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America's First River:

Bill Moyers On The Hudson

Part 1:

“Stories From the Hudson”

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TEASE

BILL MOYERS: The Hudson River. America's First River.

GENERAL DAVE PALMER: We're standing right smack at the strategic center of the American Revolution. General Washington called it the key to the continent.

MOYERS: For two hundred years writers and painters flocked to the Hudson Valley like migrating birds- captivated by the grandeur of the Mountains and the River's ever-changing moods and mists and light. Their paintings gave us the American landscape.

BARBARA NOVAK: Everywhere I looked. Every bit of research that I unearthed yelled, "God!" It was the most amazing thing!

MOYERS: It was where writers gave us America's first stories

MOYERS: And it was in the Hudson Valley we began the slow awakening to the perils we pose to nature.

BILL MCKIBBEN: What's really interesting, this place is that it's the story of redemption.. It's a story of Eden lost and then regained.

MOYERS: The Hudson Valley is where we found America The Beautiful. And almost lost it.

ACTOR READS WORDS OF VERPLANCK COLVIN: September Sixteenth, 1872. About four p.m. we stood on the shores of a little lake. By the mercurial barometer, has an altitude computed at 4,293 feet above the tide. A minute, unpretending tear of the clouds-- a lovely pool, shivering in the breezes of the mountains, and sending its limpid surplus through Feldspar brook to the Opalescent river, the well-spring of the Hudson!

MOYERS: They called it The Lordly Hudson! A river bountiful and beautiful and glorious in its vision of God's Creation. A New-World Paradise. A working river that carried a billion board feet of spruce and pine and maple down to market. They called it The Mighty Hudson! A highway that brought the world into America. Where money and power and commerce grew like weeds in the salty mix of river and sea. Where the steamboat taught America how to hurry. They called it America's River! The most fought-over stretch of real estate in the American Revolution. Saratoga, Fort Washington, West Point. They called it the Silver River! Misty and moody. Where poets and painters found God in the Wilderness and introduced culture to a nation of rubes and hicks. They called it the North River. A boulevard for America's richest people. Where Robber Barons built castles on a River more beautiful than the Rhine. Where ideas about nature and landscape shaped America's vision. A place of smoke, and iron, and muscle that sent church bells, and stoves, and horseshoes into the new American heartland.

MOYERS: "In the beginning, all the world was America." These words were written by British philosopher John Locke in 1681, in a Europe that was corrupt, crowded, cruel, and despoiled. America held the hope for a new world, free and open. A place for a fresh start. A new Garden of Eden.

ACTOR READS WORDS OF ROBERT JUET: September 25, 1609. We rode still, and went on land to walk on the west side of the river, and found good ground for corn, and other

garden herbs, with great store of goodly oaks, and walnut trees, and chestnut trees, yew trees, and trees of sweet wood in great abundance. The mountains look as if some metal or mineral were in them.

MOYERS: In 1609, Henry Hudson's first mate Robert Juet viewed the River with the sharp eye of a real estate appraiser. The report to the Dutch East India Company in Amsterdam was perhaps the first document to declare the Hudson River Valley a commercial enterprise, ripe for development. It was beginning of a struggle that would lead to America's slow and gradual awakening to our relationship with nature- It was here in the Hudson River Valley that we found America The Beautiful. And almost lost it.

MOYERS: Compared with other famous rivers- with the Missouri or the Mississippi, the Hudson is a small river. Just 315 miles long - 71st among America's rivers. The Hudson flows from the mountains in upper New York State, down to New York City where it disappears into the Atlantic Ocean. It is a river celebrated for its history, its commerce, but most of all, its beauty.

ACTOR READS WORDS OF FANNY KEMBLE: I looked down, and for a moment my breath seemed to stop, the pulsation of my heart to cease - I was filled with awe. The beauty and the wild sublimity of what I beheld seemed almost to crush my faculties - I felt dizzy as though my senses were drowning - I felt as though I had been carried into the immediate presence of God.

