

All Roads to the River



INTRODUCTION

Before overland routes were created, the Hudson River was the principal artery for transportation and commerce in our region.

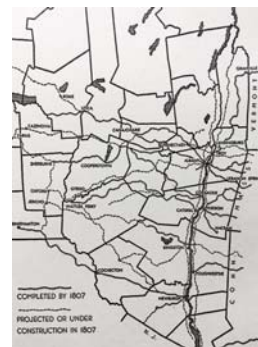
In 1785, Hudson became the first city in the United States to be chartered after the Declaration of Independence. With a large new wharf, two shipbuilding yards, and dozens of houses, warehouses, and stores under construction on the newly laid out streets, Hudson showed tremendous promise.



W.H. BARTLETT, VIEW OF HUDSON CITY AND THE CATSKILL MOUNTAINS, 1881.

“In 1788, I visited the new city of Hudson which exhibited a progress at that time almost without parallel in American history.”

- *Men and Times of the Revolution, the Memoirs of Elkanah Watson*



TURNPIKES OF EASTERN NEW YORK

By 1790, Hudson was the 24th largest city in the United States with a population of 2,500. Fifteen ships departed daily carrying exports of beef, pork, shad, herring, barrel staves, lumber, leather, and country produce. Most traded with other Hudson River ports, southern coastal ports, and the West Indies, although some were engaged in whaling and sealing.

With an eye on prosperity and economic growth, Hudson proprietors began an ambitious program of “internal improvements”, as programs to construct roads and canals were then known. Between 1799 and 1806, five turnpikes were created and stretched out of Hudson like spokes on a wheel.

The goal, however, was not to send Hudsonians into the hinterlands. It was to lure products to the Hudson market and beyond.

THE IDEA EXPANDS

The young United States was hobbled by horrendous roads which made it difficult, or even impossible, for farmers and manufacturers to move goods to market. American roads at the time were rough and unreliable, often little more than obstacle courses hacked out of the wilderness.

Enterprising entrepreneurs, like Hudson’s proprietors, outpaced the new federal government. In fact, more private money had already been invested in New York turnpikes than any other state.

“Unlike a federal lighthouse, a turnpike was a means of making money, and profit-making caused builders to lay out relatively direct routes.”

- *Common Landscape of America, 1580-1845*

In 1807, President Thomas Jefferson assigned his Secretary of the Treasury, Albert Gallatin, the task of defining how the government might support economic growth. The 1808 Gallatin Report on Roads, Canals, Harbors, and Rivers was visionary and astounding. Gallatin detailed a vast array of what today would be called infrastructure projects.

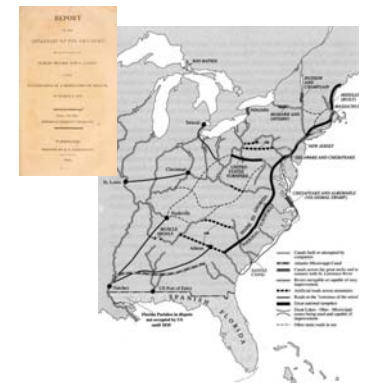
- A major turnpike from Maine to Georgia
- A series of canals along the Atlantic coastline
- Inland canals heading to Ohio
- A canal crossing New York State
- Improvements to make rivers more passable to major river navigation

“The roads grew bad, beyond all badness, the night dark, beyond all darkness, the guide frightened beyond all frightfulness.”

- *President John Adams*



GILBERT STUART, ALBERT GALLATIN, CA. 1803.



THE GALLATIN PLAN, 1808, AS RECONSTRUCTED IN D.W. MEINIG, THE SHAPING OF AMERICA, VOL. II (1993).

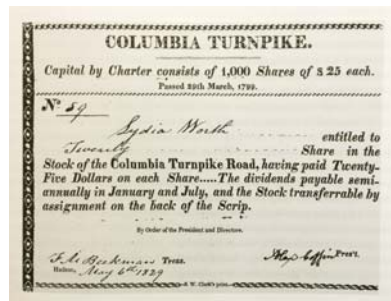
The 1799 Columbia Turnpike

“BE IT ENACTED”

With an act by the New York Assembly, the Columbia Turnpike Corporation was established on March 29, 1799. The Charter stated its purpose: “for improving the road from the city of Hudson to the line of Massachusetts, on the route to Hartford.” The Columbia Turnpike was the first turnpike in Columbia County and the fifth in New York State. Columbia County would eventually have more turnpike mileage than any other New York county.

The Charter also gave the right of the Corporation to use existing roads or to “enter into any land, where they may deem it proper to construct such a road and to contract with the owner for as much land as may be necessary for making the road, and for establishing gates and toll houses.”

The Charter listed subscription procedures. The Columbia Turnpike’s shares sold for \$25. It listed the down payment on shares, and the total number of shares to be issued (1,000).



Mile Marker

Even if many toll houses are lost to us, pieces of turnpike history are scattered along old toll roads. Though President Franklin Roosevelt had the markers encased in stone during the Great Depression to protect them, hundreds have disappeared as roads were widened and the markers' historical significance was forgotten.

