



The Noon-Mark

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A noon-mark is a traditional method used to track the passage of time

This week's image is an unusual one which comes to us from the digital collections of the New York Public Library. I was clued into the existence of this image by a friend across the river who saw a bound collection of these prints up for auction on Ebay. The Greene County Historical Society didn't try to bid on the eBay listing, but I was able to find this print online to satisfy our curiosity!

This view of Middle Ground Flats, Athens, and Hudson comes to us from a work by Jacques Gerard Milbert first published in Paris in 1828 titled: "Itineraire Pittoresque du Fleuve Hudson et des Parties Latérales de l'Amérique du Nord."

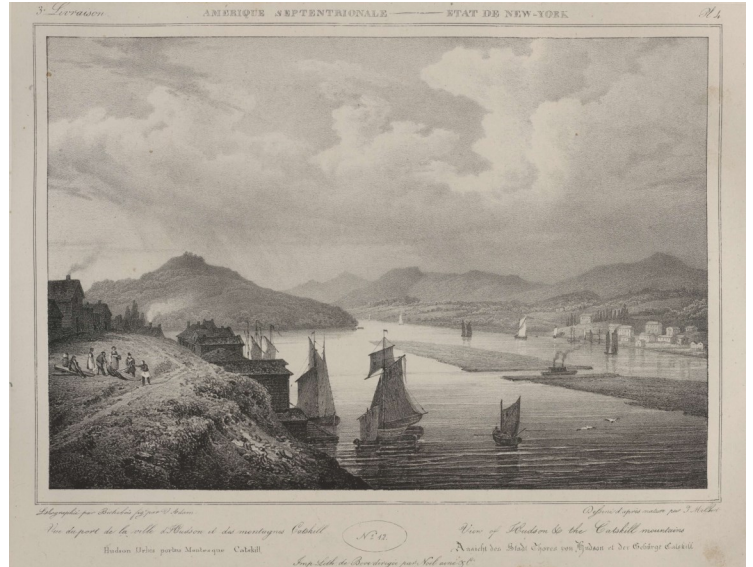
Within the three-volume set are 54 lithographed views of the Hudson River Valley. I found this particular view of note for one reason - it may be the earliest view available of the ferry cut or "canal" that was dug through Middle Ground Flats for the benefit of the Hudson-Athens Ferry in 1818. The canal was less than a decade old at the time the scene was composed, and shows a steam-powered ferry using the cut.

At Athens today one can still spy the remnants of this canal from the Riverfront Park by spotting where the thinnest region of tree growth is on the now heavily wooded flats.

The steam ferry was an interesting inclusion by the artist, because Athens wouldn't receive its first steam ferry until the 1850s. Perhaps the person composing the scene thought a steam ferry would convey a better sense of the progress and affluence that was on display in the Hudson Valley at that time.

What the artist would have actually seen was a "Team Boat" powered by several horses on treadmills which plied the same stretch of water.

The scene itself is composed from somewhere



"View of the Hudson and the Catskill Mountains" by Jacques Gerard Milbert from the Digital Collections of the New York Public Library.

near Promenade Hill in Hudson at the end of Warren Street, and I find the artist's inclusion of some Hudsonians having a leisurely picnic to be a very interesting feature of the scene.

These well-dressed folks were part of an affluent and coming merchant class that called Hudson and Athens home in the 1820s, and they are no doubt picnicking in a spot where they can look out on a scene they had financial interest in. Perhaps one or two of the picnickers may have owned some of the ships sailing the river, while others on this picnic profited from trade of the goods being carried in their holds.

It's really quite a lot to think about when one considers that the artist demonstrates to the viewer that even in their leisure time these Hudsonians are realizing a profit. The stirring scenery, bustling traffic, carefree populace, and the composition and variety of buildings and homes all create quite a statement about what the United States was in the 1820s. The more I consider the scene the more I admire its execution.

Questions and comments can be directed to Jon via archivist@gchistory.org.