

Sloop Clearwater
Poughkeepsie, Dutchess Co., NY

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8 Page 12

Mark Lytle, PhD., Fulbright scholar, professor of history and director of the Historical Studies Program at Bard College, underscores the significance and meaning of the sloop *Clearwater*:

The sloop as both a symbol and a means to dramatize the River and its historical importance has been an inspired project. I remember when my son was about 5 years old in 1978 and he went with my wife to offload pumpkins from the *Clearwater* at that the town dock in Rhinecliff. What a way to link the town to the river to the maritime history of the region as well as its agricultural and (in the pumpkin's link to Washington Irving) even its literary history. Obviously one cannot easily separate the *Clearwater* from Pete Seeger who has himself become an historical institution. Through his music he has promoted both historical and environmental awareness as well as encouraging the people of the Hudson Valley to define their sense of place. That is perhaps the most enduring import of the *Clearwater* as a symbol.

Frankly I can't think of any physical structure or entity created in this region since FDR and the New Deal that has as much historical meaning as the *Clearwater*.¹⁸

Harvey K. Flad, PhD., a professor of geography at Vassar College, eloquently sums up the legacy of the sloop *Clearwater*:

The Sloop *Clearwater* was launched in 1969, the same year that saw the passage of the landmark legislation that created the National Environmental Policy Act, the most significant environmental legislation in United States history. The *Clearwater* became an immediate cultural and environmental icon for the growing national environmental movement. At both the regional and national level, it signified the cleaning from pollution and restoration of America's waterways, and the organization became a leader in the passage of the Clean Water Act and has continued to pursue the effort to remove pcb's and other toxic contaminants from the river. As a replica of an 18th and 19th century cargo vessel, the *Clearwater* sloop acts as an educational classroom for thousands, young and old, who have learned of the history of the Hudson River as a working river and an extraordinarily rich ecological habitat, as well as a cultural landscape rich in American history. Indeed, for the public, the sloop's integrity as an historical-cultural resource is experienced by sailing up and down the "river that flows both ways." Its efforts in social, cultural, historical and environmental education as well as environmental advocacy have been fundamental to the inclusion of the Hudson River as one of the first National Heritage Rivers and the Hudson River Valley as a National Heritage Area, culminating in the designation of the Hudson River Valley by the United States Congress as the "Landscape that Defines America" in 1997.¹⁹

¹⁸ Mark Lytle, PhD., e-mail to author (April 28, 2004).

¹⁹ Harvey K. Flad, PhD., e-mail to author (April 28, 2004)

Sloop Clearwater
Poughkeepsie, Dutchess Co., NY

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8 Page 11

schooner hulls, including that of the *Victorine*, were converted to harbor lighters and barges, while an undetermined number continued to eke out livings along the Atlantic coast for several more decades. Others were simply abandoned along the river shore and left to rot.

At the time Hamlin was commissioned to design the sloop *Clearwater*, no sloop remains could be found to salvage or to use as a basis for reconstruction despite an extensive search. Hamlin was, however, able to obtain detailed information and lines documenting the famous Hudson River sloop *Victorine* of 1848. *Victorine's* lines and accompanying descriptive information were published by John W. Griffiths in his 1850 Treatise on Marine and Naval Architecture. The lines, supplemented by other period manuals, builders half-hull models, contemporaneous illustrations (e.g. Francis Silva's *The Hudson at Tappan Zee* and James Butterworth's commissioned painting of the *Phillip R. Paulding*) and rare period photographs formed a basis for the design of the new sloop. Articles by Charles G. Davis, Alfred Brownell, and data provided by Howard I. Chapelle provided further insights into operational hardware and rigging.

The design of the sloop *Clearwater* required minor adjustments in order to meet U.S. Coast Guard regulations in order to carry passengers. Modern steel fasteners were required throughout the hull. The sail plan was shortened slightly to meet stability requirements. Watertight bulkheads were placed between all living and mechanical spaces. A diesel engine, tanks, shaft and exhaust system were installed in one corner of the cargo hold. All hatches were built on the centerline to avoid the possibility of flooding, and a full set of fire and bilge alarms were designed and installed. Still, most of the salient traditional elements were retained. Completely traditional shipbuilding arts and materials were used to build the sloop including the use of sawn frames and natural knees.