MOYERS: Fanny Kemble was a British actress and travel writer - one of thousands of Europeans who flocked here in the 1830's to taste the splendor of the New World. They lined up and paid their money for the American Grand Tour! The great attraction - the highlight - was a ride up the Hudson on the new steamboat!

KEMBLE: At half past six we set off to the quay. Just as we were nearing the bottom of Barclay St., the bell rang from the steamboat, to summon all loiterers on board; and forthwith we rushed, because in this country steam and paddles, like the wind and tide, wait for no man.

KEMBLE: The steamer goes at a rate of fifteen miles an hour! No one who has not seen it can conceive the crowd, the hurry, the confusion of tongues, like the sound of many waters... as to privacy at any time, or under any circumstances, 'tis a thing that enters not into the imagination of an American. They live all the days of their lives in a throng, take pleasure in droves, and travel by swarms.

ROGER PANETTA: Fanny Kemble's writings about this are very interesting. She not only described the crowds she talks about the strangers, people she didn't know. She would have met immigrants. She would have met people going up river for jobs. She would have met middle class people. This was not a community. Somehow traveling on that steamboat they were reconstituted as a community of travelers, a community of explorers in a way which was very different for her coming from England with a different cultural sensibility. What she would have seen and would have experienced is the fullness of American democracy.

KEMBLE: The reflections of the sun's rays on the water flickered on the cabin ceiling, and through the loop-hole windows we saw the bright foam round that paddles sparkling like frothed gold in the morning light.

DAVID LILBURNE: Steamboats... there were thousands of them that went up and down the river. What I like is the little guides they used to produce and sell to the tourists that would come up. Of course, it was an expensive outing so they used to produce nice little keepsakes for their river sojourns and quite often, at the back they would have a little fold-out map in color of the river and where they'd been and this particular one is from 1839.

KEMBLE: Past the stupendous reach of the Palisades, which stretching out in an endless promontory, seems to grow with the Mariner's onward progress.

MOYERS: The spectacular cliffs of the Palisades guard the river's edge in New Jersey, just across from New York City. 500 feet high, they are the blunt face of the Appalachians, an impregnable Rocky Wall that presides over the river for 42 miles.

PANETTA: As a young nation, somewhat uncertain about our place in the history of civilizations, you couldn't appeal to ancient ruins, you couldn't appeal to ancient texts. What you could appeal to was the work of natural history. And so as you pass the Palisades the argument would have been, look at the work of God. This rather spectacular landscape has been created as a sign that God in fact blessed us as a people and here are these manifestations of that. So the Palisades took on this wonderful quality of being a kind of marker of American history, of our natural history.

KEMBLE: At every moment the scene varied; at every moment new beauty and grandeur was revealed to us; at every moment the delicious lights and shadows fell with richer depth and brightness upon higher openings into the mountains, and fairer bends of the glorious river.

DAVID LILBURNE: When I came up the river and I started to see green everywhere, I couldn't see any houses because the foliage covered all the houses, I'm saying to myself, there's nobody living here. How can there be a bigger population than Australia living in this area? And then we got to river and I just went WOW. And you see the Tappan Zee and the wide expanses and you go, WOW. Then you drive further north and all of a sudden, you get to Peekskill and you look out and there are these Highlands, jutting up and the sun catches them and I tell you there just beautiful. They are the most, well, it started me collecting Hudson River material. And when I went back to England I started looking over there. And I've been doing it now for 25 years.

MOYERS: David Lilburne is a dealer in the books and maps that tell, in bits and pieces, the story of the river's history. He discovered a treasury of old Hudson River items in the bookshops of London where there had been a fascination with travel in America. David works with his wife Cathy in their shop by the river's edge in the tiny village of Garrison.

DAVID LILBURNE: This is authentic Milbert. Milbert sailed all the way up the Hudson to the source and would do views. Very popular. He published it in France, they bought the books in England. He did a series of lithographs to illustrate his views to mass produce them.

