

Maurice Hinchey and the Creation of the Hudson River Valley Greenway

—compiled by Edward Sanders

Note: Maurice Hinchey several years ago gave me several boxes containing copies of letters, articles, drafts of legislation, press releases, records of hearings and other documents which trace the creation of the Hudson River Greenway, and his involvement and leadership in its successful establishment.

It seems to me that Congressman Hinchey deserves the commendation of all New Yorkers, and indeed of all Americans, for his very important role in the Greenway's creation and destiny.

1.

The Beautiful Air that Henry Hudson Encountered

When Henry Hudson and the *Half Moon* sailed up the Big River in 1609 he noticed the beautiful, full-scented aroma emanating from the forests, fields and escarpments along the future Hudson River. Those who were on the *Half Moon* weren't the only ones. Sailors who landed in their sea-stained ships weary from wind-whipped voyages often marveled at the pleasing scents of the New World.

Columbus was aware of it. Sir Walter Raleigh's crew smelled wild flowers and the petals of shrubs even before the shoreline of the future Virginia came to view. Pilgrim John Winthrop later compared the air of New England to "the smell of a garden."

That was, of course, 400 years ago, and the River underwent a strong polluting beginning with the 19th century, and extending well into the 20th. Along its banks and along its tributaries lay thousands of chemical factories, smokestacks, refineries, abattoirs, and sewage plants, which polluted the air, land and water, sending odors that of course removed almost all traces of the beautiful air that blessed Hudson's ship in 1609.

2.

The Healing of the Hudson

There were always those who sought to protect and to clean up or reduce the pollution of the Hudson River and its glorious valley. However, it was when Pete Seeger and his associates began the Clearwater project in the 1960s that the Healing of the Hudson began.

The *Clearwater* Arrives at the Mouth of the Hudson

August 1, 1969

The condition of the Hudson River was not quite as bad as the Cuyahoga in Cleveland which actually caught fire back in '65, but the Hudson River by '69 was oil-slick, smelly with chem-waste, littered on its shores with the dreck of industrial waste, and used as a living drainfield by cities great and small.

The great song-writer & banjoist Pete Seeger decided, with his wife Toshi and many friends to begin the Healing of the Hudson. It took three years of reaching out to the public. (Seeger gave hundreds of benefits and raised about a hundred thousand dollars himself, but the campaign also included —to the chagrin of a few of Seeger's leftist pals— reaching out to wealthy sailboat enthusiasts and those with Hudson River estates) to raise almost \$200,000 to build a 106-foot sloop, the *Clearwater* at a shipyard in Maine. It had bunks for 15 and a tall main mast of Douglas fir.

At last the *Clearwater* made its maiden voyage from Maine packed with Seeger & the Hudson River Sloop Singers (raising \$27,000 for the Great Healing with 25 concerts along the way) till it passed through the Narrows & docked at the Statue of Liberty on August 1 where New York's impressive mayor, John Lindsay, came aboard and took a turn at the tiller. Then the *Clearwater* sailed up the Hudson to begin its great work of restoring what early Dutch maps called the Groote River, for the rest of the century and beyond

It was a heroic era, when men and women created a great good for the Nation.

3.

Enter Maurice Hinchey

After he was elected to the New York State Assembly in the historic year of Nixon's resignation— 1974— Maurice Hinchey quickly involved himself in helping the local economy, and in environmental protection.

In fact, he is legendary for helping economic development, and equally legendary for his historic work protecting and cleaning up the environment.

Hinchey's leadership over a number of years to create the Hudson River Valley Greenway was another "moment for America."

The Hudson River Greenway did not just spring without effort from the mind of the era, like the ancient goddess Athena springing from the forehead of Zeus. It required thousands of hours of work, and spirited leadership on the part of Maurice Hinchey and of course thousands of others, up and down the Hudson, who saw the beauty of this grand idea.

How do you create something as far-reaching and complicated as the Greenway? First of all, you go to the public. You set up meetings. You print brochures and flyers. You draft laws. You approach Town Boards, County Governments, established groups, and seek to

inform and get their ideas and support. Things at which Maurice Hinchey has always had the touch of inspiration.

4.

**Maurice Hinchey Begins to Work to Protect and
Enhance the Hudson River Valley
—a chronology—**

Hinchey began his work to start protecting and restoring the River and the lands and tributaries along it around 1979.

I'll present a dated chronology of some of Hinchey's many efforts on behalf of the Hudson River Valley, which resulted at last, after years and years, in the Hudson River Greenway.

One of the first efforts was to restore quality fishing in the River.

