

# More in-depth historical info: Albany, New York Friday, June 14, 2019

President David Bonewitz's Convention Walk of Historic Capital of New York State.



## Albany's Place in History

- Prior to 1600s, the “North River” (called “Hudson River” by Dutch) & adjoining lands were exclusive homes to several Native American tribes, particularly Mohicans & Mohawks of the Iroquois Nation, and Algonquin.
- Henry Hudson, English explorer sailing on his ship “De Half Maen” (“The Half Moon”) under Dutch flag, navigated up the “North River” 150-miles from Atlantic Ocean, dropping anchor off present day Albany (Sept. 19-22, 1609). The AVA Start Point will be very close to that location. He claimed for The Netherlands all lands in that 150 mi river valley. The river’s full length goes another 150 mi. from Albany to its source, a pond in the Adirondack Mtns., Lake Tear of the Clouds, at the edge of our State’s highest peak, Mt. Marcy (5,344’). (During the same period, Samuel de Champlain was exploring for France the St. Lawrence River valley, discovering the Lake that bears his name (1609) helping set the stage for future military conflicts in these regions, such as the “French & Indian {against the English} War” [1754-63].)
- An early Dutch settlement for trading with Native Americans, most notable beaver pelts, was Ft. Nassau (1614), a wooden stockade with moat on an island in the River. Due to summer flooding and success of the trading industry, a 2<sup>nd</sup> much larger settlement on the main land was built, Ft. Orange (1624), that resulted in formation of a whole community, Beverwijck (not Beaverwijck), that surrounded that fort (1652).
- When England took over New Amsterdam in 1664 (now NYC) without a battle, they also got the whole Hudson River Valley, renaming Beverwijck, Albany in honor of King George III’s 2<sup>nd</sup> son, Prince Frederick, who was both Duke of York & Duke of Albany. Ft. Orange was replaced with a better & larger defensive settlement, Ft. Frederick (1676). Improvement to the fort from 1702-35 stretched from the river up to the location of City Hall & Capitol building. Dutch was still the prominent spoken language along the river valley for 125 yrs., into 1780s.
- Albany, having received its Dongan Charter in 1686 (a few months before NYC), makes it the longest running municipal government in Western Hemisphere.
- The Conference of Albany (Congress - 1754) attended by representatives from seven of the 13-British colonies was to discuss better relations with the Native Americans tribes, & common defense measures against threats from the French/French-Canadians (just before the opening of the French & Indian War, 1754-63). But, much of the meeting dealt with Ben Franklin’s “Albany Plan” that put forth a new concept of creating a unified colonial government. Some suggest this was the first-time such an idea came forth leading to a Continental Congress.
- Due to the City’s geographical location, it was a crossroads between the New England Colonies & the mid Atlantic & the Southern colonies. It was a jumping off-point for military operations during the French & Indian War (them against the British & its colonies). The Last of the Mohicans (from the Leatherstocking Tales series) by James Fenimore Cooper, of Cooperstown, NY was about this period & that book remains, around the world, one of the most widely read.
- During the American Revolution (1775-83), the target for the British Gen. Burgoyne Campaign, starting from Canada (1777) to split the New England colonies from the other ones, was Albany. His plan finally failed at the two-days of battles on Bemis Heights & surrender at Saratoga (Oct 17, 1777). (This event, one of the 10 most important battles in all world history, moved France to come into the war on the side of the 13-Colonies.) The ~5,000 British prisoners of war were marched from Saratoga to Albany along Broadway, on to Boston for

shipping back to England. But, there was a change in plans by Washington & the prisoners were sent to Charlottesville, VA to sit out the rest of the War so they would not be replacements for new troops to be sent.

- Robert Fulton, American engineer/inventor developed first successful commercial steamboat providing passenger service as “North River Steamboat of Clermonts” covering Albany to NYC, 300 mi round-trip in ~62 hrs.
- On the US eastern coast, there were no seaports with western waterways for this new country’s interior expansion & development due to the Appalachians Mountains, a land barrier that stretched from Maine to Georgia; only by going via New Orleans & up the Mississippi River. With the opening of the Erie Canal (1825), this provided a big waterway shortcut to Northwest Territory - then, Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin, & Minnesota.
- “America’s First Super Highway”, 363mi. long, 40’ wide x 4’ deep was an engineering feat of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century that had to be expanded multiple times due to success of passenger & freight traffic. A ton of freight by road from Buffalo to NYC costing \$100. dropping to only \$10/ton via the Canal. Passenger service by barge, slow transport: ~2 mph @ 2 cents/mi; faster packet boat: ~4 mph @ 5 cents/mi. as they had right-of way along canal.
- A similar canal system, the Champlain Canal opened the year earlier (1824) than the Erie Canal providing a northern route from Albany to Lake Champlain & on to Quebec. Together these two large public works projects funded by NYS (the federal government would not take it on) opened the door for an inland transportation system that later included smaller side canal routes also.
- Mohawk & Hudson Railroad (chartered 1826), first railroad in US that went only ~ 17 mi. from Albany to Schenectady providing passengers an easier route via steam power train between those two great rivers by passing the Cohoes Falls on the Mohawk River.
- Starting in its early years, access to the navigable fresh waters of the Hudson River with a daily tide of ~ 5 ft., barges & ocean-going ships could use the river as a “Super Highway” to the whole world saving enormous transportation costs.
- Those who served in Albany as NYS Governor, then US President: M. Van Buren, 1x -1837; G. Cleveland, 2x - 1885 & 1893; T. Roosevelt, 2x -1901; & FD Roosevelt, 4x -1933. Those who became US VPs: G. Clinton, 1804; D. Tompkins, 1816; M. Van Buren, 1832; L. Morton, 1888; T. Roosevelt, 1900; N. Rockefeller, 1974.
- Much of this over 400 year old community has retained in both old & new construction, public & private buildings’ architecture samples from its early Dutch & English history that has been complimented by many modern styles that will be seen along the walk route, if attention is given to looking for clues at sites, cited below.

