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# A View from Above: Reimagining Poughkeepsie Through the Lens of the Walkway over the Hudson

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**A VIEW FROM ABOVE:  
REIMAGINING POUGHKEEPSIE THROUGH THE  
LENS OF THE WALKWAY OVER THE HUDSON**

Michael Zipp  
April 15, 2011

Senior Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
For the Bachelor of Arts in Urban Studies

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Adviser, Brian Godfrey

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Adviser, Leonard Nevarez

# A VIEW FROM ABOVE



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LENS OF THE WALKWAY OVER THE HUDSON

MICHAEL ZIPP  
APRIL 15<sup>TH</sup> 2011

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### **Acknowledgements**

I dedicate this thesis to my mother. You came of age in what could be considered one of the darkest moments for Hudson Valley cities, but you managed to build a life and raise a family here. Though you did not have the opportunity to see your youngest child graduate from college, you've been a constant inspiration to me.

I would like to thank Professors Brian Godfrey and Leonard Nevarez for guiding my research and pointing me in directions that I otherwise would not have considered. Additionally, this thesis is largely indebted to the concepts presented by classes taught by Lisa Brawley, Tobias Armbrorst, Tim Koechlin, and Susan Blickstein, whose instruction has largely shaped my understanding of cultural, political, and historical underpinnings of urban morphology.

## **Foreword**

My interest in the Walkway Over the Hudson State Park is, first and foremost, rooted my deep love of New York's Hudson River Valley. Not only am I a lifelong resident of the valley's Columbia County, but my ancestry is can be tied to the area dating back to at least the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Growing up, I watched the economically depressed cities and sleeping agricultural villages I spent time in radically transform into a constellation of highly desirable locations, newly populated by former Manhattan residents seeking a change of pace. I marveled at the speed at which the old farmhouses around me were bought, sold, and restored. Fortunately, the appreciation and preservation of the Hudson Valley's historic qualities has always been at the core of this migration.

As a child, however, my family was directly engaged in one of the Hudson Valley's most intense clashes between preservation and economic development to date. Much to the dismay of Manhattan weekenders, environmental groups, and historic preservationists, St. Lawrence Cement, where my mother was employed as Financial Controller, proposed to build a new plant just south of Hudson, New York. Public hearings, endless letters to the editors of local newspapers, and heated demonstrations ensued, and the plan was eventually overturned. I vividly recall how difficult it was for my mother to reconcile her understanding of the scenic significance of the Hudson Valley with the region's dire need for employment opportunities.

When I later arrived in Poughkeepsie in 2007 to attend college, I was struck by the enormous tension between the Vassar College campus, a beautifully preserved hotbed of academic and creative energy and the city of Poughkeepsie, where almost no signs of the growing interest in the Hudson Valley were visible. Despite being surrounded by

four colleges, the city seemed stuck, offering up little reason for students to even enter the city proper, let alone consider it as a viable post-graduate place of residence.

When the Walkway Over the Hudson opened in 2009, a considerable amount of dialogue surrounding the project appeared hopeful that it would spark a boom in tourist activity, contributing to the local economy and making Poughkeepsie a more desirable place to live. At the very least, for what seems to be the first time, Poughkeepsie now has a public space where area residents of a multitude of economic and cultural backgrounds intermingle. If even just for this reason, I believe that the Walkway has achieved some level of success. Although it may be too soon to tell what the permanent implications of the Walkway Over the Hudson may be for the City of Poughkeepsie, it is my personal hope that the project will at least spark a greater understanding and reverence for the historical, cultural, and architectural heritage of the Hudson River's Queen City.

## **Introduction: The Walkway Over the Hudson and its Hudson Valley Context**

When the Walkway over the Hudson State Park officially opened on October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2009, the event, in many ways, signaled an incredible turning point in attitudes toward the City of Poughkeepsie. After looming over the Hudson River for over three decades, the charred skeleton of the Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge was unveiled to an anticipatory public as both a preserved aspect of the city's rich history, and a dynamic public space. Reputed to be the "longest elevated pedestrian park in the world," the Walkway, as of the end of 2011 had attracted over three quarters of a million visitors, a number considerably higher than what had been projected by the Walkway Over the Hudson Foundation during planning stages (Angel 2011, 1). Notably, the pedestrian bridge functions not only as a unique park for local residents, it has also drawn a significant tourist influx for Poughkeepsie.

This thesis aims to trace the development of the Walkway Over the Hudson Historic State Park, looking specifically at the way in which the project has been framed as a potential economic stimulant for the City of Poughkeepsie and the Hudson Valley more generally. While I do not wish to discredit the widely held belief that the Walkway will prove to be of some economic merit, I instead hope to suggest that the park is perhaps more significant for its potential to help cultivate a specific sense of heritage-based place for residents. I place a particular emphasis on the theories surrounding the practice of historic preservation, suggesting the various ways that preservation can be utilized to promote growth and a sense of community, rather than it become a force that pickles the city in an intangible and inflexible history.

### *Physical Description of the Park*

Over the course of my research, I visited the Walkway Over the Hudson on numerous occasions, hoping to both understand the park's physical attributes and glean a sense of social makeup of the park's users. In order to familiarize the reader with the site, I offer the following description, derived from these visits:

The Walkway Over the Hudson is an elevated linear park that spans the Hudson River between the Town of Lloyd, on the western shore, and the City of Poughkeepsie to the east. In total, the park is 1.28 miles in length and stands 212 feet above the river's surface, offering dramatic views of the Hudson River and surrounding environs. Over half of the Walkway looks out onto an open expanse of water, while portions on each end of the bridge extend above land. On the eastern side, the Walkway extends across an abandoned waterfront industrial zone and a largely residential community within Poughkeepsie.

The Park utilizes an existing structure, the Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge, as its support structure, with new concrete decks in place of the original wooden and metal rail lines. Despite small modifications and the addition of explanatory placards, the physical form of the park is remarkably similar to the railroad bridge when it was completed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Walkway is not limited to pedestrian access, as the name suggests; it also provides linkages to previously established bicycle rail trails on either shore of the river. The Walkway Over the Hudson is managed and maintained by The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation. It can be accessed from parking areas in the City of Poughkeepsie and the Town of Lloyd, and plans have been

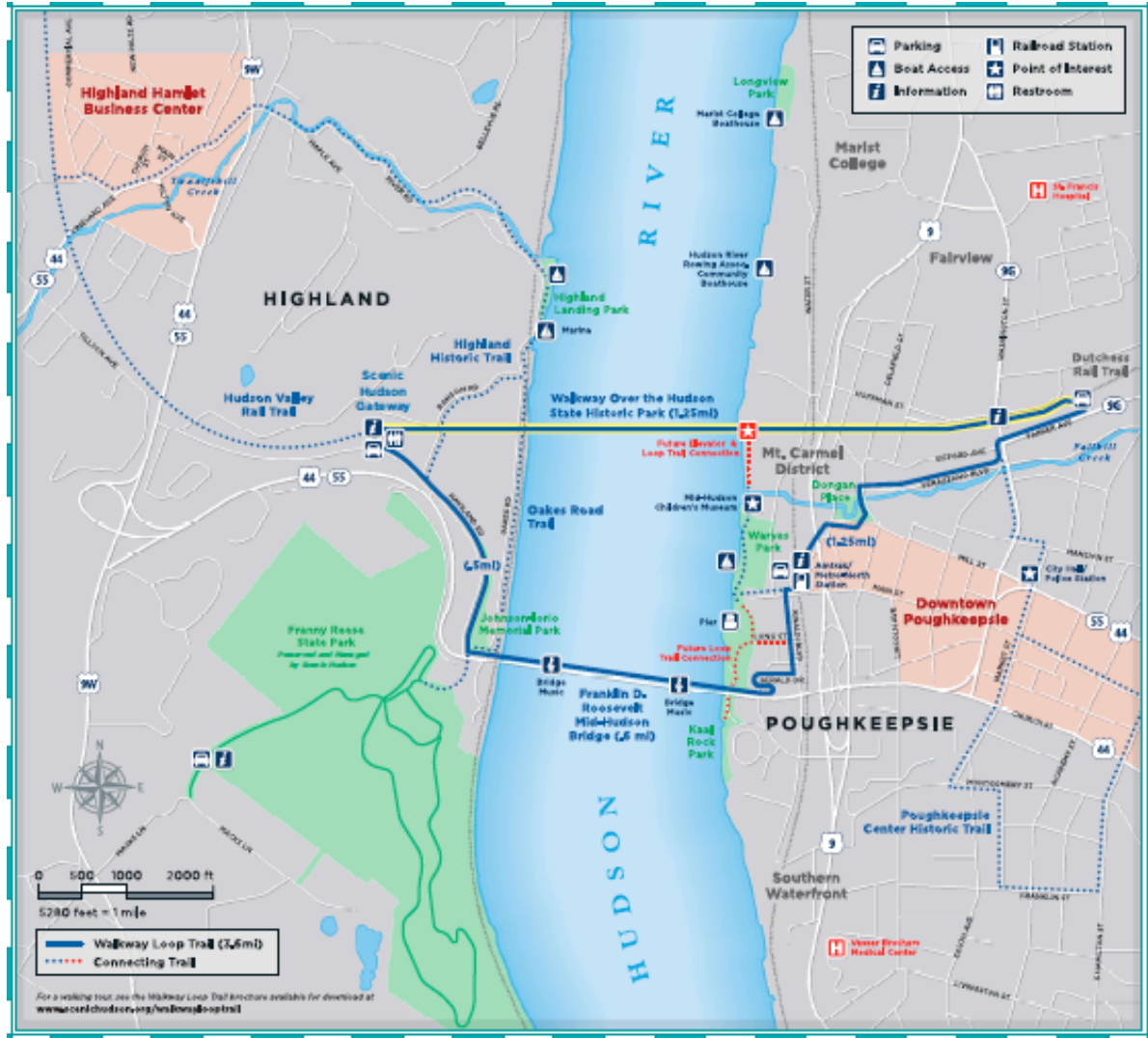
made to construct an elevator on the Poughkeepsie side that will connect to the city's waterfront Waryas Park.