April 2, 1979

“An ACT to amend the environmental conservation law, in relation to establishing a fishery management program for certain portions of the Hudson River and making an appropriation therefor”

7117-A, bill in original Hinchey file given to E.S.

October 27, 1980

letter to Freeman editor from Hudson River Fishermen's Association

praising “the new fishery program.”

“The man behind the new Hudson River Fishery Management Program is 101st District Assemblyman Maurice Hinchey. In 1979 and 1980 Maurice Hinchey drafted and secured passage for legislation that established and put into action the fishery program”

—letter in original Hinchey file given to E.S.

9-17-86

Article in *Freeman* on the first study of the Hudson River valley in 15 years.

Hinchey is quoted: “It's the first time since the demise of the Hudson River Valley Commission... that any state entity... has focussed attention on the environmental and physical needs of the Hudson River Valley.”

He announced a public hearing for 9-23-86 at the Old Dutch Church, on Wall Street in Kingston.

With Hinchey at the press conference were John Mylod of the Sloop Clearwater, and Klara Sauer of Scenic Hudson.

—article by Sheila Isenberg, in original Hinchey file to E.S.

Fall of 1986

Hinchey held hearings on the topic

“The Future of the Hudson Valley Environment”

—Poughkeepsie Journal, 4-12-87 in original Hinchey file
given to ES

4-2-87

Headline in the Freeman “Hinchey calls for agency to unify Hudson Valley”

Article on Hinchey’s bill to create a Hudson River Valley Authority.

One of five bills just introduced by Hinchey in the Assembly, resulting from public hearings of the Assembly’s Committee on Environmental Conservation held in the fall of 1986.

Bills: Hudson Valley Authority

Land banking bill

giving municipalities right to levy up to 2 % tax on real estate sales
over \$100,000

Expansion of public access to waterways through allowing planning boards
to require access as a development condition

Creation of an Estuary Management Program,

Hudson River Estuarine district to protect fish and wildlife

Strengthening the Heritage Task Force, while adding Rensselaer and
Albany counties to the 8 Hudson Valley counties on the HTF

—article in files Hinchey originally gave to E.S.

April 1987

The New York State Hudson River Estuary Management Act

- creates Hudson River estuarine district
from the Troy locks to the Verrazano Narrows,
including tidal portions of tributaries

- establishes a Hudson River estuary management program for the district and associated shorelands by amending the Environmental Conservation Law
- \$200,000 appropriated to do it
- Hudson River estuary management advisory committee to include fishermen, conservation, research and recreation interests.

This committee to be appointed by the DEC Commissioner

- This committee by 3-1-88 shall report to the Legislature with “a strategy for development of a 15-year estuary management program” to safeguard and enhance the estuarine district: natural resources, habitats, fish, wildlife

In a press release a few weeks later Hinchey spoke proudly of the establishment of the Hudson River Estuarine District:

Hinchey: “The Hudson, with strong populations of American shad, blueback herring, striped bass, and other species has the potential to provide desperately needed habitat for fish, migratory waterfowl and other species and to see a rejuvenation of commercial and recreational fishing on the river.”

(And thus escape the sharp decline, say, of the Chesapeake Bay wildlife system)

—Hinchey news packet 7-10-87

April 10, 1987

an editorial in the *Poughkeepsie Journal* that commended Maurice Hinchey for creating “a package of visionary bills that may ensure a happy ending to the Hudson Valley Tale.”

— in packet MH gave ES

May 10, 1987

article in *Freeman*

11 members proposed as composition of Hudson River Valley Commission

— in packet MH gave ES

May 28, 1987

editorial in Poughkeepsie Journal
on the creation of a trail

\$5,000 grant from state
to help Shorewalkers, Inc

to study the creation of a 320 mile hiking trail
to follow the Hudson River from NYC
to its headwaters at Lake Tear in the Clouds

— in packet MH gave ES

June 6, 1987

Article in Kingston *Freeman*

“Hudson River Plan Faces Choppy Water”

Hinchey’s ten point agenda

needed support of “two key senators”
Rolison of Poughkeepsie
and Schermerhorn of Newburgh

— in packet MH gave ES

June 9, 1987

The Hudson River Authority bill passes
assembly committee 23-1

as Maurice Hinchey noted in a press release
“with overwhelming support by Ulster County constituents.”

70 % of whom in a recent poll
support it.

— in packet MH gave ES

June 12, 1987

Never Give Up

article in *Times Herald Record*

that the Hudson River Valley Authority
is “dead in the water— at least this year”

Hinchey not able to secure a Republican Senate co-sponsor

but he was not about to give up on protecting the Hudson.