CATHY LILBURNE: And this is in the 1820s. So in the 1820s people on the continent of Europe and in England were fascinated with the Hudson River. It's a book purely on the Hudson River.

DAVID LILBURNE: And when they came they thought this was the Rhine of the New World, they thought this was fabulous. And so much so that of course they started building ruins on the river to make it look like the Rhine. But it took them many years to realize they had natural beauty that didn't need to put ruins on it to make it to European standards. And the tourists kept coming anyway, so they stopped doing ruins.

CATHY LILBURNE: The way the light changes around the river is really incredible. Because our bedroom faced onto the riverside and the afternoon light bouncing off the river on the wall up behind, it was just shimmering ripples all up and down your wall. That I miss from not living on the river anymore. And there's another light that's spectacular that you only get in the wintertime and it is in the early morning when the sun is coming from the east which is that way, and the whole of West Point is bathed in pale-pink light. It's incredible.

PALMER: It's a somber place but it's a touchstone to history. These are the people that fought our wars, built the country, ran West Point. And you can find laid out in this cemetery the history of America from the beginning, from the Revolutionary War beginnings right up to people who died in space. Ed White is buried just there and he died in a space accident. Class of 1952. Thayer of course himself is over here, Winfield Scott.

MOYERS: 200 years of history are alive here, even among the dead. If West Point were a religious school instead of a military academy, the religion would be history. An old soldier visits the West Point Cemetery with two cadets. Dave Palmer is from Texas, West Point Class of 56. Taught history here; served in Vietnam and in Germany and in the Pentagon. And for five years, was Superintendent of the Academy.

PALMER: Now here's the cadet monument. These are cadets who died over the years, you look at the dates 1835, 1828, 1840. They had to all learn how to fire artillery pieces. It was a part of the training in the early days. Fired it right on the plain and this hill was the target. And the first cadet to be killed, was killed an explosion of an artillery piece.

MOYERS: In a 19th Century stroke of Public Relations genius, the West Point commandant always welcomed the steamboats full of tourists. A hotel was built to make them comfortable. The cadets performed their famous drill for the press and important visitors- the great plain above the Hudson became a theater for the military arts. In the early days, the school was frequently under attack as elitist and unnecessary by a young nation suspicious of the idea a standing army. But the cadets were a big hit with the public who found a magic in the place. And still do. 2 million people a year visit West Point.

MOYERS: At West Point the River makes a deep cut through mountains named Break Neck and Storm King. Here the river is deep and dangerous. The old Dutch called it World's End. Wind and tide and current have conspired in this narrow channel to send sloops and tugs and tankers to the bottom 200 feet below. Rowing is made more difficult by an especially tricky tide. The river flows two ways. The Mohicans and the boatmen and the fisherman all knew this- that the Hudson here is not really a river, but still part of the Atlantic Ocean. An estuary. The tides of the sea pushing their way north for 150 miles, mixing saltwater with the freshwater flowing south. Flowing two ways. These conflicting currents are part of a long legacy of struggle on the River.

PALMER: Describing the Hudson River is almost impossible to do in a short time because it is so different all the way from Lake Tier of the Clouds to New York Harbor. And if you look at the geology the Hudson River really runs a hundred miles out into the Atlanta, the original Hudson. It's a river that can only be described physically by a painter or a really skilled photographer or maybe a poet. But I don't think I could describe it myself. However, let me describe it in terms of its impact on America. The Hudson River, at the time of the American Revolution and for some years before, that was the single artery that divided America and shaped America.

PALMER: The center of population for the 3 million people who lived here were centered in northern New Jersey. Half the population lived east of the Hudson, half lived west of the Hudson. The supplies of meat were grown in New England. The grain, the wheat, came from areas to the south. So economically it divided. Then, of course, the Hudson Valley itself was one of the richest granaries in the Colonies. So it began as a river of economy. When the war came along it became strategically very important.