On an average visit to the Walkway, I witnessed a wide variety of people utilizing the park, from college students, families, or groups of elderly people out for a leisurely stroll, to runners and bicyclists who utilize the park for more fitness oriented purposes. Disregarding these individual motivations, I was struck by the sheer number of users present each time I visited the Park.

Figure 1. Walkway Over the Hudson on Opening Day (Artvoice, 2009)



Figure 2. Walkway Over the Hudson Loop Map (Walkway Over the Hudson 2009).



### *The Valley Context*

The Hudson Valley, even as early as the colonial era, has been considered one of the most scenic regions in the United States, attracting millions of visitors to its picturesque landscape of rolling countryside, rugged mountains, meandering streams and rivers. The uniqueness of the area's natural and historical features has come to support a multi-billion dollar tourism industry in the region, focused largely on the small working farms that blanket the Valley's more rural areas (Scenic Hudson 2010, foreword). The

small cities embedded along the banks of the Hudson River, however, have historically received less attention from tourists, instead becoming sites of industrial ruin, economic decline, and concentrated poverty.

Small cities, that is, places of 50,000 residents or less, have had an especially difficult time adapting to changes in dominant industry particularly because of their size. The World's leading metropolises are often understood as the dominant producers of culture, attracting residents, new industries, and capital. Villages and small towns, on the other hand, are perceived as quaint and old fashioned, becoming the perfect place to purchase a weekend home or 'settle down' in the country. Small cities, lacking both the dynamism of the metropolis and the quaintness of the village must seek creative solutions to market themselves.

The settlements that dot the banks of New York's Hudson River represent the full spectrum of urban scale. New York City, at the river's mouth, has a population of over 8 million people, classifying it as a 'Global City' (Bell and Jayne 2006, 4). Tracing the River further north, one encounters a string of small cities, namely, Peekskill, Newburgh, Beacon, Poughkeepsie, Kingston, and Hudson. Sprinkled between these urban centers are a collection of small towns and villages, some of which, such as Woodstock, Millbrook and Rhinebeck, have gained considerable notoriety for their hosting of major events of popular culture. Because of the vast array of transportation options made available during various moments in history, as well as the continual growth of suburban zones, all of these locations are bound together in an increasingly more tangled web of population movement. As infrastructural developments through most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the Hudson Valley, as well as in the rest of the United States, privileged the



individualistic spirit of the automobile, parkways, highways, and interstates were driven through the region, either severing or bypassing completely small cities such as Poughkeepsie.

This is not to suggest that the allure and legacy of rail travel in the Hudson Valley, which historically linked city centers, has been totally eclipsed by the automobile. In fact, a visit to the Poughkeepsie Train Station during peak hours will show that ridership is still quite strong. In 2009, Metro-North alone facilitated a record 83.5 million trips, viewed as a reliable and less expensive way for employees in Manhattan to commute from New York City's expanding suburban hinterlands (Rife 2009, 1). Furthermore, Hyde Park, the historic estate that once belonged to Frederick W Vanderbilt, former director of the New York Central Railroad, continues to draw many visitors to Dutchess County. However, as the trend toward rural weekend and vacation residences grows, the cities of the Hudson Valley continue to be seen more as points of connection for transportation or places to pass through and less as destinations on their own.

Though long-supported federal policies supporting suburbanization and urban renewal caused significant damage in urban areas, their abolishment, under the neoliberal outlook of President Reagan in the 1980s only served to further deepen the problem. Without assistance from the Federal level, many American cities found themselves in a state of crisis. In order to attract new investment, populations, and development, cities turned to tourism. When several small cities inhabit the same geographical region, as is the case in the Hudson Valley, these cities are forced into competition with one another, at a level that had not been experienced since the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century railroad wars (Judd

1999, 35). Exploiting the specificities of place and historical narratives has become one way that older cities, now coping with the overwhelming loss of industries, have come to entice visitors. For this reason, it is particularly important to understand how the historic preservation of a city's monuments is bound up in an increasingly competitive system of heritage-based marketing.

### *Defining Historic Preservation*

For the purpose of this investigation, I wish to define the term *historic preservation* not only as the act of salvaging a city's monuments or buildings from deterioration or complete destruction due to their distinctive architectural qualities, but additionally as a continual process which imbues these structures with a specific cultural narrative and inserts them into a contemporary context. While this definition represents a synthesis of attitudes toward preservation, it is largely derived from a now infamous 1975 debate between urban sociologist Herbert J. Gans and architectural critic Ada Louise Huxtable. Gans, suggesting that much of the work carried out by preservationists privileged the narratives of wealthy white men and elite architects, was countered by Huxtable, who believed that their great buildings "are a primary and irreplaceable part of civilization" (Huxtable 1975, 1). Instead of suggesting that one view is necessarily more correct than the other, I rather attempt to reconcile their claims. Cities should strive to preserve a range of cultural narratives that accurately represent the unique traits of their history. Ultimately, my understanding of conflicts regarding historic preservation and public space is informed by Dolores Hayden's claim that "the politics of identity – however they may be defined around gender or race or neighborhood – are an

inescapable and important aspect of dealing with the urban built environment, from the perspective of public history, urban preservation, and urban design” (1997, 7).

For residents of Poughkeepsie and other small cities in the Hudson Valley, the provision of viable public space and well-maintained parks seems quite limited, despite the fact that “pristine nature” surrounds these cities. Where parks or public monuments do exist, they disproportionately offer up a specific cultural narrative of white-privileging early America. As Setha Low suggests, the process of historic preservation, planning and development, and park interpretation recreated the colonial period as a white male space” (2005, 149). This stands in great contrast to the current demographics of the city of Poughkeepsie, which report a population that is 35 percent black and 11 percent Hispanic, with 20% of the total population born outside of the United States (American Fact Finder 2011). A walk through the city of Poughkeepsie illustrates this mismatch; for example, tucked within a racially diverse neighborhoods, one finds Dongan Place, in honor of 17<sup>th</sup> century New York Mayor Thomas Dongan. Similarly, along Main Street, the colonial Glebe and Clinton Houses stand, surrounded by a myriad of businesses opened in the past few decades by Latin American immigrants.

Additionally, public access to the Hudson River, arguably the region’s most important natural resource, has become increasingly limited due to the development patterns of manufacturing facilities. Many of the Hudson Valley’s waterfront factories were completely abandoned during the later half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, leaving behind large swaths of contaminated land and dangerously deteriorating industrial buildings. The Walkway Over the Hudson provides a glimmer of hope that city residents will finally have a public means to connect with regional heritage and express their own identity.

However, when cities must resort to playing up their unique attributes in order to compete economically, historic preservation becomes a much more controversial pursuit. As Diane Barthel writes, “History is no longer treated with respectful distance. Rather it is mined for images and ideas that can be associated with commodities” (1996, 117). The hybrid growth-heritage machine, consisting of an alignment of developers, preservationists, politicians, and others, leverages preservation projects in order to create an attractive urban identity, often resulting in the manipulation of authentic historical narratives. Historical places and their associated objects, Barthel notes, can become imbued with an aura that extends “far beyond their superficial qualities of social purposes” (1996, 133).

A third, related suggestion made by historic preservation theorists that is worth noting is the notion that modern society has reached a moment of memory crisis when it comes to urban history. As the built environment of cities are continually reshaped and repurposed during different eras of urban development, urban narratives are increasingly fragmented and juxtaposed against one another, making the formation of a collective memory a difficult endeavor. M. Christine Boyer provocatively asks,

But how can the arts of city building attend to the city of tradition and memory without limiting its horizons to conciliatory conclusions and foreclosing zones of uncertainty and complexity with imposing unjustifiable control over the city and exercising unwarranted authority over others (1996, 29)?

The primary objective of this thesis is to utilize debates within the contemporary practice of historic preservation to frame the Walkway Over the Hudson State Historic

Park. To do so, in Chapter 2, I construct a historical narrative that investigates the changes that have occurred to Poughkeepsie's economy, geography, and population through the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, locating these shifts within greater trends experienced generally across American cities. This narrative illustrates the particular set of local and regional conditions that led to the proposal of bridging the Hudson River for heavy rail in the 1870s, the construction of the Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge in 1888, the bridge's deterioration through the latter half of the 20th century, and its eventual fire and closure in 1974. Additionally, Chapter 2 explicates the ways in which understandings of Poughkeepsie's spatial geography have shifted throughout its history.

Continuing chronologically, the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter of this thesis examines the grass roots movement that developed in the 1990s to preserve the Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge as a historic site and adapt it into a linear park. This chapter focuses primarily on the politics surrounding historic preservation, considering the legal precedents that gave legitimacy to the historic preservation movement in America in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. Furthermore, Chapter 3 investigates the partnership of public and private interests that secured the millions of dollars needed to restore the bridge's structure. Despite benign intentions, the agendas of the organizations and political offices involved with the Walkway Over the Hudson have undoubtedly influenced the way the park is programmed and marketed. As with all historic preservation projects, these specific agendas have inevitably played a part in determining the specific historical identity the park aims to convey.

Building from an explication of the political forces at work in advancing the Walkway Over the Hudson, chapter 4 considers the pro-economic growth rhetoric that has come to characterize the majority of the discussion surrounding the park. As the

story is currently presented, the Walkway Over the Hudson is projected to contribute to a burgeoning tourist-oriented niche within Poughkeepsie, which is expected to have significant economic implications for both the city itself and the entire Hudson Valley region. This chapter begins with a historical analysis of the development of the Hudson Valley as the birthplace of tourism in America, based primarily in visual representations of the region. In many ways, these images, proliferated by the Hudson River School artists still largely define our understanding of the Hudson Valley. Much of the Walkway's potential for success is derived from its location within a "cultural infrastructure" that facilitates tourism (Gassan 2008). This chapter continues by reflecting on the large and small scale economic affects that the walkway may have on Poughkeepsie, presenting the preliminary economic findings generated in the Economic and Fiscal Impact Report carried out in 2009 by Camoin Associates.