Conclusion

In 2002, the sloop *Clearwater* was featured in a documentary created by Emmy award-winning journalist Bill Moyers, entitled *America's First River: Bill Moyers on the Hudson*. About the launching and history of the sloop he said "And so began the journey of the *Clearwater*, sailing around the Hudson on a mission to draw people back to the water.... After more than three decades, the sloop, built on the far-fetched notion of cleaning up the river, has become an institution on the Hudson."¹⁶ John Cronin, Riverkeeper of the Hudson River and co-author of *The Riverkeepers* also shared his thought about Pete Seeger and the mission of the *Clearwater*: "Pete Seeger is a master of simple cunning. The brilliant and cunning idea he had about the Hudson was that the Hudson would be saved by people, but only if people had a chance to enjoy the Hudson. This was something that nobody was thinking of or doing."¹⁷

Since her launch in 1969, *Clearwater* has sailed the Hudson River so frequently that she has become an iconic component of the region's character as valid as many of the historic homes or physical landscape features. *Clearwater* appears in more regional documentation than landscape features such as Storm King Mountain, and more than most historic homes such as Clermont or Sunnyside. The *Clearwater* has appeared on magazine covers, college catalogs, web sites, newspapers, and tourism materials produced by hundreds of institutions. In fact, *Clearwater* voyages constantly throughout the Hudson River estuary and New York Harbor area during its seven-month season, and embarks more than 15,000 schoolchildren each season from 16 docking sites.

¹⁶ Bill Moyers, "*America's First River: Bill Moyers on the Hudson*," Videocassette, Public Affairs Television (2002).

¹⁷ Ibid.

Sloop Clearwater
Poughkeepsie, Dutchess Co., NY

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8 Page 10

The centerboard sloops of this era (and a growing number of very similar boats with schooner rigs) were capable of attaining speeds of 12 mph, and if wind and tide were favorable, were known to make the 150-mile run from New York to Albany in less than 24 hours. When conditions were less than favorable, and the boats were limited to drifting with the tides and currents, the same trip could take as long as a week.

Between 1830 and 1850, Hudson River sloops and schooners continued to evolve in response to need for greater speed and efficiency. Clipper bows were introduced, freeboard was reduced to a minimum in order to reduce windage, and sail rigs were steadily increased in height and sail area. The renowned sloop *Victorine*, built in 1848, was widely regarded as the fastest sloop of her class on the river, measuring 65 feet in length on deck, 25 feet in beam, 6 feet depth of hold and nearly 5000 square feet of canvas. In terms of speed, utility and aesthetic appeal, she paralleled the clipper ship in representing the highest development of her class and technology.



Sloop *Victorine*, undated photo (c. 1870?)
(Collection of National Maritime Historical Society)

By mid-century, passenger service on the river's growing fleet of steam sidewheelers had improved greatly in reliability, comfort and safety, leaving the sloops to earn their living through the transportation of bulk freights, including lumber, brick, building stone, iron ore, limestone, cement, lime, plaster, potters' clay, produce and livestock. Many of these cargoes were carried as deck loads in order to save time and labor in handling. As profits decreased in the face of rising operating costs and increased competition from railroads and steam-towed barges, sloop owners began to reduce labor costs in the 1860s and 1870s by converting their sloops into more easily handled schooners. New boats built during this period were specifically designed to handle bulk freights and were rigged as schooners from the start.

As many as 200 sloops and schooners were in regular service on the river in 1860. By 1890, however, they were no longer competitive and the era of working sail on the Hudson River quickly drew to a close. Some sloop and

Sloop Clearwater
Poughkeepsie, Dutchess Co., NY

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8 Page 9

a boat which is to have a 36 foot keel, with a peak aft, also a cabin and a caboose, a mast, a rudder, a jib, a roasting spit, a crane beam, bilge strakes, gunwale, festoon work and four bunks, to wit, two fore and two aft.¹²

In 1694, 72 sloops operated on the Hudson. Sixty-two were owned in New York and ten were owned in Albany. By 1771, 125 sloops were working on the river. The 1753-1760 accounts of Tobias Conrad Ten Eyck's sloop *Christiena* appear to be fairly representative of the river trade carried on by Hudson River sloops in the eighteenth century. Ten Eyck, who held property and slaves near Coeymans, New York, operated a sloop for his convenience in transporting agricultural products to market and returning with manufactured goods and luxury items. He ran errands for relatives, and on occasion, bought and sold for his friends and associates. Products imported from New York included molasses, oysters, English cheese, books, tea, sugar, snuff, candles, furniture and copper. Freights shipped back to New York consisted of lumber, corn, wheat, oats and firewood. Between 1756 and 1760, Ten Eyck appears to have profited from transporting military supplies to the British army in Albany.¹³