PALMER: If you envision North America and the thirteen colonies along the eastern seaboard, they were all right on the ocean or along the rivers. There were a few trappers and settlers

beginning to move inland, but the American people lived near the water. There were no roads as we know them today, none of the major rivers were bridged, so the British thought that if they could control the Hudson River, they could put down the rebellion. The Americans agreed with them.

PALMER: The great tactical question was, how does a land power, in the United States there was no sea power, stop the world's preeminent sea power from going anywhere they wanted to on the water. And the answer was that you had to find a place where the River was constricted. Where a sailing ship would have trouble passing, and you could control it with a land force, and there is one.

PALMER: Now we're standing right smack at the center- the strategic center of the American Revolution. If you drew a map of the Revolution of the war, of the campaigns and stuck a pin at the strategic hub, you're standing on it. There was no way the British could crack through the river. So while they could control it from this point 50 miles to New York City, they couldn't control it beyond here. This area was the center, the key to the continent, the Gibraltar of America.

MOYERS: The great fortress was designed by engineers recruited from France and Poland; built by soldiers who often went without pay. The fort fell into disrepair and was rebuilt many times during the 8 long years of the war - a constant worry to General Washington. His men were almost always hungry and cold and discouraged. Sickness and desertion were the rule.

PALMER: Here's the actual letter written by a Major in October of 1783 from West Point to Henry Knox. And he's talking to him about the soldiers here at West Point and talking about them being, he says naked, their nakedness. The distressing nakedness of our troops. They in some cases couldn't leave their huts without...they had one set of clothes and if someone had to leave to go get wood he'd wear the clothes.

MOYERS: The Hudson Valley was a violent war zone right from the beginning- 92 battles from New York City to Saratoga- no other part of America saw so much fighting. In a 1924 classic film DW Griffith recreated the chaos. Many citizens were loyal to the king- others for the rebellion. Neighbors fighting neighbors. The British hired hundreds of Mohawk Indians, their tomahawks turned on civilians in a war of terror. 12 thousand farms were abandoned. More than half the population perished or fled the region, never to return. West Point sat in the middle and for eight years it was Washington's constant preoccupation.

PALMER: The one person that he had the most faith in to be his leading warrior, to be his command one of the wings of the army was Benedict Arnold.

PALMER: The battle that turned the tide in the war, the Battle of Saratoga, was won in the climactic moment by Arnold getting on horseback and rallying the troops and breaking the British lines. And at the moment he broke the British lines he was wounded. A musket ball broke a bone in his thigh. If that musket ball had entered his heart instead of his leg, and he had died at that moment he would be remembered today in the pantheon of our great heroes. There would be state named after him. There would be cities named after him. Everyone with the last name of Arnold would call their boys Benedict. And now no one would do that.

PALMER: The treason started when he was in Philadelphia. And he began to deal with the British commander And he asked them what they wanted. They said we want West Point. This was the place they wanted. They couldn't get it by attacking it so they were going to get it by treason. And he put a pretty high price on it.

MOYERS: Arnold not only agreed to sell the plans, he made an itemized inventory of all the men, the canon, the powder, the food. Detailed the weak spots. In his storekeeper's hand he wrote it all out- an invoice for which he would be paid 30 thousand pounds.

PANETTA: The whole history of Benedict Arnold, the selling of the plans of West Point to the British, the subsequent capture of Major Andre in Tarrytown by John Paulding and American soldiers. What this does is it makes the River the American Revolutionary River. So all of this is filled with History. It gives the River a place in a country desperately searching for a history.

MOYERS: America after the revolution suddenly a new nation - without a history, without culture and without a literature of its own. Until Washington Irving- a man who wrote stories about the old Dutch and English settlers in the Hudson Valley -tales that gave America its first history and its first great literature - simple stories. And funny. Set in a Hudson River Village called Sleepy Hollow.

ACTOR READS WORDS OF WASHINGTON IRVING: If ever I should wish for a retreat whither I might steal from the world and its distractions, and dream quietly away the remnant of a troubled life, I know of none more promising than this little valley.

