

Steamships

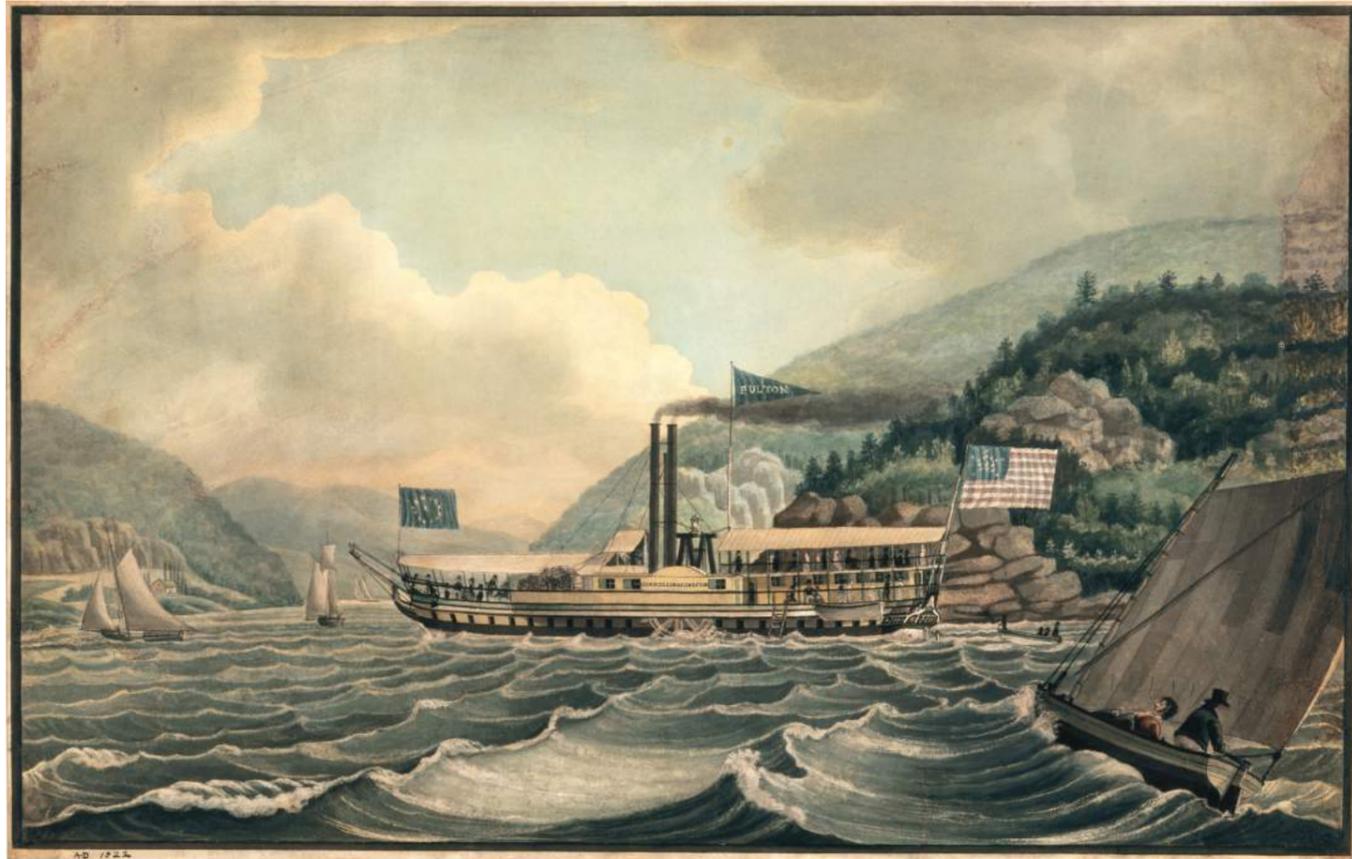


Image: **Steamship Chancellor Livingston**, 1822, Richard Varick DeWitt (1800–1868), watercolor on paper, Albany Institute of History & Art, bequest of Sarah Walsh DeWitt, 1924.1.4