Two hundred and six sloops were reported on the river in 1813. Dutch culture and shipbuilding traditions persisted in the Hudson Valley long after the imposition of English rule, and were still discernible to contemporaries in the design of early nineteenth century sloops. William Verplank, author of the first book devoted to this subject, describes early nineteenth century sloops as:

65-75 ft. in length, 100 tons capacity, full forward, like the other Dutch vessels, high quarter deck, mast well-forward, large mainsail, small jib, and a topsail. Packets carried a commodious cabin beneath the quarterdeck for passengers. They were far from being an uncomfortable means of conveyance.¹⁴

During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, many river sloops operated as market boats, collecting agricultural products and building materials at landings along the river, and selling them on consignment in urban markets. The sloops returned to the same landings with drygoods, and packages. Passengers and mail were also accommodated, but sailings were unscheduled and irregular, depending upon the completion of a paying manifest and favorable wind and tide. After the inauguration of steamboat service in 1807, competition for business and passengers led to the development of regularly scheduled packet sloops, years before the concept was inaugurated by the Black Ball Line in 1818 in their New York to Liverpool route.

The most significant stage in the evolution of the Hudson River sloops and schooners was the invention and rapid acceptance of the pivoted centerboard. Patented by the Swain Brothers of New Jersey in 1811, the device first appeared on the Hudson River between 1815 and 1816 with the sloops *Advance* and *Freedom*.¹⁵ Use of the centerboard enabled the development of broad-beamed, shallow draft vessels, capable of carrying bulk freights into the shallowest inlets and coves at high tide without a compromised ability to sail effectively to windward. A pronounced sheer remained a local characteristic of the type. These characteristics, which appear to have become somewhat standardized by 1830, were exactly matched to the shoaling tidal waters of the Hudson River and Long Island Sound and the changing economic niche in which sloops and schooners could profitably operate in competition with steam.

¹² A. J. F. van Laer, ed., *Early Records of the City and County of Albany and Colony of Rensselaerwyck*, Vol. 3 (Albany: University of the State of New York, 1918): 534

¹³ Waldron Mosher Polgreen, "Gleanings from an Old Account Book of the Sloop *Criestiena* 1753-1760, *Yearbook* (Albany: Dutch Settlers Society of Albany, 1944-1945): 16-20.

¹⁴ William E. Verplank and Moses W. Collyer, *The Sloops of the Hudson River* (Port Washington, NY, 1908): 4-5.

¹⁵ Paul Foutenoy, *Sloops of the Hudson River* (Mystic, CT, 1994): 48-49.

Sloop Clearwater
Poughkeepsie, Dutchess Co., NY

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8 Page 8

thought so, and one afternoon in the fall of 1975 the *Clearwater* sailed into Fulton Ferry at the foot of the Brooklyn Bridge where Walt Whitman had crossed on ferryboats to Manhattan and wrote:

Just as you are refresh'd by the gladness of the river and the
bright flow, I was refresh'd,
Just as you stand and lean on the rail, yet hurry with the swift
current, I stood yet was hurried,
Just as you look on the numberless masts of ships and the
thick-stemm'd pipes of steamboats, I look'd.

I had managed to get the local paper to carry a notice of the boat's arrival and a number of curious persons came out that afternoon to see the boat. *The Clearwater* was a magnificent sight with its 75-foot mast poking up directly under the Brooklyn Bridge. Pete strummed a few tunes on his banjo, I made sure our visitors got information on membership, and then the crew, Pete, and I retired to the cabin for a spaghetti dinner as the lights came on in the skyscrapers across the East River.

And it was these small riverfront sloop clubs that were instrumental in reclaiming the Hudson, town by town, from the pollution and waste of the industrial age. *The Clearwater* was intended to provide Hudson River Valley citizens with a firsthand look at the neglect and pollution of the river, educate them on what could be done to restore the river, and move them to action—and it did. It quickly became a symbol for the environmental movement in the Hudson Valley and over the last three and a half decades has served as the model for countless environmental, educational, and maritime preservation organizations worldwide that have also built or acquired dozens of historic sailing vessels to draw attention to their programs and activities.¹¹

Basis for the Design of the *Clearwater*

The *Clearwater's* design is accurately modeled on the classic Hudson River sloops of the mid-nineteenth century, particularly the *Victorine* of 1848. As a type, the Hudson River sloop evolved from small sailing vessels introduced to the river by the Dutch in the early seventeenth century. Gradually, operating conditions particular to the Hudson River began to influence the building and design of a regional boat type engaged commerce on the Hudson River and southern New England.

