

How much do New Yorkers really know about their own history? That's the question prominent citizens were asking 100 years ago. Their plan for educating the public was to throw a gigantic party – the Hudson-Fulton Celebration of 1909.

The idea of a historical festival for New York was planted back in 1893, when Chicago staged an exposition celebrating Christopher Columbus's discovery of the New World. In that year, Rev. J. H. Suydam wrote a letter to the New York Tribune suggesting a celebration in 1909 of the 300th anniversary of Henry Hudson's voyage up the river that bears his name.

The idea gained fresh momentum in 1901 when the Holland Society of New York called for an appropriate commemoration of the Hudson tricentennial. A citizens' meeting later that year led to the formation of the Hudson Tri-centennial Association in June 1902. By 1905, the initiative had passed to a joint committee formed by Robert B. Roosevelt, President Theodore Roosevelt's uncle, and later led by General Stewart L. Woodward.

While planning for the Hudson celebration accelerated, plans also developed to mark the 100th anniversary in 1907 of Robert Fulton's first steamship trip up the Hudson. In 1906, the Hudson committee convinced the Fulton committee to combine their resources and honor both pioneers with a giant celebration in 1909. The state legislature then created the Hudson-Fulton Celebration Commission to plan the event.

The 1909 extravaganza was meant to educate the public. Unlike many World's Fairs, people wouldn't have to pay to take part in the Hudson-Fulton celebration. Instead of people going to a fairground, a fleet of ships, including replicas of Hudson's *Halve Maen* (Half Moon) and Fulton's North River Steamboat (better known as the *Clermont*), would bring the celebration to communities between New York City and Cohoes, the furthest point of Hudson's exploration.

Organizers saw the celebration as a way to unite the people of New York and improve ties with other nations. It would help educate a large immigrant population about their new homeland, while honoring many of their mother countries. Dozens of countries sent ships to escort the *Halve Maen* and *Clermont*, with pride of place going to the Dutch, who commissioned Hudson's original journey. The Dutch participated fully through their own commission, which provided timbers for the construction of the *Halve Maen* replica in the Netherlands. Other nations made lasting contributions, like the Japanese donation of cherryblossom trees for planting on Riverside Drive.

The celebration began on September 24, 1909, when the Dutch officially transferred the *Halve Maen* to the people of New York City. The next day, the *Halve Maen* and *Clermont* led an international naval parade past a special Gate of Honor. During the event, the replicas collided with one another, but neither ship was seriously damaged. Two days later, a massive Historical Pageant paraded down 5th Avenue with floats portraying the Indian, Dutch, Colonial, United States and Modern periods of New York history.

Over the next two weeks, the replicas traveled upriver, a deep-

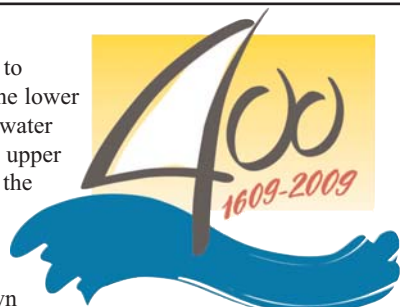
water fleet accompanying them to Newburgh for celebrations on the lower Hudson, and a smaller shallow-water contingent continuing along the upper Hudson to Cohoes. Floats from the Historical Pageant followed by train for parades in towns visited by the fleet. From Yonkers to Poughkeepsie, from Tarrytown to Catskill, from Hudson via Albany and Troy to Cohoes, the ships' arrival was the climax of days of parades, public lectures, special school days and religious services.

When the *Halve Maen* and *Clermont* reached a town, it was

time for more parades, public appearances by actors playing Hudson and Fulton, speeches by Governor Charles Evans Hughes and local leaders, electrical illumination of the streets and bridges at night and fireworks overhead. Between towns, the ships sailed close to shore so people from the countryside could watch history pass by.

The Hudson-Fulton Celebration of 1909 boosted state pride while making money for countless souvenir sellers along the river. It inspired a vogue for Dutch arts and crafts and led to the creation of permanent park spaces along the naval parade route. It accomplished everything the organizers hoped for, but it could have gone further.

Back in July, New York, along with Vermont and Canada, had already celebrated the 300th anniversary of Samuel de Champlain's discovery of the lake that bears his name. While Champlain was honored again in 1959, it was left to the 2009 Hudson-Fulton-Champlain Quadricentennial celebration to honor all three pioneers together in a new commemoration of history for 21st century New York.



EXPLORE NY

HUDSON • FULTON • CHAMPLAIN

Celebrations: 1909 to Today

This is one of a 10-part educational series created by the NYNPA NIE Program © 2008



Newspaper Tie-ins to Today:

Look through newspapers (either in-print or online) for information about celebrations, fairs and festivals. What is it about these events that attract people to attend? Research events or exhibits associated with the Hudson-Fulton-Champlain Quadricentennial and create a newspaper advertisement to attract people to come to one or more of these activities.

Browse items in the newspaper to find any features or articles on the 400th anniversary of Henry Hudson and Samuel de Champlain's voyages to the new world. Does the story include any additional information about the 1909 celebration? Imagine how this event might be celebrated in 2109. Write a brief article for a newspaper in the future highlighting the who, what, where, when and why of the celebration you envision.

Photo: Onboard an excursion steamer passing the American Fleet -- Hudson-Fulton Celebration, 1909, Library of Congress, reproduction number LC-USZ62-131470.