Object: **Model of Steamboat Swallow**, F. Van Loon Ryder, Coxsackie, New York, c. 1968, wood, paint, electrical wiring, small motor, Albany Institute of History & Art Purchase, funded by the Women's Council of the Albany Institute of History & Art, 1968.51

# The Capital Region in 50 Objects

## Steamships

Shortly after 1 PM on August 17, 1807, an ungainly vessel fitted with a smokestack, and paddlewheel pulled away from the Hudson River dock at Greenwich Village in New York City. Twenty-four hours later the steamboat landed at Clermont, Robert Livingston's estate 110 miles upriver. The remaining 42 mile journey to Albany continued the next morning, achieving the total distance in 32 hours. The vessel's inventor, Robert Fulton, immediately wrote to friends describing his success. Fulton's maiden voyage started a steamship revolution on the Hudson River that lasted for more than a century.

Before steamships, travel and trade by stagecoach or sloop took weeks and months. After Fulton proved his invention would work, steamships regularly traveled the Hudson River between Albany and New York City, transporting passengers and cargo.

By the second half of the nineteenth century, steamships resembled floating palaces complete with interior velvet upholstered seating, crystal chandeliers, fine paintings, and wall-to-wall carpeting. The Hudson River Day Line advertised its steamships in the 1880s as "strictly first-class—no freight." A newspaper reported: "With rare exceptions, the passengers are nice people. The peanut and sausage eaters; the beer drinkers; the pipe smokers; the expectorators; the loud talkers; the life-long enemies of soap and water, are never seen here." Considerably larger than their predecessors, the new breed of steamships had steel hulls and six boilers. More than 400 feet in length, these vessels could hold as many as 5,500 passengers per voyage.

Steamships eventually succumbed to the automobile and highway systems. On December 31, 1948, the Hudson River Day Line officially terminated service, ending the steamship era on the Hudson.

The model is of the steamboat Swallow, one of the fastest boats of its era was built to make the night run from Albany to New York City in the shortest time possible. Captains held bragging rights over being the fastest to make the trip, and racing became a means to prove your skill and boat. On the night of April 7, 1845, the Swallow raced another boat, the Rochester on a trip south from Albany. After 30 miles, the Captain of the Swallow ran aground near the village of Athens. The Swallow caught fire and sank within minutes. Many of the 350 passengers were picked up by the Rochester or swam to shore, but fifteen lives were lost.

## Vocabulary

**Engineer** – a person who designs, analyzes, and/or constructs devices for practical purposes

**Invention** - an object, process, or technique, which shows innovation. An invention can be based on earlier ideas, but is modified and changed into a working concept or object

**Model** – a physical representation of an object, created at a certain scale, usually smaller

**Paddlewheel** - the paddlewheel is a large wheel, generally built of a steel framework, upon the outer edge of which are fitted numerous paddle blades (called floats or bunkets). In the water, the bottom quarter or so of the wheel is underwater. Rotation of the paddlewheel produces thrust, forward or backward as required

**Patent** – a legal document giving an individual or group, exclusive rights on a device, for a limited amount of time. Patents can be renewed by the same individual after expiration

**Sloop** – a sailing vessel with one mast, powered by wind

**Steamboat** – a mode of transportation, using steam power, driven a propeller or paddlewheel

**Succumb** – Brought to an end.

## Steamships

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### Directions

Use the depiction of the object, image, and corresponding text to answer the following questions.

1. What is the object? \_\_\_\_\_

2. Where was the object made? \_\_\_\_\_

3. When was the object made? \_\_\_\_\_

4. What was significant about this object?

a. \_\_\_\_\_ b. \_\_\_\_\_

5. What kinds of boats are pictured in the painting?

\_\_\_\_\_

6. What differences do you notice between the types of boats?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

7. Before steamships, how long did it take to travel between Albany and New York City?

\_\_\_\_\_

8. What methods of travel were used prior to steamships?

a. \_\_\_\_\_ b. \_\_\_\_\_

9. How did steamboats change transportation on the Hudson River?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_