European colonization of the Hudson River began in earnest in 1624 with the settlement of Fort Orange (Albany). Within several years, communities and trading posts were established at New Amsterdam (New York), Esopus (Kingston), and several other strategic locations along the 150-mile navigable river. Communication and trade within the maritime colony of New Netherland and among its trading partners in Europe and the West Indies was carried on by traditional Dutch sailing craft of the period, particularly the sloop. The sloops introduced to the river by the Dutch appear to have included shallow draft, bluff bow craft carrying single masts, gaff mainsails, one or more headsails and leeboards as well as deeper draft sloops without leeboards capable of ocean passages. A 1662 contract between builders Hendrick Abelson and Jurian Calier and owners Cornelis Cornelissen van der Hoeven and Andries Hansen Scherp describes an Albany-built sloop of that period as follows:

¹¹ Peter F. Guerrero, letter (2 December 2003).

Sloop Clearwater
Poughkeepsie, Dutchess Co., NY

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8 Page 7

The vessel is turned into the wind and slowed until it is barely making way. The peak halyard and throat halyard are uncoiled and stretched aft along the deck one to a side. The young people – often fourth and fifth graders – gather along the halyards with a smattering of teachers, parents, and shipboard volunteers to raise the sail and learn the value of teamwork. This they invariably do in just a few minutes, despite the fact that the combined weight of boom, sail, and gaff is well over 3,000 pounds. The gaff and head of the mainsail must be lifted over eighty feet up the mast.

Once the sail is set and the jib hoisted by the crew, the engine is turned off. The young students are now assembled into their five groups at one of five learning stations identified by parts of the boat:

- The fish station, which is on the starboard side of the hold hatch on the main deck.
- The invertebrate station, which is to port of the hold hatch.
- The water chemistry station, which is on the starboard side of the main cabin coachroof.
- The navigation station, which is on the port side of the coachroof.
- The recycling station, which is below in the main cabin.

The students have 12-15 minutes at each station. The navigation station is subdivided in two parts, because half the group will be steering the vessel with the 10-foot tiller. As segments elapse, the groups migrate to the next learning station in the counterclockwise rotation.

In *The Hudson: An Illustrated Guide to the Living River*, the use of a replica of a historic sloop for teaching is described: "The choice of a sloop provided a Romantic reminder of a simpler preindustrial time when the Hudson was not yet transformed by modern technology. The *Clearwater* connects us to the history of the river by re-creating the experience of sailing the Hudson and linking river travel with nature."¹⁰

Personal Remembrances of the *Clearwater*, by Peter F. Guerrero

In October 1974, I signed on to crew on *Clearwater* during its annual Pumpkin Festival week. With its decks brimming with tons of golden pumpkins, we left the rotting docks of Greenpoint, Brooklyn, sailed past the skyscrapers of Manhattan, under the George Washington Bridge, into the wide reaches of the Tappen Zee and through the narrow twists and turns of the Hudson Highlands that Washington Irving wrote about. Up past Beacon and Poughkeepsie all the way to Albany, stopping at towns here and there to hold benefit concerts where Pete would invariably show up and we would pass the hat. In Kingston, on a glorious fall day, I filled balloons with helium for kids and we sold pumpkins all day long. Monarch butterflies were migrating during the day, using the Hudson as an ancient highway to their winter breeding grounds in the mountains of Mexico. At night, under star-filled skies, we listened to the Canadian Geese using the Hudson as their personal interstate to wintering grounds along the Chesapeake Bay and points south. I was sold on *Clearwater*. Before leaving New York for good some 26 years ago, I had served for a brief time on *Clearwater's* Board of Directors and started getting people interested in a "sloop club" in Brooklyn.

Sloop clubs had already been established in upstate river towns along the Hudson and there was also one in Manhattan, but Brooklyn—with its expansive post-industrial waterfront—seemed to be a natural. Pete also

¹⁰ Stephen P. Stanne, Roger G. Panetta and Brian E. Forist, *The Hudson: An illustrated Guide to the Living River* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996): 139.

