calls me back,” said Jamont McClendon, 25, who says he’s lucky to get part-time work. “Everything’s closing or being downsized. It’s a great town in some ways, but I’m pretty disgusted. There’s no living here unless you’re rich.”

FOR the most part, old and new get along in a town of 7,500, about a quarter black, that still feels like a real place, not a too-perfect, make-believe one.

Dennis W. McEvoy runs J. C. Rogerson, a hardware store dating to 1832 that’s the oldest on the street. He saw downtown prosper and then turn into a boarded-up ghost town when businesses fled to the malls, so he said Hudson was lucky to have the galleries and boutiques that have brought it back.

“The new businesses put us back on the map,” he said. “I hear people say, ‘I wish we had the old stores,’ but that’s not going to happen.”

Hudson’s new economy, and that of much of the region, is inseparable from a reborn river. And even if it wasn’t, surely we’ve learned enough to know that destroying our natural heritage can’t ever be an option again.

But in this lovely town, where new and old lingered after the parade to watch fireworks dance over the river, here’s the dilemma. For decades we provided good blue-collar jobs by using the river as receptacle for every waste product and toxic substance factories spewed out.

Those days are over. But for all the talk about green jobs, we’re a long way from figuring out how to provide them in a world where we know that there’s no difference between the river’s health and our own.

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