## **Highlights of the Walk**

**The Start Point for this walk will be in the downtown area, Corning Preserve, on the shore of the Hudson River.** There will be two walk distances, 5K rated 2A (one significant hill taken in stages; on pavement); and 10K rated 3A (one hill same as 5K and modest 2<sup>nd</sup> hill; both on pavement). Both groups will follow the same route for about the first half of the 5Kers split-off.

o **Hudson River** – This walk’s Start Point will be on the shore of this once called “North River” where English explorer, Henry Hudson, sailing his “Half Moon” ship under Dutch flag, dropped anchor off present day Albany (Sept., 1609). Although fresh water, the Atlantic causes a daily 5’ tide to the advantage of our ocean going ships.

o **Great Seal of Albany** – Statue depicts the city’s Native American & Dutch history & their beaver fur trading.

o **First Dutch Reformed Church** – Inside, oldest pulpit in America purchased from Amsterdam, Netherlands for 25 beaver skins (1656).

o **Albany City Hall** – Beautifully constructed from brownstone & granite (1882) has 60-Carillon bells in clock tower that play at noon. Those familiar with Cheyenne’s train station/museum will recognize the architect Richardson’s work.

o **Gen. Phillip Schuyler Statue** – Father-in-law of Alexander Hamilton, was Commander of the Northern District during Revolutionary War. He designed the defenses at Bemis Heights against British Gen. Burgoyne who surrendered at (old) Saratoga. He had a house in, now Schuylerville, & a mansion in South Albany that is on the 10K route only.

o **Old Albany Academy** - Now Albany Bd. of Ed., was private boys' Academy, 1813, attended by Herman Melville (*Moby Dick*), & Joseph Henry. Henry returned to teach physics, & here, discovered electricity could be generated by passing magnet through coil of wire – the electric dynamo/generator. Henry's Memorial at front of building. Peace Pole also here to be used as a Check Pt.)

o **Peace Pole** – Several located within the Capital City, but one will be a Check Point.

o **NYS Education Building** – Considered one of 12 most beautiful buildings in World when it opened in 1912 at \$4M cost that included price of the land. Best known for its expansive 660' frontage with 36 Corinthian columns, the longest colonnade in the US & possibly World. It was the first major government building constructed for sole purpose of education; restored in 1980's-90's.

o **NYS Capitol Building** – This Capitol building was started 1865, took 30 yrs, & cost \$25 M. It is in the Romanesque Revival/Neo-Renaissance style of Richardson who was just one of the four architects in charge over the period of design & construction. This is one of last great monumental structures built entirely of masonry, & one of eight state capitols without a dome. Just completed building restoration for only the roof took 10 yrs. & \$53 M.

o **Gen. Phillip Sheridan Statue** – (Not Sherman - “Atlanta to the Sea”) but Grant's right-hand cavalry officer whose beat Gen. Robert E. Lee to the train depot where there were war supplies at Appomattox, VA resulting in the Lee's surrender the next day at Appomattox Courthouse.

o **Nelson A. Rockefeller Empire State Plaza** – This complex of state office buildings, plaza & concourse levels has world's largest collection of modern art not housed in a museum, a hobby of the Governor; 92 sculptures, paintings & tapestries. While some are outdoors, most are indoors on the Concourse level below the Plaza level seen only on the 6K route. Construction cost for Empire State Plaza has not been determined, but estimated in excess of \$1B. Various construction styles had never been done before.

o **Delaware & Hudson Railroad Building (1914)** – This is now headquarters for the State University of New York, the largest university system in the US. This uniquely curved building in Gothic style extends 660' was designed to block the view of the very busy work of ships along the river's docks. It cost \$1.25M when completed in 1918. Note the largest working weathervane in N. America atop the 13-story center tower. The vane is in the shape of Hudson's ship, “The Half Moon”, and is 8' tall.