Finally, the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter refocuses to include a more anthropological lens in order to consider the impact that the Walkway Over the Hudson has had on social life and attitudes in Poughkeepsie, a city that just two decades ago was reputed to be struggling with a "clouded image" (Berger, 1998). Ultimately, I suggest that perhaps the Walkway should be exalted not for its potential value as a cultural product to be sold to tourists, but rather as a site that has helped to carve out an interesting, dynamic, and democratic space for city residents.

Certainly, the Walkway Over the Hudson offers both Poughkeepsie residents and visitors a new perspective, literally and metaphorically, on some of the region's greatest and most well known assets: the Hudson River and Catskill Mountains. However, the park additionally provides a space from which the palimpsest that is the City of

Poughkeepsie can be better understood and reflected on – a space where residents can interact with the city’s vast and diverse cultural heritage.

Figure 3. The View From the Walkway



## Chapter 2

### **The Life and Death of an Industrial Monument: The History of the Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge**

The idea to create the Walkway Over the Hudson, the pedestrian and bicycle oriented adaptive reuse of the Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge, was born out of a long period of decline for both the City of Poughkeepsie and the railroad industry. In order to best understand exactly how the project came about, it is important to examine the particular political, cultural, and economic changes that shaped Poughkeepsie's physical appearance and economic conditions from the late 19<sup>th</sup> to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. In many ways, the transformations experienced by Poughkeepsie throughout this period can be read as a paradigmatic depiction of overarching trends in post-industrial America.

#### *Poughkeepsie's Early Years and the Entrance of the Railroad*

Dutch Colonists established Poughkeepsie in the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century, a small village on a plateau overlooking the Hudson River at a point between the earlier settlements of New Amsterdam and Fort Orange, now known as New York City and Albany, respectively. In these formative years, daily life in Poughkeepsie was largely insular, and like many other Colonial outposts in the Hudson Valley, agriculture structured village's economy. It was not until the 1770s, almost a century after the settlement was founded, that Poughkeepsie began to entertain the potential of the Hudson River as an economic resource. In this decade, several docks were constructed at the water's edge for the purpose of shipping produce to larger settlements both up and down river (Flad and Griffen 2009, 26). Aside from the occasional warehouse or hotel built near the docks, Poughkeepsie's orientation to the river would remain minimal for another 70 years.



Poughkeepsie grew from a small village to city and subsequently began playing a larger role within the region as a direct result of the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century upsurge of the railroad industry. In the 1840s, Poughkeepsie became an important center for the shipment of Hudson Valley agricultural products upon the completion of the Harlem Railroad line, which provided a direct link between eastern Dutchess County and New York City (Flad and Griffen 2009, 32). By 1850, railroad track in the United States stretched for 9,021 miles, most of it centered in New England and the Mid Atlantic States (Stover, 22).

In 1851, the completion of the Hudson River Railroad line, which hugged the river's banks from New York City to Albany, ushered in a wave of Irish immigrants to the city, many of whom had worked as laborers on the track's construction (Flad and Griffen 2009, 32). This early connection to the railroad established Poughkeepsie as an easily accessible destination for Europeans entering the United States through New York City, and in the following decade, several thousand more immigrants, mostly from Ireland and Germany, settled in the city. The heritage of these communities is still very much evident in Poughkeepsie today.

Enabled by the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century expansion of the railroad system and explosion Poughkeepsie's population, prominent businessmen in the area established a considerable physical presence along the waterfront by opening factories and mills near the train lines. During this time, Poughkeepsie's waterfront became a generally undesirable location, "associated with noise, smoke, grime, and other unpleasant industrial by-products" (Flad and Griffen 2009, 35). Poughkeepsie's wealthiest residents began to build homes on the southern edge of the city, leaving the streets sloping down to the river's edge for

immigrants and the working class. Waterfront industry continued to grow, requiring more resources from further distances. Between 1869 and 1873, yet another rail line was constructed the through city, making it clear that Poughkeepsie had established itself as a regional industrial and transshipment center.

### *Building the 'Great Connector'*

Although the first proposal to link the eastern and western shores of the Hudson River at Poughkeepsie came in 1855, the concept wasn't seriously entertained until the late 1860s, a time when railroad infrastructure in the United States was being constructed at a rapid pace to meet the growing demand for more efficient modes of transportation for both people and goods (Mabee 2001, 9). Naturally, early advocates of building the bridge were prominent members of Poughkeepsie society, for whom enhancing the connection to railroad lines would be economically beneficial. This group included John Winslow, an iron and steel manufacturer, Mayor Harvey Eastman, George Gaylord, a shipping merchant, and Matthew Vassar, a brewer and founder of Vassar College. In 1871, these men and other interested parties formed the Poughkeepsie Bridge Company, publishing a charter entitled *Bridging the Hudson* in the same year.

In addition to the economic advantages of locating a rail bridge in Poughkeepsie, the geography of the surrounding area made the proposal particularly viable. At Poughkeepsie, the Hudson River is considerably less wide than further downstream, and high plateaus on both sides of the river could allow a structure to span it without impeding on river shipping via large ferries. Additionally, rail infrastructure existed at the site near both of river's edges. Following the north-south axis described by the

Hudson River, Dutchess County encompasses a region approximately equidistant from New York City and Albany, New York State's historical centers of industry and government. West to east, the Bridge would link coalfields in Pennsylvania to the burgeoning industrial centers of southern New England. Poughkeepsie's strategic location made the city the focus of attention for many (Goldsmith 2010, 120).

However, not all area residents or even Railroad Barons took so kindly to the proposal to link the eastern and western shores of the Hudson at Poughkeepsie. Particularly, Cornelius Vanderbilt, owner of the New York Central Railroad believed that the bridge would compete with one he had already built at Albany. Other cities in the region, most notably Newburgh also vocally opposed the proposal, as city officials and business leaders feared it would diminish their economic importance by crippling the city's rail-car ferry crossing. This clash between neighboring Hudson Valley cities would be just one of many in the intense battle to gain prominence within the region.

Additionally, J P Gould, a Dutchess County Civil Engineer pointed out that there were several ambiguities in the Poughkeepsie Bridge Company's charter. In 1876, Gould published *A Review of a Project for Bridging the Hudson River at Poughkeepsie*, which warned local residents the bridge would not necessarily provide a great economic boost for the city and they should avoid investing in the project. He writes,

There *is* no vitalizing virtue in the mere passage of a train of cars through a town with no principle of growth itself; a fact attested by scores of places that are today are lifeless as when a rail-road first projected through them... On the other hand, the construction, through a portion of the city

mainly devoted to residences, of such as railway thoroughfare as it is contemplated, would prove an unmitigated nuisance (4-5).

Almost Prophetically, Gould's remarks underline the sort of progress for the sake of industry and shipment that would come to partition, deaden, and taint the image of Poughkeepsie over the following century through the spawning of rail lines and succeeding highways, overpasses and arterials of the automobile age.

Regardless of Gould and others' concern, preliminary construction of the Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge began in May of 1872 after Mayor Eastman amended the Poughkeepsie Bridge Charter through questionable political practices, allowing for the construction of the bridge's four support piers (Mabee 2001, 34). However, due to a number of factors, including this opposition, Eastman's death, the Panic of 1873 and subsequent national economic depression, progress on the bridge stagnated for at least a decade, before any of the piers were even erected. Ultimately, The Poughkeepsie Bridge Company reorganized in 1886, when faced yet again by competition from a neighboring city.

In Peekskill, approximately thirty miles downriver from Poughkeepsie, a similar group of local businessmen aligned with financial backers from Boston in an effort to build a Railroad Bridge near Storm King Mountain, even drafting a set of architectural plans for how it might be completed (Mabee 2001, 33). At this time, coal industry leaders in Pennsylvania began to view a Mid-Hudson River rail crossing as a necessity, due to the inefficiency of the existing ferry-method of transport, and assumed positions on the Bridge Company's board of Directors. Construction of the

Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge resumed almost immediately, continuing steadily until the first train traversed across its span two years later.

Figure 4: Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge Nearing Completion: 1887 (Wadlin 2009).



The Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge officially opened on December 31, 1888 and was, at the time, the longest bridge built anywhere in the world. While it only held this title for one year, until a bridge spanning the Firth of Forth in Scotland was completed, the accomplishment sparked a sense of civic pride for many Poughkeepsie residents (Mabee 2001, 55). From bank to bank, the bridge spanned a total length of 6,768 feet, at a height of 212 feet above the water level, and was considered by many to be a marvel of modern engineering. Its structure, comprised of steel beams, allowed the bridge to support the heavy weight and swift speed of the trains that utilized its tracks. Shortly after the bridge opened, it began to attract the attention of residents from other communities in the region.

On one occasion, 800 excursionists visited from Albany to observe the marvel at the industrial wonder. Ironically arriving by steamship, a mode of transportation that the railroad was vying to outmode, the group remarked that the open ironwork seemed insubstantial and precarious, “like the web of a great spider suspended between heaven and earth. (Mabee 2001, 54).

While the Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge remained a successful and efficient river crossing for several decades after its initial opening, as Gould suggested, it actually provided very little stimulation for Poughkeepsie’s economy. Instead, it positioned the city as an important link between New England and the American West, and came to be colloquially known as “The Great Connector.” However, the American railroad industry would suffer successive blows throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century that would come to drastically affect the shape and condition of the Country’s urban areas. Particularly detrimental to the railroad was the introduction of the automobile at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Between 1900 and 1910, the number of automobile registrations in the United States rose from a mere 8000 to a staggering 469,000 (Kay 1997, 142).