Sloop Clearwater
Poughkeepsie, Dutchess Co., NY

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8 Page 6

The PCB Problem and Other Activities of the Clearwater

In 1972, fish that were malformed and covered with lesions began to show up in nets and on lines in the Hudson River. After testing, it was revealed the polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) were present at very high levels, and the source of the PCBs was soon identified as General Electric (GE) – one of the state’s largest employers. By 1975 Clearwater became frustrated with ongoing efforts to get action from the state environmental agency, and in November 1975 Clearwater went to the *New York Times*. That launched a pitched 25-year battle between environmentalists and the nation’s wealthiest – and arguably most intransigent – corporation. Ultimately, GE was charged with cleaning up the PCBs, a process that is currently in the planning phase.

One of the other pioneering activities of the Clearwater was the development of databases to catalogue all shorefront properties along the Hudson River, and while this information is now outdated, other groups have used this example to maintain shoreline data inventories in a variety of GIS formats to assist in community planning efforts.

Clearwater became concerned with public access to the Hudson's shores as it began to sail the river in 1969. At the time, there were relatively few sites where a large vessel could dock and people could gather in safety. Much of the river's shoreline was privately owned, dangerous, or inaccessible. Fortunately, there were enough municipalities and industries that supported the work of the Clearwater to allow early festivals and the safe boarding of students for educational sails. For 20 years Clearwater stressed the importance of public access to the river, citing Public Trust Doctrine - and simple common sense community economics. Public access to the Hudson River is now mandated by law in most waterfront communities.

On-Board Education

In 1969 the only vessel doing environmental education work was Cousteau’s *Calypso* – and there were no outsiders on board sharing the experience. The outreach was through TV and movies. Other ships were engaged in sail training and youth development, but there was virtually no on-board “experiential” education in science and the environment. Clearwater’s decision to embark on a long-term campaign of building an environmental generation is believed to have been the first in the world. *Clearwater* was the first vessel in the United States to conduct science-based environmental education on board a sailing ship. Many river groups across the country and around the world trace their origins to the example of *Clearwater*’s work on the Hudson. For example, the Foundation Maritime Colleg of Warsaw was inspired by Clearwater to plan the construction of a replica sailing vessel for use in raising public awareness of pollution on the Vistula River.⁹ Since the Classroom of the Waves was initiated, more than 400,000 young people and over 100,000 adults have participated in Clearwater’s science-based environmental education program.

At the heart of the Classroom of the Waves is the vessel itself. When young people come aboard for a sail they are divided into five groups. They gather for a safety talk, and then cluster on the vessel’s outboard side while the crew unmoor and get the vessel underway. Once the vessel is underway a small trawl net is set while the engine is still running. Volunteers self-select from the group to cast over, and soon thereafter retrieve the net. Fish caught in the trawl are sequestered in a covered fish tank for future inspections.

⁹ *Clearwater Navigator* (Winter 1993-1994): 11.

Sloop Clearwater
Poughkeepsie, Dutchess Co., NY

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8 Page 5

Clean Water Act

The Clean Water Act of 1972 represented a sweeping change in the restoration of the nation's polluted waters. Its mission to "restore and maintain the chemical, physical and biological integrity of the nation's waters" placed new emphasis on uniform federal standards and recognized biological diversity as key to measuring the environmental health of water bodies. The Act provided funds to municipalities to build new wastewater treatment facilities, established a discharge permitting process and regulated dredging, filling and the destruction of wetlands. Since 1972, the population served by wastewater treatment facilities has doubled. Two-thirds of the nation's rivers are now considered fit for swimming. Wetland losses have been reduced by 75%. The law and its subsequent amendments represent a turning point in the history of the American environmental movement.

The Clearwater organization filed the first successful prosecution against a polluter under the Clean Water Act of 1972 in New York State when it sued Tuck Tape of Beacon. Clearwater found that the factory had permits for two discharges, but in fact there were 23, releasing hot solvents, adhesives, sewage, latex, and titanium dioxide. In addition, chemicals leached into the creek from leaking barrels, and broken sacks. Clearwater collected evidence, set up a lab with high school students, and brought the evidence to the U.S. Attorney in Manhattan. The U.S. Attorney charged Tuck with 24 counts of violating the Clean Water Act. The company pled guilty to half the counts and was fined. This case represented the first successful prosecution under the new Act in New York State. The threat of continuing vigilance by Clearwater created an incentive for other polluters to comply with the Act.⁸

In 1975, when New York State enacted regulations more stringent than the federal rules, the passage of the State Pollution Discharge Elimination System (SPDES) created a new generation of permit issuance and enforcement. For several years permit and discharge information was inaccessible to members of the general public or their representatives – such as Clearwater. In 1986, largely in response to the deadly release of isocyanate gas in Bhopal, India, the Emergency Planning and Community Right to Know Act, one of a series of “sunshine” laws, was enacted. A component of EPCRA, the Toxic Release Inventory (TRI), forced the states to make discharge permit information accessible.