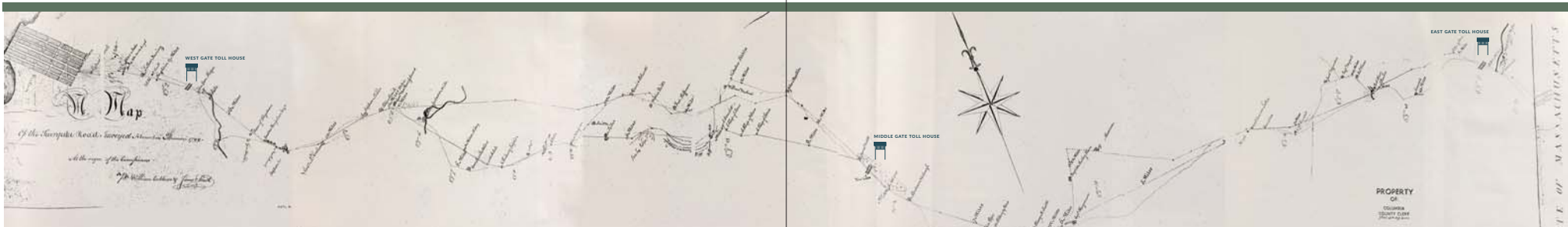
DESIGN & MAINTENANCE

The road was run from the City Hall in Hudson “in the most convenient and direct route to the Court House in Claverack... continuing in the present road as far as circumstances will permit.”

Of the 50-foot road width, 20 feet were bedded with wood, stone, gravel, and any other hard substance well compacted together and of “sufficient depth to secure a good and solid foundation to the same.”

While the original Charter was in effect, the Corporation was responsible for keeping the Turnpike in good condition. It wasn't long, however, before the Corporation modified its Charter, with State approval, and assigned local “eligible males a minimum of three days of roadwork under penalty of fine of one dollar.”

For the most part, the road we know as State Route 23 follows the original Columbia Turnpike. Before the Civil War, however, the turnpike took the easiest course and resulted in the development of mills, tanneries, blacksmith shops, taverns, and post offices in Hillsdale, Bain's Corners (Craryville), Hoffman's Gate (Martindale), and Smokey Hollow (Hollowville).



Historic Toll Houses



FROM WEST GATE TO EAST GATE

Among the provisions of the Columbia Turnpike Charter was the operation of three gates for the collection of “tolls and duties”. The gates could not be located less than ten miles from each other. The two surviving toll houses on Route 23 are irreplaceable cultural resources and symbols of America’s early transportation revolution.



WEST GATE

Built in 1799 out of fossiliferous limestone from an adjacent quarry, the remarkable West Gate served as the gateway into the City of Hudson for a century. From 1907 to 1969, it was used as office and storage space for the Knickerbocker Portland and Lone Star cement companies. It was added to the State and National Register of Historic Places in 2000 and, since 2003, has been leased to the Greenport Historical Society by the Town of Greenport.

MIDDLE GATE

Though the Middle Gate appears on 19th century maps of the region, it no longer stands. Located in Martindale, not far from what is now the Taconic Parkway, its precise location is unknown to us. Like most toll houses, the Middle Gate was a modest wooden structure smack dab along the road.



EAST GATE

The East Gate sits directly alongside what is now State Route 23. Though the front and sides are shingled, the rear appears to have the original, square-cut clapboards. After 108 years of operation, the East Gate toll house closed in 1907 and Columbia County bought the rights from the turnpike corporation. At least two generations of the Decker family occupied the house. In 1970, the house was acquired by Eldena Jenssen, who intended to preserve it. It was added to the State and National Registers of Historic Places in 2016 and acquired by Friends of East Gate in late 2016.



A TOLL KEEPER’S LIFE

The toll keeper and his family lived in the toll houses and operated the gate from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. The toll keeper was required to keep meticulous records. The Columbia Turnpike Corporation paid the keepers’ salaries – \$125 annually for operators of the East and Middle Gate and \$300 annually for the keeper of the busy West Gate.

No toll was demanded between the closing and opening hours. The fine for evading toll payment was \$10. If a toll collector was found guilty of causing unreasonable delay or demanding more toll, he was fined \$2 plus court fees.

ORAL HISTORY: RUTH SHULTIS TINKER

The following remarks were recorded in 1988 by Ruth Tinker, who recalled visiting the East Gate as a girl in the late 1890s.

“I remember as a little girl that my mother visited the woman keeping the toll gate – and she used to take me to call on this woman. Her husband was gone so the lady kept it. It was a sight to see for a little girl. The animals were driven all the way from the little towns in Massachusetts through the narrow gate. It was different flocks – sheep, hogs, cattle.”

The animals were clustered together in a huge drove, squeezed through the narrow gate and on into Hillsdale and beyond. They walked all the way to the Hudson River and be placed on boats and taken down to the city to be slaughtered for food – so they had to arrive in pretty good condition.”