Poughkeepsie was not immune to these transformations, and began to macadamize its major streets at the turn of the century (Flad and Griffen, 68). Patterns of settlement also began to shift during this time, as infrastructural improvements allowed residents to build homes further from Poughkeepsie’s commercial center, defined by the crossroads of Main and Market Streets. At first, new development was relatively constrained to the area directly south of the center. “Developers and fashionable families increasingly settled... South Hamilton, Academy, and Garfield streets as an elite neighborhood” (Flad and Griffen 2009, 77). However, by the 1920, building crossed the

boundaries of the city and spread into the town of Poughkeepsie, signaling the emergence of suburbanization.

### *Industrial and Railroad Decline*

As early as 1913, residents had already begun seeking more efficient modes of crossing the Hudson River; Much like railcar ferries, automobile ferries took a considerable amount of time and could only handle a certain number of vehicles at a time, causing for an early form of traffic congestion. Opening the Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge to pedestrian and automobile traffic, conceived originally in the bridge's charter, was, at the time, seen as a potential scheme to address the problem. Throughout the early 1920s, several studies were done to assess the bridge's structural capacity, all of which proved that adding a new automobile deck, while plausible, would be an incredibly expensive endeavor (Flad & Griffen 2009, 123).

Finally in 1924, after much advocacy by local politicians and business owners, the New York State Government was persuaded to allocate 4 million dollars to the construction of a new vehicular bridge at Poughkeepsie. The Mid-Hudson Bridge, as it was officially named, officially opened on August 25, 1930 and was celebrated by the local community. The Opening Celebration Committee organized a parade and instructed Main Street merchants to decorate their shops for the occasion, in an attempt to welcome visitors (Flad & Griffen 2009, 123). Certainly, the initial perception of the Mid-Hudson Bridge by most Poughkeepsie residents was that it would facilitate a sizeable increase in Main Street traffic, encouraging shopping and contributing to the city's economy. During the Great Depression "A major effort in the 1930s was to update the 'image' of the two

million business on the Main Streets of America” (Flad & Griffen 2009, 157). However, attempts to do so were largely undercut by suburban developments, which attracted chain stores to more convenient shopping center locations. By the second half of the twentieth century, the City of Poughkeepsie, like many cities across the country, experienced significant population loss and became characterized by economic decline. The construction of highways cutting through and around Poughkeepsie in the 1950s and 60s furthered the city’s decline, as drivers no longer had to pass through Main Street to reach their suburban destinations.

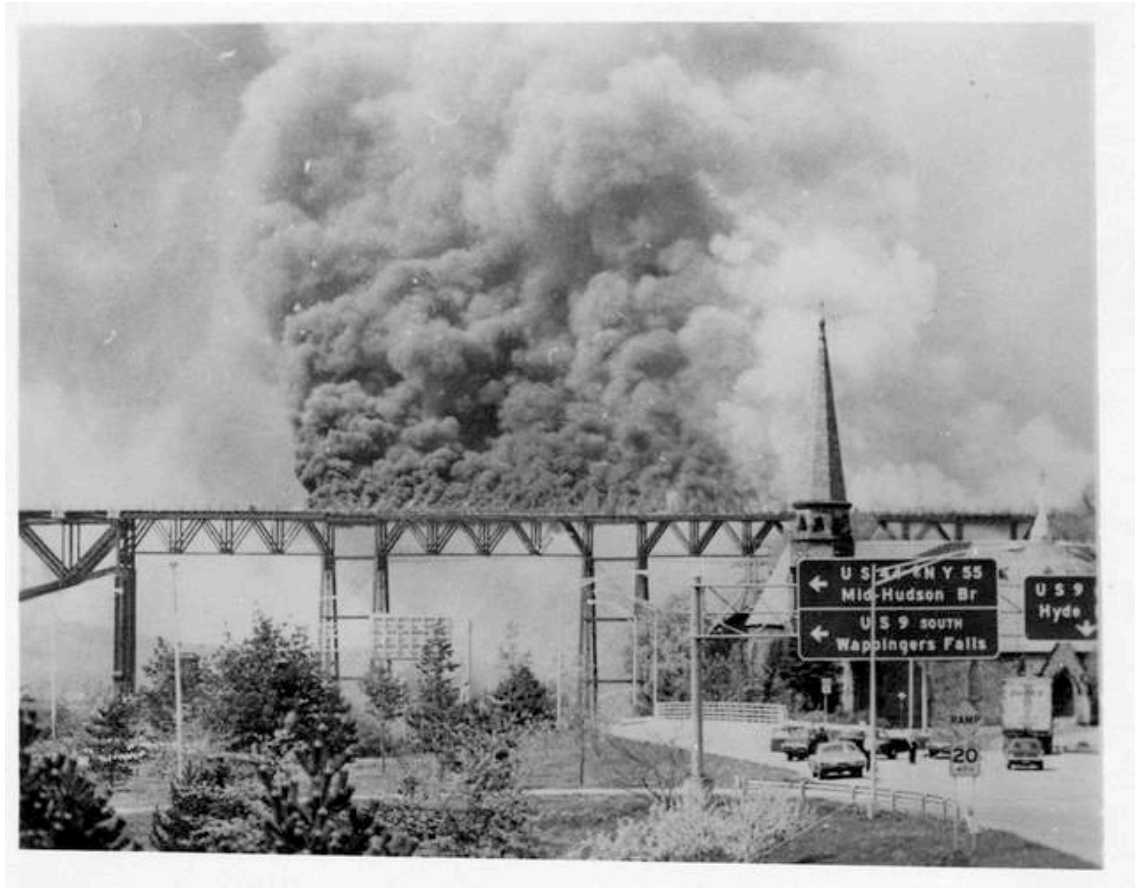
In addition to reshaping patterns of residential and retail development in Poughkeepsie, increased automobile circulation had a momentous impact on industries and railroads. Mabee notes that the railroad “suffered from governments on many levels subsidizing autos and trucks by providing free improved highways, but not comparably subsidizing trains by providing free improved tracks” (2001, 241). In Poughkeepsie, as early as the 1920s, industries began to relocate away from railroad lines, where land was cheaper and more sprawling facilities could be constructed. Train Traffic on the Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge rapidly decreased in the following decades, until, by early 1974, only one train crossed daily (Mabee 2001, 244). Simultaneously, the bridge fell into disrepair, as its owner, Penn Central, felt it worthless to further invest in maintenance and inspections.

On May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1974, the Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge caught fire, burning for over 6 hours. By the time the fire was extinguished, approximately 700 feet of railroad track on the Poughkeepsie end had been destroyed. Following the fire, the bridge’s fate was unclear, as Penn Central had gone bankrupt and other railroad corporations believed



restoration would be completely inefficient. In 1977, the New York State Bridge Authority offered the suggestion to tear down the bridge, planning to build a second automobile bridge in its place, though these plans never materialized (Mabee 2001, 258).

Figure 5. Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge Fire: May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1974 (Oluwa, 2009).



The Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge would continue to loom over the Hudson River for the following decades, a deteriorating relic of Poughkeepsie's former importance within regional trade routes and economic circuits. It would become an outward projection of the perception of Poughkeepsie as a city in decline, in the eyes of travelers and residents alike. According to past Walkway Over the Hudson Chairman

Fred Schaeffer, by the early 90s, the bridge's wooden catwalks had rotted and begun to fall off the bridge, fueling rumors that the structure was near collapse (F. Schaeffer 2011, personal communication). Not until 2009, when the Bridge's glorious transformation into the Walkway Over the Hudson was complete, did this image begin to shift.

## **Chapter 3**

### **The Politics of Preservation: The ‘Remarkable Coalition’ Assembles**

When The Walkway Over the Hudson State Historic Park opened on October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2009, the event signaled the culmination of nearly two decades of preservation advocacy, fund raising, outreach, and planning. Despite the many challenges that supporters of the Walkway Over the Hudson faced during this lengthy process, the Walkway has been wildly popular in its first 18 months, and is well on its way to being completed as planned. In many ways, the eventual success of the project outlines the importance of pro-preservation federal legislation in facilitating and guiding adaptive reuse projects. However, while the initial advocacy of the Walkway can be linked to the grassroots efforts of the Walkway Over the Hudson organization, the completion of the project is inevitably a result of an alignment of the goals of preservationists with interests of local growth advocates. Remarkable parallels exist between the growth promoting rhetoric utilized by the original boosters of the Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge and the supporters of the Walkway.

The initial idea to convert the Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge into a pedestrian bridge emerged almost immediately after the fire of 1974, but as not seriously entertained until 1992, when the Walkway Over the Hudson organization officially formed. Plans for the Walkway developed precisely at a moment in American political history when the federal government’s urban renewal, and downtown development policies of the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century were called into question. For many American cities, and particularly their urban centers, the late 1970s represented a moment of crisis, following decades of population loss related primarily to the continual movement of white residents into surrounding

suburban communities (Frey & Speare 1988, 236). When the Reagan Administration took office in 1981, the federal government adopted an increasingly Neoliberal stance in relation to economic policies, especially when regarding urban areas. During this time any renewal policies that were still in place were largely abandoned. Local governments throughout the United States received less financial investment from the federal government, despite the fact that many of the inherently anti urban policies of the post World War II era were still solidly in place. As Dennis Judd notes, “to make up for a loss of federal funds, President Reagan’s first National Urban Policy Report observed, ‘state and local governments will find it is in their best interests to concentrate on increasing their attractiveness to potential investors, residents, and visitors’” (1999, 35).