Clearwater was the first group, possibly in the nation, to gather, process, and interpret SPDES data for public awareness. Clearwater's Turning The Tides reports exposed widespread laxity in enforcement, and proved that the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) was actually manipulating reporting requirements from year to year, eliminating whole categories of toxins to make the one overall statewide discharge number look as if pollution was indeed being defeated. Clearwater's actions through 1996, when it released a “Toxic Top Ten” report, made front-page news and forced the state to more rigorously enforce its own laws.

Today Clearwater is still at work supporting the Clean Water Act, thirty years after passage, by taking both the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and Entergy, the owner of the Indian Point nuclear generating facility on the Hudson River, to court over decades of non-enforcement of the Best-Technology requirements of the Clean Water Act. Clearwater is also attempting to gain Critical Habitat status for the Hudson River as home of one of the healthiest populations of the federally-listed endangered shortnose sturgeon.

⁸ John Cronin and Robert F. Kennedy, *The Riverkeepers* (New York: Scribner, 1997):56-57

Sloop Clearwater
Poughkeepsie, Dutchess Co., NY

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8 Page 4

There was some modest press given to Seeger's sloop idea in the regional press, and when the keel was laid in South Bristol, Maine people began to take notice. But it was in 1969, when the sloop *Clearwater* was launched, that the idea captured the attention of a nation – and other nations as well. The image of the beautiful sloop sailing on one of America's foremost rivers, to save that river from the flood of toxic and domestic pollution that was literally killing all life in vast reaches, turned up in newspapers around the country.

Seeger, joined by Don McLean and other performers at the peak of their powers, toured the nation in concert and spoke frequently of *Clearwater* and the fight to save America's rivers. The sloop soon became an emblem of the movement to reclaim the nation's degraded waterways.

The ship was quickly supported by 2,500 dedicated environmentalists with a capacity for raising money and writing letters to their elected officials on any number of issues. There had been several national conservation groups, such as the Sierra Club and the Audubon Society, and a new generation of activist organizations followed at the same time *Clearwater Inc.* was formed, including the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) and the Environmental Defense Fund.

Groups of citizens were beginning to coalesce around the country, many inspired by the example of Seeger and *Clearwater*, to address the most egregious environmental problems in their communities. One of these, The Scenic Hudson Preservation Conference, was formed in the Hudson Valley by some of the area's wealthier citizens to defeat a proposed power plant. But it was the *Clearwater* that first symbolized the idea of saving one river, and by extension, all of America's rivers. The *Clearwater* brought focus to the concept that the river's ecosystem was of intrinsic value to society.

In 1970, the *Clearwater* sailed to Washington, D.C. with Pete Seeger and Don McLean onboard to highlight the plight of the Hudson River and the need to protect America's waterways. The *New York Times* once again reported on the *Clearwater's* journey: "The Hudson River Sloop *Clearwater* sailed out into the rough waters of the Atlantic Ocean yesterday to take its campaign against pollution to Washington for Earth Day Ceremonies next week. 'We've sailed for a year now up and down the river showing people what the river used to be, how it's polluted now and what it can be,' Mr. Seeger said, 'but now we're going to Washington because the problems of the American rivers can't be solved by people like me who live on them. Only the Federal Government has the power to enact and enforce the laws that are needed.'⁶ They took a room in a House of Representative's office building and held a press conference. Pete displayed a pie chart of the national budget, showing big slices for war, for highways and bridges, and a slice for the environment so small it was just a line. He angrily tossed the pie chart like a frisbee; then he and Don began to play music -- songs about the Hudson River, about the environment, about our responsibility for building a healthier world. More than 70 members of the U.S. House of Representatives attended, filling the room to overflowing, coming from their offices as they heard that Pete Seeger was playing in their office building. Some Representatives actually left the floor of the House to attend the impromptu session.⁷

⁶ "Clearwater Carrying Pollution Drive to Washington, *New York Times* (April 15, 1970): 88.