WASHINGTON IRVING: The dominant spirit, however, that haunts this enchanted region, is the apparition of a figure on horseback, without a head. It is said by some to be the ghost of a Hessian trooper, whose head had been carried away by a cannon-ball, in some nameless battle during the Revolutionary War, and who is ever and anon seen by the country folk hurrying along in the gloom of night. Indeed, certain of the most authentic historians of those parts, allege that the body of the trooper having been buried in the churchyard, the ghost rides forth to the scene of battle in nightly quest of his head, and that the rushing speed with which he sometimes passes along the Hollow, like a midnight blast, is owing to his being belated, and in a hurry to get back to the churchyard before daybreak.

MOYERS: The Legend of Sleepy Hollow is a tale told over and over and over again, in millions of books and many, many plays and movies- translated into dozens of languages- everything from Catalan to Yiddish.

MOYERS: The people of the new democracy loved Irving's stories which frequently made fun of the pretenses of the old class system they had just thrown off; they liked to laugh at social climbers like Ichabod Crane. (This version of the story was made in 1922, starring cowboy actor Will Rogers as the hapless Ichabod).

WASHINGTON IRVING: Ichabod prided himself upon his dancing as much as upon his vocal powers. Not a limb, not a fiber about him was idle. To have seen his loosely hung frame in full motion and clattering about the room, you would have thought St. Vitas himself, that blessed patron of the dance, was figuring before you, in person. How could the flogger of urchins be otherwise than animated and joyous? The lady of his heart was his partner in the dance.

PANETTA: I think what Irving is trying to do here is to give America a kind of literature that's wedded to the place. His writing, his life and his home have a common impulse and that impulse is to give a new country, a young country, a literature and an experience that is American.

PANETTA: And what he does because he's traveled, because he's the ambassador to Spain, is he brings all of those European sensibilities here and if we look at Sunnyside which is his creation, he buys the farm in 1835 and transforms it into this collection of gables and angles and roofs. He described it as an old cocked hat. What he is really trying to do is to create an

American architecture. And so the building becomes a kind of masterpiece. Very much a work of fiction.

PANETTA: And then he rearranges the landscape. He wants you to have a romantic experience so the house should not sit on flat land but rather it should be approached in a kind of mysterious way almost in a peek a boo turns and angles and corners. So that he's got this rearranged landscape and then next to him his backyard is really the Hudson River.

MOYERS: Washington Irving was America's premier man of letters, the first of a group of artists and writers- among them James Fenimore Cooper, William Cullen Bryant, Walt Whitman and Herman Melville, who celebrated the Hudson Valley as a vast cathedral of untamed nature, inspiring patriotism...the habitat of American ideals.

WASHINGTON IRVING: Whoever has made a voyage up the Hudson must remember the Kaatskill Mountains. They are a dismembered branch of the great Appalachian family, and are seen away to the west of the river, swelling up a noble height, and lording it over the surrounding country. Every change of season, every change of weather, indeed every hour of the day, produces some change in the magical hues and shapes of these mountains, and they are regarded by all good wives, far and wide, as perfect barometers. When the weather is fair and settled, they are clothed in blue and purple, and print their bold outlines on the clear evening sky; but sometimes, when the rest of the landscape is cloudless, they will gather a hood of gray vapors about their summits, which, in the last rays of the setting sun, will glow and light up like a crown of glory.

MOYERS: These words by Washington Irving, are the opening lines of "The Story of Rip Van Winkle." They reflected a view of the Catskills enjoyed by travelers on the Hudson River steamboats. Irving's story added glamour and triggered a growing curiosity about the place. Local businessmen had struggled for years to find a way to make money in the Catskills. In 1823, they found one: Scenery. They had plenty of scenery. They could sell scenery. And capitalize on the widespread curiosity generated by Rip Van Winkle's mysterious trip into these mountains. They decided to build a giant hotel high on a two thousand foot cliff overlooking the river to entice steamboat travelers to come and enjoy the view. To come into the mountains and be closer to God.