Urban renewal policies also endured growing scrutiny during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century from urban residents, who believed that the large scale federally funded razing of questionably blighted buildings or city blocks had eroded the historic identity and pedestrian vitality of central cities. In major US cities, community activists organized in the attempt to save historically significant spaces such as parks, civic buildings, and in some cases, entire city districts that were in danger of redevelopment. Importantly, another New York State monument of the Golden Age of the Railroad, Manhattan’s Beaux Arts style Pennsylvania Station, was threatened beginning in the 1950s, when rail travel had significantly decreased, making it difficult for the Pennsylvania Railroad Company to maintain the grandiose McKim, Mead and White designed building. In 1962, community leaders, architects, and others in New York concerned with the potential loss of the architecture treasure formed AGBANY, The Action Group for Better Architecture in New York. Despite holding spirited protests, the

group unfortunately lacked a local resident constituency that would be directly affected by the demolition. Without tangible legal tools and the support of the city government, AGBANY lost the fight, and Pennsylvania Station was demolished beginning in 1963.

Famously, and rather poignantly, *New York Times* architectural critic Ada Louise Huxtable, in her editorial entitled “Farewell to Penn Station,” wrote,

Any city gets what it admires, will pay for, and ultimately deserves.

Even when we had Penn Station, we couldn’t afford to keep it clean.

We want and deserve tin-can architecture for a tin-horn culture. And we will probably be judged not by the monuments we build but by those we have destroyed (1963, 1).

Many perceive the massive public outcry that occurred following the demolition of Pennsylvania Station to have given birth to the American historic preservation movement. At the very least, the event focused national attention on the need for a reevaluation of the importance of built heritage and inspired the adoption of preservation law at the federal level (New York Historic Preservation Archive).

Although the notion of American historic preservation can be traced back to the successful effort to save Philadelphia’s Independence Hall in 1816, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation has been in existence since shortly after World War II, major federal legislation pertaining to preservation did not materialize until 1966, when Congress approved the National Historic Preservation Act. Until this time, historic preservation attempts were typically slow moving and philanthropically funded endeavors aimed to save a city’s most significant historical monuments, with little attention paid to the condition of historic urban fabric. Often, the preserved structures

would serve as house museums or the headquarters of historical societies. The 1966 Preservation Act, however, significantly altered the course of historic preservation trends, enabling the creation of State Historic Preservation Offices, encouraging the designation of locally regulated historic districts, establishing the National Register of Historic Places, and allowing the government to provide funds for preservation activities (Tyler 2000, 45).

As early as 1976, following the creation of a tax incentive program for the rehabilitation of historic structures embedded within the Tax Reform act of 1976, historic preservation projects began to be framed as opportunities for city economies, rather than potential burdens. This period represents a fundamental shift in the way in which historic preservation was conceived by investors and politicians. Rather than emphasizing the need to capture and curate structures within a specific historical period of importance, effectively rendering them stagnate museums, preservation efforts began to shift toward economically driven adaptive reuse projects. This resulted in the conception of the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street Program in 1980, which encouraged communities to leverage economic arguments supporting the preservation of commercial districts in historic downtowns (Tyler, 2000 51).

Poughkeepsie saw its own Main Street revitalization project come to fruition even before the National Trust began this program and, unfortunately, missed the mark in terms of promoting the city's heritage. In 1969, in an attempt to reinvigorate the city's economy and reputation, the Poughkeepsie Urban Renewal Agency (PURA) conceived a plan to cut off traffic on Main Street between Market and Hamilton streets, in order to "establish a pleasant environment for carrying on commercial and leisure activities" (Flad

and Griffen 2009, 220). The Main Mall plan, put into effect in 1975, was unsuccessful and actually furthered the local perception of Poughkeepsie as a depressed area of urban blight. That same year, the Poughkeepsie Journal published an opinion piece, recalling a visitor's impression of Main Street:

You look out the window as you are chauffeured up Main Street. Bleak, you tell yourself, almost like a bombed-out city. Where are all the people in this Hudson River metropolis? "That's the Main Mall," the driver points out as he swings the car right on Main Street. You look up the broad expanse and see nothing but lights. If this is the Main Mall, you ask yourself, what are the side streets like (Flad and Griffen 2009, 308)?

Main Mall persisted until 2001, when traffic was reintroduced to Main Street. While the project maintained Main Street's historic buildings, many continue to sit empty, awaiting new retail tenants.

Perhaps the most important feature of the 1966 Preservation Act and the programs it facilitates is that it helped foster strong ties between local communities and state and federal preservation offices, entities which were previously almost completely unrelated. This sort of cooperation is evidenced in the "remarkable coalition of public and private organizations, as the park's inaugural publication claims, that came together in order to execute the Walkway Over the Hudson adaptive reuse in just sixteen months. Each organization and office involved in the coalition – most prominently, The Walkway Over the Hudson Foundation, the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation, The Dyson Foundation, Scenic Hudson, Congressman Maurice Hinchey,

and U.S. Senator Chuck Schumer – played a significant role in assuring the Walkway’s execution.

The initial push toward preserving the Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge was initiated by a small group of local activists, led by Poughkeepsie resident Bill Sepe, which soon morphed into the Walkway Over the Hudson Foundation. By 1998, the Walkway Over the Hudson assumed full legal ownership of the Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge, via adverse possession, after a 5-year period of squatting (Mabee 2001, 269-271). Sepe, described as a stubborn albeit honorable man, envisioned the Walkway as a thoroughly local endeavor. Thus, he felt that its restoration should be carried out entirely through volunteer work and contributions from individual donors and not by public funds. Through the 1990s, Sepe oversaw work on the bridge, without securing necessary permits or conducting a structural assessment. Many area residents, as well as local government officials, were uneasy about Sepe’s lack of regard for safety and, in 2000 when a volunteer was injured, many originally close to the project began to distance themselves (F. Schaeffer 2011, personal communication). Both the City of Poughkeepsie and the Town of Lloyd washed their hands of the project, and Lloyd even went so far as to seek an injunction, granted in 2001, to stop work on the project (Mabee, 2001, 274). Schaeffer notes, much of Sepe’s initial fundraising efforts were used to pay attorney’s fees, which caused even more locals to lose faith in the project (F. Schaeffer 2011, personal communication).

Ultimately, the Walkway Over the Hudson elected a new board of directors in December 2003, with real estate lawyer Fred Schaeffer serving as chairman. Although Schaeffer has recently stepped down from this role, he is still a board member, along with



The several other Hudson Valley notables, including former Dutchess County Legislator James Hammond, local entrepreneur Joseph Bonura Jr. and Sally Mazzarella, who has devoted much of her time and energy volunteering with a myriad of local organizations. Their involvement has contributed significantly to project's local image. According to the Walkway website's 'about us' page,

Walkway Over the Hudson is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization founded in 1992. Our mission is to inspire people to connect to the beauty of the Hudson Valley through long-term stewardship of the Walkway Over the Hudson State Historic Park and support of the regional trail system, which offer public enjoyment of the bridge's historic architecture, the scenic wonders of the Hudson River Valley and the diversity of its recreational and cultural activities (1).

Figure 6. Fred Schaeffer and the Walkway (Shapley 2010).



Because the preservation of such a large and deteriorated piece of industrial equipment required securing millions of dollars in funds, The Walkway Over the Hudson's new board of trustees quickly realized that securing grants from various sources would be necessary, as opposed to solely relying on individual donations. In 2006, the Walkway received its first large-scale contribution, a federal transportation grant secured by Congressman Maurice Hinchey. With this significant gift came significant legitimacy. Area residents now saw the Walkway Over the Hudson less as an eccentric scheme and more as a plan to provide state funded public space (F. Schaeffer 2011, personal communication). Perhaps even more important is that this grant seemed to signify that the federal government once again had an interest in investing in individual cities, as well as transportation systems other than highways.

The Dyson Foundation became involved with the Walkway in August 2007 and has since committed over 2 million dollars to the project. The Foundation, begun in 1957, has a special interest in the Hudson Valley, and saw the Walkway Over the Hudson State Park as an opportunity to contribute to the region's provision of public and recreational space. According to Schaeffer, this donation was pivotal, as it finally provided enough funding to conduct a structural assessment of the bridge's structure (F. Schaeffer 2011, personal communication). Despite years of neglect and the occasional piece of rotting wood that would fall from the bridge, its structure was in remarkably good shape. One of the most significant discoveries made during the structural assessment, and ultimately the discovery that would cement preservation plans, was that the tear down cost was an estimated 54 million dollars, while restoration could be carried out for 25 million (Schaeffer 2008, 7).

Enough money had been raised to shore up the bridge's steel supports, however, funding for the Walkway's new concrete decking had not been secured. Rather miraculously, in 2007, New York State approached the Walkway Over the Hudson with 20 million dollars in funding, with the agreement that the park would be turned over to the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation upon completion. According to Schaeffer, this generous support was largely due to the fact that New York State had yet to plan a major event to commemorate the quadricentennial of Henry Hudson's charting and exploration of the Hudson River. A strict deadline was set, and the Walkway Over the Hudson was completed in October of 2009.

Figure 7: An Architect's Rendering of the Walkway (Walkway Over the Hudson, 2007).



### *An Emerging Growth-Heritage Machine?*

Despite the fact that the Walkway Over the Hudson is widely perceived as a grassroots, locally oriented project, it is inherently bound up in a much more widespread urban growth struggle. The Walkway's successful completion is largely due to its relationship to the growth machine, which Logan and Molotch identify as "an apparatus of interlocking pro-growth associations and governmental units" (1987, 32). Consisting of rentiers, government officials, and many members of Walkway board of directors, the growth machine holds a specific power over the decision-making processes behind the project. The growth machine values and encourages investment, regardless of community effects.