— in packet MH gave ES

July 10, 1987

Hinchey release,

Assembly passage of Hudson River Estuarine District
legislation.

Jay Rolison R of Poughkeepsie
introduced similar legislation in the State Senate

— in packet MH gave ES

July 14, 1987

article in *Times Herald Record*:

Assembly and Senate both have approved
Estuary management proposal.

Will Cuomo sign it?

— in packet MH gave ES

August 28, 1987

Hinchey press release:

2 important bills:
the first reestablishing the Heritage Task Force

and the Hudson River Estuary Management Act

signed into law by the governor.

— in packet MH gave ES

Hinchey's Historic Campaign to Reform the Hudson Valley Solid Waste Business

Meanwhile, Assemblyman Hinchey had commenced his historic campaign to prevent criminal elements from overrunning the waste hauling, landfill and construction debris businesses in the Hudson River Valley.

In addition, as head of the NY State Legislature's Environmental Committee

August 28, 1987

Hinchey press release

“Key Solid Waste Bills Become Law”

Among the components of the legislation:

1. encourages state agencies and municipalities to purchase products made from recycled materials
2. expand types of waste stream separation and recycling equipment eligible for money from 1972 Environmental Quality Bond Act
3. encourage development of town and city solid waste plans
4. rules to regulate storage, transportation and disposal of infectious medical waste

— in packet MH gave ES

Keeping the Issues Alive

Maurice Hinchey renewed his efforts to protect and enhance the Hudson River Valley in the fall of 1987.

November 23, 1987

Hinchey wrote to Louis Heimbach, in Orange County, New York

who was, I think, chair of the county Legislature,

seeking his support for the balance of his Hudson River packet of legislation, particularly the Hudson River Authority bill.

He enclosed a copy of the HRV Authority bill, then asked the following questions of Mr. Heimbach:

“—Do you think the Authority is an effective approach to dealing with the regional concerns I have outlined above?

“—Do you have any suggestions for improving the Authority bill?

“—Are you aware of any other adequate and realistic alternative to management of the Valley?

“—Are you willing to meet with other Valley leaders, including legislators, to work on the Authority bill or structure another proposal?

—letter in packet Hinchey gave E.S.

December 9, 1987

Press release from HInchey

announcing he “will be re-doubling his efforts to gain increased support for the legislation designed to protect the Hudson River Valley.”

Six bills had been introduced; two have been passed.

Hinchey: “The Valley has grown considerably in the past decade and all indications predict that it will continue to grow at a phenomenal rate. We, the citizens of New York... must act in order to protect it for generations. The goal is not to put an end to growth, but rather to foster development in an orderly pattern that will discourage the continuation of the megapolis that has enveloped the east coast.

December 10, 1987

article in *Times Herald Record*

with the headline: “Legislator will call 2,000 about 9-county agency.”

A mailing is going out to around 2,000 public officials, groups, county executives, and others in

Dutchess, Ulster, Greene, Albany, Orange, Putnam, Columbia and Rensselaer counties.

He was looking for leverage from community support to get the bill passed

—article in packet Hinchey gave E.S.

December 18, 1987

letter from William Boyd, president of Hudson Valley Pattern for Progress.

Among other things it expressed the importance of the composition of the 11-member HVA Board. “It should contain representatives of an organization like the Hudson Valley Regional Council , groups like Mid-Hudson Pattern (which is strictly private-sector, mostly business, but heavily representative of educational and environmental interests), and regional environmental groups like Scenic Hudson.”

—letter in packet Hinchey gave E.S.

December, 1987

an article in the *Kingston Freeman*, titled “Hinchey renews legislative push to enact River Valley Authority”

Hinchey told the *Freeman* he was “buttressing his push for support by sending out a mailing to 2,000 local town board members, government officials and others involved in the management of Hudson Valley communities.”

—article in packet Hinchey gave E.S.

In an article in the *Freeman* in late December 1987

Hinchey mentioned he had not been able, in spite of a number of calls, to reach Senator Jay Rolison to get his response to the HRValley Authority proposal

—article in packet Hinchey gave E.S.

December 29, 1987

editorial in *Kingston Freeman*

“What does Jay say?”

The editorial pointed out that the State Senate (controlled by Republicans) had had “a recent shift toward environmental advocacy.”

It called for Mr. Rolison to speak out on a subject “of vital interest to the Hudson Valley.”

—article in packet Hinchey gave E.S.