⁷ *Clearwater Navigator* (June 1984)

Sloop Clearwater
Poughkeepsie, Dutchess Co., NY

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8 Page 3

Thirty-five days after leaving South Bristol, the first Hudson River sloop built in a century pulled into the murky waters of the East River [New York City]. We tied up at South Street to the accompaniment of brass bands. *Clearwater's* Hudson River career had started.³

The first time the *New York Times* mentioned the *Clearwater* was a couple of months after she was launched, when she stopped at the Newport Folk Festival in Rhode Island:

Meanwhile, down on the waterfront, Pete Seeger and the singing crew of the 76-foot Hudson River sloop *Clearwater* gave a two-hour concert from the deck of the ship, focused on sea songs and antipollution songs. The *Clearwater*, built with funds raised by Mr. Seeger and other folk musicians, was launched in Maine in May and is on her way to the Hudson River, where she will sail between Albany and Manhattan, dropping anchor at river towns for free weekend waterfront song festivals. Her purpose is to renew interest in the pleasures of the river and to increase the possibilities of enjoying those pleasures by cleaning up the river.⁴

The *New York Times* also described when the *Clearwater* first sailed into New York Harbor:

The 96-foot sloop *Clearwater*, her green hull cleanly slicing through the fetid waters of New York harbor, sailed into port yesterday as part of a low-key fight against pollution of the Hudson River. Yesterday, the sloop slid up the Narrow, pushed along by a gentle breeze. She tied up at a dock at the foot of the Statue of Liberty, where dignitaries, including Mayor Lindsay, clambered aboard. 'We need this kind of thing,' Mr. Lindsay commented between short watches at the tiller. 'We're very much in favor of clean water.'⁵

Creating a National Consciousness

In 1966, when Pete Seeger and several friends met in Garrison, New York to discuss funding the construction or restoration of a Hudson River Sloop, one of the strategies they reached was the principle of using music – primarily Pete's, at first – to bring an idea to people.

The first manifestation of this concept was the Hudson Valley Folk Picnic, first held under a big pasture oak at Anders Saunders Garrison farm in 1966. At that event 200-300 listened to musical performances and learned about the idea of a building a sloop to ply the Hudson River again. They contributed \$146 – not much, but a start. That folk picnic was the genesis of today's Great Hudson River Revival, attended by 5,000-20,000, depending on the weather.

Prior to the Folk Picnic, there had been festivals aplenty, but none that were attempting to convey an agenda of social change – in this case, the thought that America's rivers needed to be saved. According to Robert Boyle, author, fisherman, and sports writer, the Hudson had literally been blacked out of many government maps as a waterway that was wholly abandoned to industrialization.

³ *Clearwater Navigator* (June 1984)

⁴ John S. Wilson, "Groups at Newport Festival Sing History of Bluegrass," *New York Times* (21 July 1969):38.

⁵ Douglas Robinson, "Sloop Will Sail Up the Hudson In Campaign for Clean Water," *New York Times* (2 August, 1969):53.

Sloop Clearwater
Poughkeepsie, Dutchess Co., NY

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8 Page 2

Sloops of the Hudson may not have been great literature, but it was (and is) a fine little book. It inspired me one cold January night in 1966 to sit up until 3:00 A.M. typing a 7-page single-spaced letter to Vic. "Why don't we get a few hundred families together and build a life-sized Hudson River sloop?"

The idea was about as practical as a plan to build a canoe and paddle to Tahiti. In early spring, Vic Schwartz called me on the phone. "Hey, Pete, when are we going to start building that sloop?"

"You must be kidding," I replied.

"No. I've been talking it up on the commuter train. I passed your letter around, and we got a dozen people raring to go."

I'd say the rest is history, except things like this don't happen without a lot of planning, organization, and commitment. And at the time, it seemed like a frivolous idea. The world was full of agony, the Vietnam conflict was heating up. Money was needed for all sorts of life-and-death matters. There we were, planning to build a sailboat.

It must have been an idea that was meant to take on a life of its own. In June an organizational meeting was held at the home of Alexander Saunders near Cold Spring; 150 people attended. I sang a few songs: someone passed the hat; \$167 was raised. At that meeting officers were elected to initiate the sloop project.

At our second or third meeting, we met at the home of a wealthy Hudson Valley resident who could have paid for the entire boat himself. He studied our proposed designs and said, "It's a beautiful boat, all right. But why do you want to sail it on the Hudson? I sail the Virgin Islands myself."