The 'remarkable coalition' behind the creation of the Walkway, in many ways, can be identified as the project's symbolic bankers, who view culture and heritage as a form of capital to be invested in or traded on. According to Barthel, "historic preservation has emerged as an appropriate activity for the investing of cultural capital, with the expectation of personal gain in status and financial terms" (1996, 12). Furthering Logan and Molotch's notion of the growth machine, Barthel recognizes that American cities, large and small, have since the early 1990s, witnessed the establishment of what she calls the heritage machine, which has led to a massive commodification of heritage and historic structures. Like growth, preservation is presented as a public good, whether or not it is utilized or appreciated by the majority of residents.

Clearly, the members of the advisory board have significant personal interest in securing and maintaining the success of the Walkway, as their businesses, projects, and public images stand to gain substantially from any increase in tourism or migration to the

area. For this reason specifically, the Walkway Over the Hudson has become bound by growth encouraging rhetoric. In an attempt to attract investors to the city, the Walkway's historical image has been utilized to promote Poughkeepsie as a desirable, up and coming place.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Poughkeepsie's Ponte Vecchio? The Economic Effects of Tourism in the Hudson Valley**

Since the 1950s, American cities have turned to waterfront redevelopment projects in an attempt to revive economies and revitalize former industrial zones, which have been largely abandoned due to technological and infrastructural changes that have outmoded the urban industrial port system. Often, redevelopment strategies are geared toward making urban areas more attractive to outside investors, rather than addressing issues such as urban poverty or unequal access to public space that directly affect preexisting residents. Stephen Craig-Smith & Michael Fagence write, “In an era of increased leisure, recreational participation, and increased environmental and heritage concern, many of the world’s major waterside city areas have been redeveloped with conservation, recreation, and tourism in mind” (1995, 8).

After the Poughkeepsie Urban Renewal Agency’s destructive renewal practices of the 1960s, the first major redevelopment proposal that took into account historic preservation and its potential to attract tourism focused on the rehabilitation of the Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge, years before the Walkway Over the Hudson had even been conceived. This proposal came not from a government agency, but rather an individual, Edmond Loedy, a Hungarian-born architect who briefly lived in Poughkeepsie as a teenager. As early as the late 1970s, only a few years after the bridge’s devastating fire and subsequent closure, Loedy, who had since returned to the Hudson Valley, began to study structure’s architectural composition, realizing that he could use its skeletal trusses to support any number of programming schemes (Mabee 2001, 261). Loedy

envisioned the bridge as a modern day Ponte Vecchio, filled with shops, hotels, restaurants and marinas.

Although Loedy's scheme would have certainly provided the necessary programming and inventive design to attract both tourists and locals to the otherwise neglected Poughkeepsie waterfront, it faced considerable criticism from advocates of historic preservation, who felt the project would undermine the bridge's historic quality (Mabee, 2001 216). As evidenced by the sketch included in Loedy's proposal, the bridge's impressive structure would be almost entirely encased in a sleek modernist façade, with deck level towers and sloping pier additions further disfiguring its historical silhouette. Ultimately, the project failed to gain enough support and was perceived to be much too expensive to effectively carry out.

Figure 8. Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge Proposal (Loedy 1978).



Following this previous failure to convince Poughkeepsie of bridge's potential, The Walkway Over the Hudson State Park may not seem like a project that would likely stimulate city's economy in any significant manner. After all, the park was conceived by a non-profit organization and the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation does not charge admission for its use. This negative attitude toward the project becomes glaringly clear if one peruses the reader commentary attached to the numerous articles published online by the Poughkeepsie Journal. An anonymous commenter on a recent article profiling Walkway volunteers wrote, "but where is all this money the walkway people claim that is coming to our area. What a JOKE!!!" However, it is blatantly clear that those involved with the planning stages of the Walkway hope that its successful completion will bring about a considerable growth of tourism within Poughkeepsie, enticing new service sector businesses, such as restaurants, hotels, and retail shops back to the abandoned business district. Supporters of the Walkway have gone to great lengths in order to leverage the bridge's historical qualities and embeddedness within an area of scenic significance in order to ensure this goal. If we take into consideration the Hudson Valley's historical role as the original site of American tourism and the way in which arts and preservation based revitalization has helped to reshape other cities in the region the Walkway's potential as an economic and cultural stimulus is revealed.

### *The Historical Roots of Tourism*

The geography of the Hudson River Valley has come to define what Americans understand as an ideal landscape, despite being initially perceived as inferior to the more



familiar landscape models offered forth by Europe. As Richard H. Gassan notes, “When Americans gazed on American scenery, they saw something that was visually inferior to the Old World, where the weight and gloss of history provided those special elements that made for a truly scenic landscape” (2008, 52). These opinions began to change, however, as the notion of the picturesque landscape gained prominence in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century in both Europe and the United States. Loosely defined, the *picturesque* landscape forms a middle ground between the awe-inspiring rawness of the *sublime* landscape and the idealized and ordered scenes that characterize the *beautiful*. Originally conceived by 18<sup>th</sup> century author William Gilpin, the notion of picturesque landscape not only inspired American painters, banded together as the Hudson River School, to reevaluate the inherent beauty of their geographical surroundings, it also gave birth to the first major form of American tourism (Gassan 2008, 55).

Coupled with early 19<sup>th</sup> century technological advances in the steamboat industry that made Hudson River travel a fast and viable option, tourism in the valley steadily increased throughout the century. Following Gilpin’s model, the new picturesque tourist was compelled to “take a picture” of especially scenic vistas by drawing a sketch (Gassan 2008, 55). Naturally, this intensified interest in Hudson Valley scenery served as a catalyst for the creation and proliferation of images of the area, serving both as marketing tools and mementos of the trip. At the highest cultural level, these images appeared as the paintings of artists such as Thomas Cole, Asher B Durand, Frederick Church, and others associated with the Hudson River School. Their work, which was widely disseminated throughout the United States, cemented in the American mind that the landscape of the Hudson Valley was not only worthy of being seen, but also worthy of

visiting for oneself. The Walkway Over the Hudson is unique in that it allows the modern tourist a panoramic view of two juxtaposed vignettes that are deeply significant in American history, the 19<sup>th</sup> century industrial cityscape and picturesque wilderness.

On the Western shore of the river, the town of Lloyd has engaged in several planning policies in order to maintain the aesthetic qualities of its waterfront, which is listed as a Scenic Area of Statewide Significance. Specifically, town policy designates bluff overlay districts and mandates the maintenance of vegetative cover for both existing homes and new development projects that fall within these areas (Scenic Hudson 2010, 75). In doing so, the town of Lloyd has ensured that the view west from the Walkway Over the Hudson continues to be reminiscent of the picturesque landscape associated with the Hudson Valley and Catskill Mountains. It is precisely this incredible and historically engrained vista that makes the Walkway such a desirable place to visit.

### *The Walkway, Tourism, and the Economy*

For Poughkeepsie and the surrounding communities in Dutchess and Ulster Counties, the potential economic benefits of the tourist influx driven by the Walkway Over the Hudson are perceived by local governments and civic boosters to be immense. Poughkeepsie Mayor John Tkazyik, who took office in 2008, identifies the Walkway as the city's largest economic engine, noting that "It has significantly enhanced the city of Poughkeepsie and this region with the many tourists that have come to see this magnificent bridge, and of course, they're coming to our restaurants and our shops and using our services here" (Angel 2011, 1). The Walkway over the Hudson Foundation in 2009, aware of the need to justify the investment of an estimated 25 million dollars in

adapting the Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge to a relatively skeptical public, commissioned Camoin Associates, a New York State based economic development consulting firm, to assess the potential impact of construction and visitor spending for state and local economies. Camoin Associates notes, “an economic impact study measures the direct, indirect and induced effects new spending or investment has on an economy’s employment, wages, and business sales” (2009, 1). It is significant to note that the completed project was significantly more expensive than estimated, costing a total of 38.8 million dollars (Frazier, 2011).

The study predicts that first phase of economic stimulation will be a direct result of the 25 million dollar investment, in the form of construction spending. Although this spending will only have a one-time affect on the economy, much of the construction will be handled by local firms, resulting in a total impact of over 13 million dollars on Dutchess and Ulster County economies.

Importantly, the study also shows that of the 267,699 users projected to visit the Walkway per year, 110,000 are expected to be non-local visitors (note that this number is based on 2009 population levels and had been far surpassed in the Walkway’s first year of operation). The study defines non-local visitors as residing outside of Dutchess and Ulster County, and suggests that 40,000 of these users will be overnight visitors (Camoin Associates 2009, 3). As revenue generated by tourism has a continuous affect on the economy because it is circulated through multiple local vendors, the potential impact of the businesses needed to support the industry is even more profound than construction spending. Annually, the Walkway Over the Hudson is expected to generate 14.6 million dollars of additional spending in the economies of Dutchess and Ulster County. When

the multiplier effect is taken into consideration, the total economic impact could increase to 21 million dollars. Additionally, the increased spending will lead to nearly three quarters of a million dollars in tax revenue for the two counties annually. As a result, it is projected that 258 new jobs will be created in Dutchess and Ulster Counties in response to the needs of this burgeoning tourist population. (Camoin Associates 2009, 5 - 6).

The Camoin Associates economic report concludes by foreshadowing the physical affects that the Walkway Over the Hudson may have on the surrounding community, noting specifically that “the project is likely to spur future investment in other waterfront redevelopment activities, thus contributing to new investment, consumer spending, job creation and tax revenue” (2009, 6). As is the case with many consulting firms, the estimates provided by Camoin Associates seem to be underscored by the notion that unquestioned growth is beneficial for all types of economic situations. Furthermore, it is important to note that Camoin Associates underlying objective is to publicly ‘sell’ the Walkway as a beneficial resource for residents of Dutchess and Ulster Counties, identifying the firm as a rather subjective source of information. While it is feasible to suggest that The Walkway Over the Hudson will infuse some revenue into local economies, their report relies entirely on the continued success of the park to attract a steady or increasing number of visitors annually.