January 13, 1988

Hinchey addressed the full Board of the group, Mid-Hudson Pattern for Progress.

January 15, 1988

Hinchey addressed the Ulster County Chamber of Commerce.

He had decided to take out the name “Authority” from his proposal.

“People didn’t like ‘authority.’ Hinchey told a reporter at the meeting. “Authorities are thought of a money-spending governments unto themselves— uncontrollable.”

Now he would propose a Hudson River Valley Partnership, which he said would be a voluntary way for counties and municipalities in the Valley to create a coordinated plan that would encourage sensitive and thought-out development in the region.

Hinchey was proposing a budge of \$1.5 million for the Partnership’s first year.

In another article around then, Hinchey said “It’s time for people in the entire region to begin thinking of themselves as a cohesive region.”

—articles in packet Hinchey gave E.S.

June 1, 1988

A Hinchey press release

“Hinchey Bill to Promote Greenway Study”

Hinchey introduced legislation which “would initiate a greenway study along the Hudson River from New York City to the Adirondacks.”

Hinchey’s bill, the release stated, “is the first step toward the actual creation of a greenway in which the Hudson River would be linked with various cultural and ecological areas such as historic sites, wetlands, wildlife habitats, urban cultural parks and scenic settings for the beneficial enjoyment of the public.”

Gov. Cuomo had endorsed the greenway concept in his State of the State talk.

Scenic Hudson had surveyed HV residents,
75% of whom supported the greenway idea.

Hinchey’s Bill sets up a 17 member advisory committee to make recommendations, plus create draft legislation.

Funds for the Greenway Study are to come from the 1987 Environmental Quality Bond Act.

Other bills in this packet:

1. HRV Partnership Act, to increase public access to coastal waters
2. An act for the preservation of open space, creating a public benefit corp.
3. and a bill setting up the “Hudson River Scenic Corridor District.”

October 5, 1988

Hinchey sent a letter to Gov Cuomo, recommending 7 individuals to the Greenway Council.

—letter in packet Hinchey gave E.S.

May 21, 1991

Editorial in the *Kingston Freeman*, “Funding the Greenway.”

The editorial noted that the Greenway idea “has reached the next plateau”

after three years of study, 17 public hearings in the 12-county region, plus “an ambitious well-done report.... detailing its voluntary environmental and planning goals.”

A small fee would be added to the state mortgage tax to finance “the Greenway Council and Conservancy.”

One cent for each \$100 borrowed.

The editorial basically supported this taxing method.

—article in packet Hinchey gave E.S.

June 18, 1991

press release from Hinchey

“Assembly Encon Committee Unanimously Approves Greenway Act
—Assemblyman Hinchey hails bi-partisan support for Bill”

Hinchey was pleased at the support for the bill from such as

Greater Hudson Valley Coordinating Council, the NY State Farm Bureau, Mid-Hudson Pattern for Progress, American Institute of Architects, New York-New Jersey Trail Conference, Neighborhood Open Space Coalition, the Town of North Greenbush, Palisades Interstate Park Commission, New York City Parks Council, Environmental Planning lobby, Nature Conservancy,

Sierra Club, Scenic Hudson, et al.

—release in packet Hinchey gave E.S.

December 31, 1991

Governor Cuomo signed the Greenway legislation

—article in packet Hinchey gave E.S.

In news articles published around the time of the passing of the Greenway law, the governor tended to get the credit for creating the Greenway, but it was Maurice Hinchey who provided the multi-year leadership and outreach, with of course hundreds of others, but it was he who kept the Greenway Dream alive, through thick and thin, large and small, yes and no, till the Dream came alive!

January 20, 1992

editorial in the Poughkeepsie *Journal*:

“Greenway: Home Rule and planning at its best”

urging towns to investigate “the possibility of becoming a model Greenway Community. Model communities will get the earliest grants.”

—article in packet Hinchey gave E.S.

Thus was established The Hudson River Valley Greenway, serving a vast swatch of river land, including some 293 municipalities in 13 counties. Westchester, Rockland, Putnam, Orange, Dutchess, Ulster, Greene (except Catskill Park portions), Columbia, Albany, Rensselaer and Saratoga. And since the signing, from New York all the way North, the Hudson has continued to heal, and its shores have thrived with walkways, shore trails, celebrations, riverfront open spaces, parkways, bike paths, and environmentally sensitive development.

**It wouldn't have happened without
Assemblyman, now Congressman Maurice Hinchey.**

He kept the dream of it alive, till it was accomplished.

He deserves the praise and gratitude of all.