My fingers clenched in anger, but I didn't say anything. He had just given us our best reason for building the boat. Cleaning up a river was a cause worth fighting for. We had allowed some people to make a profit from the Hudson, after which they went somewhere else to enjoy clear water. At the same meeting we made a decision to go public. It was a more far-reaching policy decision than any of us realized. The *Clearwater* would be everybody's boat.

It was a bright sunny day on May 17, 1969, and over 2,000 people crowded the Gamage Shipyard and dock in South Bristol, Maine, when the *Clearwater* was launched. To those of us who had been raising money for three years, it seemed like a miracle. The governor of Maine was there, as were many rank and file Maine citizens, young and old. Sloop members laid out a magnificent spread of homemade food. Several busloads of schoolchildren from Newburgh and other Hudson Valley towns helped smash a bottle of Hudson River Valley champagne on the bow. The crowd sang "This Land is Your Land" as the 100-ton hull slid into the water with a splash. It was a great day.

In the early morning of June 27, Captain Allen Aunapu, together with eleven musicians, some of whom had never been in a sailboat, sailed *Clearwater* down the Damasriscotta River. We covered 40 ocean miles in a fog and finally arrived in Portland, Maine, where we gave the first of a series of fundraising concerts which would help us make the final payments on the cost of construction, which in the end totalled \$140,000.

Sloop Clearwater
Poughkeepsie, Dutchess Co., NY

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8 Page 1

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The sloop *Clearwater* satisfies Criterion A and Criteria Consideration G for her significance in the history of the American environmental movement. Modeled after a nineteenth century Hudson River sloop and launched in 1969, the *Clearwater*, as a symbol of the organization of the same name, was instrumental in dramatically raising public awareness over the consequences of polluted rivers and in inspiring successful citizens' initiatives to clean up the nation's rivers. The *Clearwater* and her supporters were highly effective in educating the public about environmental pollution and seeking legislative solutions to the problem. The passage of the Clean Water Act of 1972, a milestone in the nation's history of environmental protection, was a direct result of a campaign led by the *Clearwater*. Although the principal focus of the *Clearwater* and the organization behind it was the Hudson River, the effects of their activities were felt nationwide. The sloop has become a well-recognized symbol of the impulse to reverse the destruction of American rivers, and although less than 50 years of age, possesses exceptional significance in the history of environmental activism. Deborah Meyer DeWan, director of the Riverfront Communities Program of Scenic Hudson, Inc., summarizes the significance of the *Clearwater*:

The *Clearwater* is a symbol of exceptional significance to the modern American environmental movement. It represents the tireless efforts of citizens, led by the legendary folksinger and river champion Pete Seeger, to call national attention to the pollution of America's waterways, which resulted in the passage of the Clean Water Act of 1972. The unique icon has served an entire generation as a positive counterweight to the destruction of the country's rivers from decades of social and industrial waste. The *Clearwater*, a replica of the classic 19th century Hudson River sloop, celebrates the beauty of the Hudson - America's First River - and the triumph of ordinary citizens to make a lasting difference and to create an inspiring legacy for future generations.¹

In 1966, renowned folk singer Pete Seeger, in despair over the pollution of his beloved Hudson River, announced plans to "build a boat to save the River" – an utterly unique idea in the late 1960s. At that time, many American rivers were biologically dead or dying, and hence suitable only for industrial uses. Then the rivers began to catch fire – literally – and *Clearwater*'s arrival in New York Harbor became nationally and internationally significant. Thousands of newspaper articles led to an even larger number of media impressions – all talking about the importance of America's rivers. "In the 1960s and 1970s, 'the Hudson Valley would emerge as the central battleground of the American Environmental movement:' [During this period], 'the Hudson emerged as the Mount Vernon of environmental law.'"²

Seeger, a well known and accomplished American folk singer and musician, explained the genesis of the sloop in an article published in the *Clearwater Navigator* in June, 1984:

In the early 1960s, Vic Schwarz of Cold Spring, friend, commercial artist, and American history buff, told me that the Hudson once had many large sloops. Some of those sloops had booms 70 ft. long. It was hard to believe. Vic loaned me a tattered copy of Sloops of the Hudson, written by William Verplank and Moses Collyer (Putnam, 1908). I read it through in a night.

¹ Deborah Meyer DeWan, letter (September 10, 2003).

² John Cronin and Robert F. Kennedy, *The Riverkeepers* (New York: Scribner, 1997): 22.