COLUMBIA TURNPIKE	
EAST GATE. \$ Cts.	
Sunday	02
Monday	10
Tuesday	60
Wednesday	25
Thursday	25
Friday	25
Saturday	25
\$ 2.20	

COLUMBIA TURNPIKE	
EAST GATE. \$ Cts.	
Sunday	02
Monday	10
Tuesday	60
Wednesday	25
Thursday	25
Friday	25
Saturday	25
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Tuesday	60
Wednesday	25
Thursday	25
Friday	25
Saturday	25
\$ 2.20	

392
780
300
307
\$14.59



“It was a sight to see for a little girl.”

Looking Ahead



DOES PRESERVATION MATTER?



This exhibit coincides with the 50th anniversary of the National Historic Preservation Act. Many critics of preservation argue that preservationists are too focused on aesthetics, too inclined to emulate the “house museum approach” to conserving and curating precious objects and buildings, and too often used as a tool for enshrining the inequality between rich and poor.

According to Richard Moe, National Trust for Historic Preservation President from 1993 to 2009, *“Preservation isn’t just about saving historic buildings. It’s about saving historic neighborhood schools, revitalizing local economies, making historic homes affordable, and respecting our diverse heritage.”*

PRESERVATION REPRESENTS COMMITMENT TO REMEMBERING THE PAST AND PREPARING FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE.

ENVIRONMENTAL

On its most basic level, the practice of historic preservation is the practice of conserving resources. Not only do restoration and redevelopment consume less energy than demolition and new construction, but preservation also recovers the worth of past energy investment. Preservation is a remarkably effective method of sustainability.

ECONOMIC

In the past, historic preservation has been considered a luxury practice, but in recent years, research of the economic and public benefits have revealed that it is a powerful tool in sustaining local economy, creating jobs, increasing property values, and generating capital.

CULTURAL

Architecture is a direct and substantial representation of history and place. By preserving historic structures, we share the very spaces and environments in which the generations before us lived. Historic preservation is the visual and tangible conservation of cultural identity.

FRIENDS OF EAST GATE

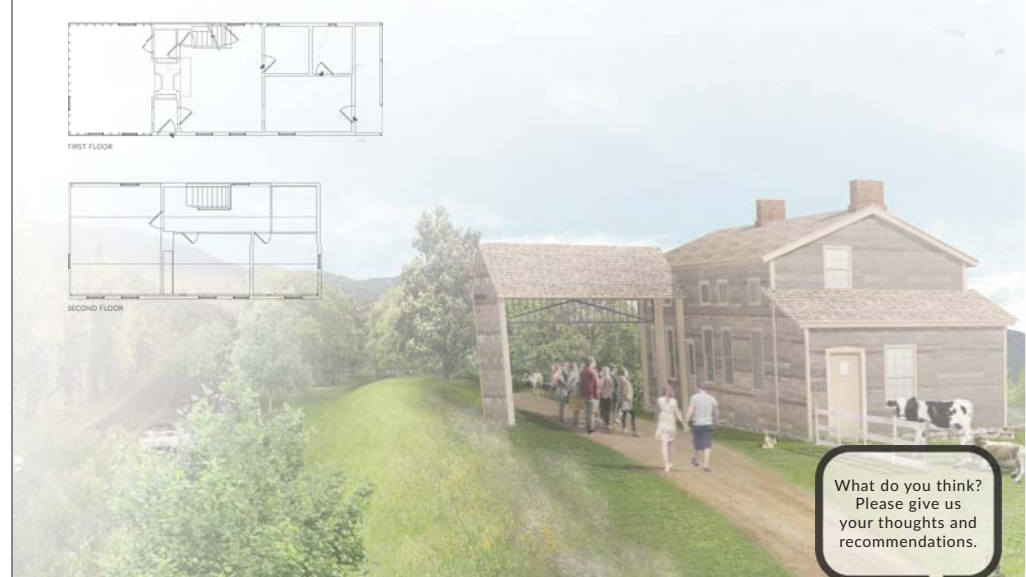
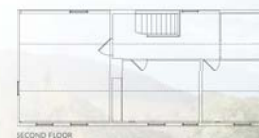
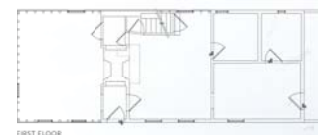
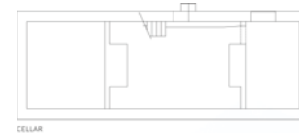
The Roeliff Jansen Historical Society (RJHS) is proud to support the Friends of East Gate (FoEG) in its mission to preserve and restore the old Toll House in Hillsdale.

FoEG was formed in 2016 to acquire the building and take the necessary steps to stabilize and weatherize the structure. Starting with this exhibit, the RJHS and FoEG are asking the community for input on how a preserved Toll House can best serve the community. Should the ultimate goal be to restore the East Gate Toll House and develop the site into something self-sustaining and productive?



“The past is with us. It is a fixation of man’s thinking and a precious record of his activity.”

- Herodotus, ca. 420 B.C.



What do you think?
Please give us
your thoughts and
recommendations.