

YONKERS' HISTORY

Village History & Economy Was Built Upon the River: The Hudson River and its rich water resources play prominently in the settlement history, social development, economic health and stability of the City of Yonkers.

SETTLEMENT

Early Role of the Native Americans - The Algonquin Native Americans were some of the earliest settlers of Yonkers. Clustered in a village at the intersection (confluence) of two waterways called the *Muhheakantuck (or Shatemuc)* and the *Neperah*. They called their village 'Nappeckamack' which meant either 'trap fishing place' or 'rapid water settlement'. Both translations focus on the importance of the water, and its food supply, to the tribe. Today these same two waterways continue to flow in the area, but we know them now as the Hudson and the Saw Mill Rivers. This location met many of the settlement needs of the Native Americans, including:

- Protection from attack – shelter – good visibility
- Rich food sources from fish, nuts, small animals
- Fresh water and
- Ready transit opportunities either on foot or by canoe



Henry Hudson: The Native people's settlement needs were the same as those the Europeans looked for in selecting their settlement locations. In the fall of 1609 Henry Hudson sailed the "Half Moon" up the river that would later bear his name, in search of the Northwest Passage. He stopped at Yonkers to trade with the Native people. He noted the Native American settlement, its excellent location and resources. Records show he obtained oysters from the local tribe. Hudson claimed the Hudson River for the Dutch.

The Dutch & De Jonkeer - Adriaen van der Donck was a young lawyer working for the Dutch West India Company. He arrived in the new world to work as a sheriff in Albany several years after Hudson noted the excellent waterfront location of the Native American tribe. In 1646 he moved downriver and negotiated with the tribe sachem (leader) for a large section of land. Known as De Jonkeer, which means "the young gentleman" his estate was referred to as "De Jonkheer's (or Jonkeer's) Land" or as "Donckers." The English shortened it to Yonkers.

Sawmill - Van der Donck built a **sawmill** at the junction of the Hudson and Nepperhan Rivers, which is why it is now known as the Saw Mill River. While today it seems a small river as it flows through Yonkers, at one time waterfalls existed along what is now Warburton Avenue, powering the mills. This waterpower became the energy for Saw Mills and grist mills for many years, resulting in Yonkers' growth into a major trading center.



Frederick Philipse – The Philipse family was once the richest family in the New York colony. They bought a large section of De Jonkeer’s property in 1672 which included most of Yonkers. They owned it for over one hundred years. Philipse Manor Hall, was built on what was then a bay, on the north bank of the Nepperhan River near where it flowed into the Hudson. This location was known as the Lower Mills. The Philipse Manor House still stands in its original location and is the oldest

building in Yonkers. The Philipsburg Manor, also still standing, is in Sleepy Hollow and was known as the Upper Mills. As British sympathizers they lost their land to the state during the American Revolution.

Early Government - Yonkers the Town

After the Revolutionary War the Legislature divided New York State into sixteen counties, one of which is Westchester. Westchester was then divided into twenty-one towns, including Yonkers. This early town of Yonkers was much larger, running north to the town of Greenburgh, east to the middle of the Bronx River, south to the town of Westchester and Spuyten Duyvil Creek, and west to the Hudson River.

ECONOMY BASED ON THE RIVER

Milling

The town of Yonkers began as a small farming community in the 1700's. However, the prime location of the community on the waterfront and its early trading history launched it into a more business-based community. Sawmills and grist mills developed around the waterways and land development increased. A small town developed with shops and services including general stores, blacksmith shops, and taverns for the traveler. The waterfront remained key, serving as a connection for the sloops and ships that brought and traded goods and for the stagecoaches bringing travelers and carrying supplies inland.

Industrialization

The industrial history of the Yonkers waterfront is a long one. It was in the early 1800s that industry really took hold, and by 1845 the town had transformed from an agricultural to an industrial center. Land that had once been part of the Philipse estate near the confluence of the Nepperhan and Hudson Rivers was turned into mills and stores. Woodland forests were cleared and turned into veneer (wood) planking in a mill built on the foundations of an old grist mill, using the water power of the Nepperhan. Yonkers was home to Otis elevators, a center for carpet and hat manufacture, and the first sugar industry was established in 1862. In 1867, the first elevated mass transit system in the world was created in Yonkers. To fully understand the **extensive industrial history** of

Yonkers, look over the listing of its historic industries below.

Railroad – The development of the railroads marked a time of tremendous change for riverfront communities in the Hudson Valley. The first railroad station in Yonkers was



built in 1848 at the site of the present station. The railroad attracted more business, bringing prosperity for the town of Yonkers as land values in the center of the village and the population increased dramatically. However, the railroad also changed the profile of the waterfront all along the banks of the river. In numerous locations in the valley the railroad blocked free water exchange with tributaries and small bays that had previously been

regularly flushed as part of the Hudson River in tidal cycle.

In Yonkers, the Nepperhan had once been a river that was sailed by sloops entering from the Hudson. The river has a 26.5 square mile watershed, and runs 23 miles from its origin outside Chappaqua, New York, to where it enters the Hudson in Yonkers. Due to the damming the waters for wood and grist mills, hat manufacturing and other industry, as well as the impacts of the railroad, the river became polluted and stagnant. Even in these early years successful industry had negative impacts on the environment.

The Industrial History of Yonkers - Chronological List of Yonkers Industries

INDUSTRIES	ESTABLISHED
Fur Trading with the Indians	1610
Purchasing Land	1626
Saw Mill	previous to 1649
Grist Mill	
Glue Factory	previous to 1824
Hat Body Manufacturing	1828
Veneer Mill	~1845
Carpet Factory (Messrs. H. & M.)	~1846
Morocco Factory	1850–69
Rubber Manufactory	1852
Elevator Works	1854
Hat Manufacturing Machinery	1854
Illuminating Gas Manufactory	1854
The Silk Works	1855
Special Machinery	1857
Brewery	1858
Sugar Refinery (Howell's)	1862
Arms and Mowing Machines	1862–63
Carpet Factory (Alexander Smith)	1865
Soda Water Factory (D. H. Smith)	1866
Cigar Factory	1871
Gas, Light, Fuel and Power	1875–84
Wool Extract	1876

Plow Factory	1878
Telephone Exchange (Westchester Co.)	1880
Carpets (Fern Brook Co.)	1881
Medicine Factory	1881
Paper and Wooden Box Factory	1881
Sanitary Plumbing (Washburn & Moore)	1882
Sugar Machinery	1883
District Telegraph	1884
Gear Cutting, etc., (American Co.)	1885
India Rubber and Gutta Percha Insulation	1886
Electric Lights	1886
Steam Laundry	1888
Wire Picket Fence Factory	1891
National Sugar Refinery	1892
Bag Manufactory	1892
Carpet Factory (Yonkers Co.)	1892
Electric Motors and Dynamos (Otis Electric Co.)	1893
Hat Bands and Ribbons	1893
Crown Smyrna Rug Co.	1894
Nickel, Silver and Gold plating	1895
Elevator and Mill (Deyo)	1895
Postal Telegraph Cable	1895
Steam Heating (Barr, Reynolds & Co.)	1895
Boat Building (Fearon)	
American Laundry	
Carpet Factory (Skinner)	

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