### *Dangers of Developer Speculation and Gentrification*

One major issue that may emerge in Poughkeepsie due to an increased tourist population and reinvigorated historical awareness in the coming years is that of developer speculation, which could lead to gentrification. As the Walkway Over the Hudson

continues to attract visitors to an area of the city that was once largely avoided, it is only logical that businesses will begin to locate in the communities most conveniently accessed by the park. As evidenced by the gentrification patterns that occurred in Portland, Maine beginning in the late 1970s, even small grass roots actions, such as the renovation and conversion of a few historic properties by individuals can lead to massive changes in the quality of urban neighborhoods (Lees 2006, 96). Typically, this sort of development raises area property values, increases rent and forces lower income residents to move elsewhere. Poughkeepsie's waterfront is particularly vulnerable to the effects of developer speculation, as large tracts of formerly industrial land currently sit abandoned along the river's edge. This area has already begun to exhibit development patterns that are inconsistent with the needs and income levels of the majority of Poughkeepsie residents. The trend may very quickly spread into other parts of the city, such as the Main Street corridor or the tightly knit Mount Carmel district, where large stocks of undervalued historic properties exist.

Even before the Walkway was completed, Poughkeepsie's waterfront had begun to show signs of developer speculation. In the past decade, noticeable transformations have occurred in the historic neighborhood known as Upper Landing, located where the Fallkill spills into the Hudson River, just south of the Walkway. In 2002, the Mid Hudson Children's Museum, also a recipient of funds from the Dyson Foundation, relocated from its temporary location in the Poughkeepsie Galleria to an abandoned 19<sup>th</sup> century factory in Upper Landing, bordering the northernmost edge of Poughkeepsie waterfront's Waryas Park. Directly across the street, the Schmidt Piano Hammer

Factory, built in 1880 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places, was renovated in 2008 into a high-end 13-unit loft apartment building.

Perhaps most the most dramatic development, not to mention the most glaringly out of context with the city's historical character, has occurred in the southern portion of Poughkeepsie's waterfront. On the site of former industrial buildings, Joseph Bonura Jr, a member of the Walkway Over the Hudson board of directors, has established a small high-end empire, consisting of Grandview, a catering facility, Shadows, an upscale restaurant, and a recently opened 100 slip marina. Additionally, Bonura's enterprise operates the Poughkeepsie Grand Hotel, located on lower Main Street. For Bonura, the Walkway has proven to be incredibly beneficial, claiming, "The summer of 2010 is the best I've ever had, so I have to believe the Walkway is a factor. We're doing 70% more volume than we projected" (Angel, 2011, 1). Bonura has recently broken ground on another Poughkeepsie waterfront project, a 14-acre string of restaurants, retail and offices, and has plans to add sixty condo units by 2014.

Because the Walkway Over the Hudson has been successful in drawing the middle class residents of Poughkeepsie's suburbs back to the city's waterfront, if even just for a short amount of time, speculation by both large development groups and individual entrepreneurs has increased dramatically since 2009. Unsurprisingly, new projects and businesses are largely targeted toward an upper middle class of tourists or those potentially looking to relocate within the city.

Further waterfront development is planned directly north of the Walkway, on the site of the former Dutton Lumber Yard. Presently, huge tracts of deteriorating industry, like the Dutton property, largely characterize the view of Poughkeepsie looking north

from the Walkway. However, if the plans of the O'Neill Group of Hackensack, NJ are carried out, this view might instead be of yet another complex of condos. Poughkeepsie Mayor John Tkazyik, a supporter of the project, is in the process of reevaluating waterfront zoning codes dating to 1979, in order to allow for this sort of development (Angel 2011, 1). Though this may seem to signal some sort of progress, the project actually poses a major problem within Poughkeepsie, as it would contribute toward further limiting the accessibility of the waterfront for the public. Without the ability to connect with the Hudson River, Poughkeepsie residents may lose touch with one of the area's largest cultural resources.

Figure 09. The Dutton Lumber Yard as viewed from the Walkway



The Walkway has also benefited many smaller enterprises that are less intrusive, but still have the potential to alter the city's cultural fabric. Directly surrounding the Walkway's Poughkeepsie entrance, several successful small businesses have opened since 2009, signaling that Walkway visitors have moved beyond the park's boundaries and into the city. A particularly poignant account of the sort of neighborhood changes that have occurred because of the Walkway can be found in a recent *Wall Street Journal* article, written by Melanie Lefkovitz. She notes,

When Mary Francese and her husband, Peter, bought a warehouse in Poughkeepsie for their antiques auction house five years ago, their neighbors were a junkyard and a printing shop, and the pedestrian traffic was more like a pedestrian trickle. Now, they share a building with a bicycle rental shop, plans for new shops and cafes are in the works and a surge of walk-in customers has invigorated their business (1).

As Walkway related development continues, they will have implications in both the economic and physical landscape of the City.

### *Regional Trendsetters*

Two Hudson Valley cities, Hudson and Beacon, particularly serve as examples for the type of physical and cultural transformations that may occur over the next few decades in Poughkeepsie as a result of the opening of the Walkway Over the Hudson. The centers of both cities, which were in equal states of decline in the 1970s and 80s after falling victim to suburban sprawl, have since experienced significant economic growth



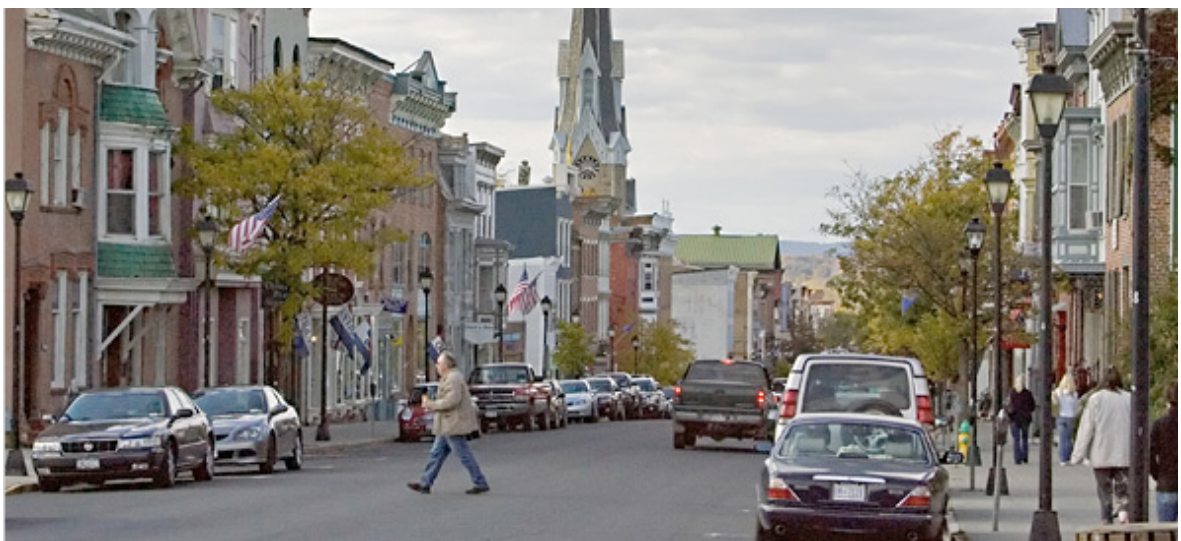
due to arts and heritage based development. Their stories however, while largely positive in reawakening a sense of place and sparking the preservation of historic buildings, are not entirely unproblematic.

Hudson, New York, located approximately 50 miles north of Poughkeepsie on the Eastern shore of the Hudson River, has recently experienced a major cultural transformation in spite of mid-century industrial disinvestment and the growth of surrounding suburban development. As Flad and Griffen note, “Hudson’s revitalization efforts took a small nineteenth-century city from a depressed economy in the mid-twentieth-century to one based primarily on the arts in the twenty-first century” (2009, 361). Not without facing major legal difficulties and local opposition, this transformation began in the late 1970s and has been largely led by new residents and investors, many having relocated upstate from New York City.

In the 1950s and 1960s Hudson’s Warren Street, much like Main Street Poughkeepsie, was largely abandoned as much of the city’s population and commercial endeavors relocated to newly constructed suburban communities on the city’s periphery. Due to an abundance of enormous swaths of drastically undervalued farm land, as well as a string of faded country manors on the market in the surrounding areas, Hudson emerged as a prime location within a burgeoning weekend destination. Area newcomers, relocating from an equally depressed New York City, recognized the potential beauty hidden beneath the faded façades of Warren Street’s elegant townhouses and slowly began to take advantage of the city’s low real estate values, first opening a small constellation of antiques shops and art galleries in the city’s commercial core. In the 1990s and 2000s, Hudson’s core, which runs for several blocks along Warren Street,

rapidly transformed from a largely abandoned stretch into a lively conglomeration of restaurants, clothing retailers, farmer's markets, and home furnishing shops. Around the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, after the majority of Warren Street's historic buildings had been restored and occupied, attention was focused on reclaiming the city's old industrial buildings on adjacent streets and along the waterfront. Hudson has emerged one of the leading weekend getaway destinations for residents of New York City, boasting its own destination page on the websites of both the *New York Times* and *New York Magazine*.

Figure 10. Warren Street, Hudson (Ramirez 2006).



Despite the reawakening of Hudson's historical past, historian and professor Byrne Fone suggests, "the old, familiar struggle between 'us' and 'them'", has persisted among deeply rooted locals and cosmopolitan newcomers (2005, 195). Today, a visitor to Hudson is confronted not by the blight and neglect typical of the Main Street of a small American city of the industrial age, but rather by a vibrant community deeply connected with its past. The preservation and adaptive reuse of Hudson's historic structures, including many buildings linked to the city's industrial past, has situated Hudson as a

leading influence in the art, design, and antiques fields that extends far beyond the regional scale. However, Hudson revitalization has not occurred evenly throughout the city, and economic classes seem largely segregated into separate areas of the city. In the blocks north of Warren St, the city's less stately historic structures remain in a state of decline, if they haven't already been torn down to make room for previous revitalization projects.