ACTOR READS NEWSPAPER ADVERTISEMENT: The Catskill Mountain House! 8 miles west of the Hudson River and only first class house on the mountains. The great elevation is absolutely free from malaria and affords relief to sufferers from chills, and fever, asthma, hay fever, loss of appetite, and general debility. The temperature is 15-20 degrees lesser than that in New York City.

ACTOR READS WORDS OF ENGLISH TRAVEL WRITER HARRIET MARTINEAU: What is this Mountain House? This Pine Orchard House? Many will ask. For the name will not be found in most books of American travels. I saw something on the rocky platform above our heads like an illuminated fairy palace perched among the clouds in opera scenery; a large building whose numerous window lights marked out its figure from amid the thunder clouds which over shadowed it. I went out upon the platform in front of the house, having been warned not to go too near the edge, so as to fall an unmeasured depth into the forest below. I sat upon the edge as a security against stepping over unawares. I shall never forget, if I live to be a hundred, how the world lay at my feet.

HARRIET MARTINEAU: A dense fog, exactly level with my eyes, as it appeared, roofed in the whole plain of the earth; a dusky firmament in which the stars had hidden themselves for the day. The firmament rose and melted, or parted off into the likeness of snowy sky

mountains and left the cool Sabbath to brood lightly over the land. Long before sunset I was at my window again, watching the gradual lengthening of the shadows and purpling of the landscape. It was more beautiful than the sunrise of this morning, and gave me a vivid idea of the process of creation, from the moment when all was without form and void, to that when light was commanded, and there was light.

MOYERS: Tourists by the thousands came to the Catskills in the 1800's and among them, the writers and artists who glorified the place -presented these mountains to the world as the American Paradise- a Garden of Eden. The effect was profound and long-lasting. Lovers of art and nature are still drawn to the site of the old Mountain House. For them it's a pilgrimage.

HOWARD GODEL: This is magnificent. It's amazing how close this is to New York City and how few people actually know about this place.

ALEX BOYLE: Do you think Church was ever hired by the Catskill Mountain house to paint up here or did they just come up here for the heck of it?

GODEL: I think all the artists made a pilgrimage up here because it was one of the premiere resorts in the whole area.

MOYERS: Howard Godel and Alex Boyle are from New York City. Dealers in the art of the American landscape - following footsteps that Hudson River School painters left here 175 years ago in their search for the perfect location to view the American Eden.

GODEL: Pretty spectacular, huh?

ALEX BOYLE: Now you can see why they all came here. So many different things they could do.

GODEL: I know, it's gorgeous.

ALEX BOYLE: They could explore fifty different compositions on a single sketching trip.

GODEL: I know it's fabulous. And the water is so clear too.

ALEX BOYLE: I bet what they'd do on sight were pencil drawings. Just because it was such a schlep to get up here.

MOYERS: This is a trail that attracted romantics and artists at a time when America was changing its attitude toward nature- no longer a wild dangerous wilderness to be conquered and tamed, but a friendly place where one could find beauty and feel God's presence. They came here, it was said, for the contemplation of eternal things.

ALEX BOYLE: This is it. It really does exist.

GODEL: Oh my goodness.

MOYERS: The Kaaterskill was believed by many to be the same rugged terrain explored by Rip Van Winkle and his dog Wolf. And later by Natty Bumppo, hero of James Fenimore Cooper's Leather stocking tales.

GODEL: Man, is this beautiful of what?

ACTOR READS WORDS OF PAINTER THOMAS COLE: In the Kaaterskill we have a stream, diminutive indeed, but throwing itself headlong over a fearful precipice into a deep gorge of densely wooded mountains—and possessing a singular feature in the vast arch cave that extends beneath and behind the cataract.

GODEL: Watch out. It's slippery. That's a nice view.

THOMAS COLE: The waterfall may be called the voice of the landscape..., for unlike the rocks and the woods which utter sounds as passive instruments played on by the elements, the waterfall strikes its own chords.