Similarly, Beacon, New York, 20 miles south of Poughkeepsie, has experienced a fairly substantial renaissance led primarily by the adaptive reuse of a former Nabisco packaging factory as an upstate outlet for the New York City based Dia Center. Dia:Beacon, opened in 2003, houses a renowned collection of contemporary art installations, many of which are too large to be exhibited in traditional gallery spaces in New York City. As early as 1999, Dia:Beacon was projected to attract upwards of 50,000 people per year to Beacon, an otherwise declining city. As quoted in the New York Times, former New York State Governor George Pataki claimed that the project would help to "preserve the Hudson Valley's rich cultural legacy," a mission he deemed worthy of receiving two million dollars of funding from the state's Community Enhancement Fund (Vogel 1999, 1).

The Dia Center's decision to restore an otherwise disused and crumbling industrial space along Beacon's waterfront serves as a catalyst for revitalizing the city's Main Street and increasing real estate values (Flad and Griffen 2009, 363). Furthermore, Dia:Beacon reintroduced waterfront property and Hudson River history to the residents of the city via the revitalization of Beacon Point, a public park which features a sculptural pier designed by artist George Trakas. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Beacon's economy has

transformed to one based in art and tourism. Reinvigorated by the influence and investment of an outside cultural institution, Beacon, like Hudson, has become a cultural institution on its own.

Figure 11. Main Street, Beacon (Rudoren, 2009).



However, the recent economic recession evidenced just how instable a market that relies primarily on tourism can be. In 2009, journalist Jodi Rudoren wrote of Beacon, As in so many other abandoned small towns and former industrial capitals, art galleries and knickknack emporiums over the last decade reinvented the charming exposed-brick storefronts along Main Street, supported both by locals and by tourists visiting... But in the last six months, many of the gewgaw parlors and antiquaries have seen their balance sheets follow the broader economy down, down, down (1).



Though Beacon has seen some recovery, the city's experience should serve as a warning for other Hudson Valley Cities that new businesses should aim to balance the needs of both residents and tourists.

Figure 12. Main Street, Poughkeepsie (Gazeaux, 2006).



While the city of Poughkeepsie can certainly seek guidance from Hudson and Beacon for examples of how to handle the prospective influx of tourism and new residents to the city, it is important to not lose sight of The Walkway's importance for existing residents of the city. Though the Walkway initially began as a grass roots movement led by local people, it is important to take into account the ways in which the planning of the project was influenced by the many outside forces that eventually became

involved. Presently, it is unclear how large of an impact the Walkway will actually have on Poughkeepsie's economy, and whether economic growth will be a decidedly positive outcome for all city residents.

Recognizing this, it is necessary to consider the project not only in terms of its potential for reinventing Poughkeepsie's external image, but also as a means for allowing city residents to see their own community and its history in a new light. Those responsible for guiding the rhetoric surrounding the Walkway must aim to reconcile the goal of tourist development with Poughkeepsie's need for a more democratic form of participation in the creation and governance of public space.

## **Conclusion**

### **A New Image for the City: Experiencing Poughkeepsie From Above**

Ultimately, the suggestion that the City of Poughkeepsie, where past revitalization projects have serially failed to take hold, will be a drastically different place in a decade is quite a stretch for most residents. Perhaps, rather than trying to evaluate the significance of the Walkway Over the Hudson in terms of its potential economic contributions, it may be most useful to understand the project as a lens through which city residents may begin to conceptualize a more positive sense of place and community, moving away from the cities formerly clouded image. The lens has a dual function: In a literal sense, it offers a new vantage point for comprehending the way the history is manifested across the physical space of Poughkeepsie. At the same time, the unlikely success of the project opens up a new channel of hope that other local grass roots movements might also have an impact on the city. In this way, the Walkway Over the Hudson possesses an inherent symbolic importance for the region, even if its economic potential does not come to fruition.

People largely encounter and understand the environment around them through the act of seeing, above all other senses. As John Urry points out, “there is a fascination with the sense of sight as the apparent mirror of the world, and more generally with the ‘hegemony of vision’ that has characterized Western social thought and culture over the past few centuries” (71). As evidenced by the discussion in chapter 4 regarding the historical underpinnings of tourism in the Hudson Valley, vision is particularly prioritized when on the Walkway.

However, while tourists are certainly flocking the Walkway, the park's guestbook, which was initiated in the summer of 2010, reveals that local people of many different backgrounds still make up the vast majority of visitors. It is because of this fact that I believe the park has a unique potential to contribute to a reimagining of Poughkeepsie. Geographer and urban planner Kevin Lynch, in his groundbreaking work *The Image of the City* suggests, "A clear and comprehensive image of the entire metropolitan region is a fundamental requirement for the future. If it can be developed, it will raise the experience of a city to a new level, a level commensurate with the contemporary functional unit" (1960, 117-118). The Walkway's vantage point not only reveals a scenic panorama akin to the work of the Hudson River School, it also offers a far less idealized view that area painters have tended to ignore, that of a thoroughly palimpsestic cityscape, rewritten and fragmented by over 350 years of history.

Poughkeepsie's outward growth, in conjunction with inner city urban renewal projects and highway construction, have blurred neighborhood boundaries and weakened the city's overall spatial clarity, or legibility, to borrow Lynch's term. As a pedestrian and even by car, Poughkeepsie can be an extremely challenging city to visually navigate, full of one way streets, dead ends, and empty lots. However, experiencing the urban fabric of Poughkeepsie from the Walkway increases the depth of vision in order to "facilitate the grasping of a vast and complex whole by increasing, as it were, the efficiency of vision: its range, penetration, and resolving power" (Lynch, 1960, 107). The view from the Walkway highlights the vibrant historical pockets of Poughkeepsie, such as the Mount Carmel and Union Street historic districts, while at the same time rendering visible the complex arrangements of highways and arterials that tie the city to



the rest of the Hudson Valley. Furthermore, the Walkway Over the Hudson, with a renewed history and rootedness within Poughkeepsie, provides a landmark that residents may utilize as a navigational tool.

Figure 13: Poughkeepsie's Mount Carmel district from The Walkway (Schaeffer, 2010).



Boyer, in a way similar to Lynch, suggests a movement toward what she calls “the city of collective memory”. In this new view of the city, the traditional way of understanding urban forms is brought under scrutiny, “for the city is the collective expression of architecture and it carries in the weaving and unraveling of its fabric the memory traces of earlier architectural forms, city plans, and public monuments” (1996, 31). Forgotten urban narratives can be reawakened and a city’s uniqueness can be rediscovered. Rather than physically manifesting the decline and abandonment of the

city of Poughkeepsie, the Walkway recalls the spirit of the Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge in the golden age of the railroad, when it served as “the great connector” of the region.

### *Community Building on the Walkway*

Lynch concludes that the city “must be plastic to the perceptual habits of thousands of citizens, open-ended to change of function and meaning, receptive to the formation of new imagery. It must invite its viewers to explore the world” (1960, 119). This is particularly important as urban areas, even those extending beyond the mold of the global city, welcome people of diverse cultural backgrounds. The Walkway has created a new public space within Poughkeepsie on which new cultural narratives may be written. A renewed sense of place-based specificities can foster a sense of community connectedness, and restore the hope that grass-roots initiatives, even those as large of an undertaking as the Walkway, can be realized.

Since its opening, the Walkway has served as host to numerous community-oriented events, including a domestic violence walk hosted by the Grace Smith House, a suicide awareness walk, and an event in recognition of National Women’s Day. Organized by local people these events are aimed at raising awareness about urban issues. The Walkway provides a positive space in Poughkeepsie in which marginalized voices can be heard and made visible, broadcasting their message to an expanded audience. Particularly important to the Hudson Valley context, the Walkway has also become the newest home of the Poughkeepsie Farm Project farmer’s market. The organization’s mission focuses on creating a more sustainable food system in the Hudson Valley, a

region historically characterized by agriculture. This new location will make it easier for the Farm Project to serve a wider range of Poughkeepsie's residents.

### *Picturing the Walkway's Future*

In an attempt to capture the simple pleasure of Poughkeepsie's Walkway Over the Hudson, *New Yorker* journalist Ian Frazier writes, "Where else in this densely packed part of the country can you breathe this much air, see this much space? Every once in a while, people need to be in the presence of things that are really far away" (2011, 1). While the actual experience may be uplifting, the Walkway is inevitably bound up in complex ongoing debates within the field of historic preservation. It is impossible to evaluate its creation without inevitably wondering whether the monuments of the past should benefit city residents or outside visitors, and whether the desires of these parties are reconcilable. Over the next decade, I believe that we will see questions raised about whether Poughkeepsie should rely on the hope of growth by leveraging the Walkway as a tourist attracting amenity, or whether the city should focus on cultivating the site and its surrounding areas as a space for fostering ties within the existing community.

In the present moment, a time when monuments from the past and their associated historical narratives are increasingly latched onto by city heritage machines and offered as a commodities to tourists, the preservationist's role as guardian of authentic, multiperspectival historical understandings of urban space is of utmost importance.

Across the Hudson Valley, where several of the region's cities have experienced a renewed interest in historic downtown districts and waterfront regions, I believe we are at a pivotal moment, where we must decide how to utilize the areas unique heritage to

promote carefully planned and sustainable economic growth, without losing sight of community needs. For the city of Poughkeepsie, the Walkway Over the Hudson State Historic Park, if maintained as a public space that allows visitors to better visualize and conceive the surrounding environment, just might be able to strike that balance.

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