MOYERS: This description was written by a young, unknown painter named Thomas Cole who joined the crowds of tourist climbing the trail to Kaaterskill Falls. He was down on his luck and thought he would try his hand at landscape painting. He made a few sketches and took the steamboat back to New York.

ALEX BOYLE: Here's a Cole that I think is extraordinarily significant. It's one of the earliest ones ever done. The sun is coming out of the East so it's sunrise, so it's dawn of the new day and it's almost analogous to America's place in the civilized world and the way we look at America. The Hudson as being an integral part of it, a sign of the hand of man.

MOYERS: The story is that on Cole's first trip up river he was so inspired that he came back with three paintings just like that.

ALEX BOYLE: And he made front page news of "The Daily Mirror", September October 1825. Front page news.

MOYERS: How come?

ALEX BOYLE: Because Colonel John Trumbull was the leading American painter of the day, he painted "The Battle of Bunker Hill", he painted the Saratoga surrender image. He just looked at it, he was about 70 years old, and said: "God, I have struggled all my life and this kid has topped me immediately." So Trumbull bought one, William Dunlap who was a major critic of the time, and Asher Durand who was a young, successful engraver bought it. And they all just said: "This guy's the next great thing."

GODEL: It was like a singer in the 20th Century. You just got discovered.

ALEX BOYLE: A star was born. In 1825.

GODEL: The artists were not only celebrities but they were into the commerce. They had a famous building called the 10th St. Studio and they used to have big studios with pictures there so that the collectors could come around and see what the different artists were doing.

ALEX BOYLE: Ten thousand people would look at the latest Bierstadt or Church.

GODEL: They brought opera glasses to see the work and the critics raved about them. And the thing about Church and Bierstadt was in the days before TV and radio and popular magazines, these artists were celebrities. And they were on the front page of newspapers and their travels to different parts of the world were reported upon. They took a special and important place in society.

MOYERS: I didn't realize that.

ALEX BOYLE: They made us realize that we weren't just backwoods country bumpkins anymore. That Americans were capable of doing something.

MOYERS: So this art really fed the American imagination, our identity...

ALEX BOYLE: And its ego.

MOYERS: The pictures were deceptively simple. Lovely scenes of natural settings painted with skill and fascination with the complex details of nature. These were scenes that Americans recognized as their own, unlike any in the world. American Art. And they suggested a noble and fruitful land, unspoiled by commerce, a world Americans would prefer to remember. In this time before movies, TV and photography it was America getting to look at itself- at its very best. Dozens of talented artists followed Cole's lead and the copies of the pictures began appearing on parlor walls throughout the young country. The International art world took notice and voted its approval. American landscape art flourished for fifty years until going out of fashion toward the end of the Century. The term "Hudson River School" was applied by a caustic critic in the New York Tribune who found the landscape pictures sentimental and naïve. Paintings which sold for enormous sums of money plummeted in value and

disappeared into attics and cellars - some were sold for the price of their frames. But the old landscapes made a comeback - now they can be worth millions - to find a good one is to find gold.

ALEX BOYLE: So, what did you get?

GODEL: An early, early painting by Thomas Doughty on panel.

ALEX BOYLE: What's it of?

GODEL: You won't believe it. It's a fisherman by a stream. It's gorgeous. I don't want to get it wet. It's just gorgeous. Early, 1820's

ALEX BOYLE: It's survived 180 years. Where do you think he got it from? Just had it in the bins?

GODEL: I think it was recent because he said it needs a cleaning which is his signal for, I didn't try to clean it yet. But I don't get to see too many pristine 1820's pictures on panel.

ALEX BOYLE: That's true.

MOYERS: Howard Godel and Alex Boyle frequently break one of the cardinal rules of their trade: Keep a distance from the art; do not fall in love with the pictures. Remain cool and aloof. At this they fail.

ALEX BOYLE: That is exquisite.

GODEL: Isn't it beautiful?

ALEX BOYLE: It could almost be the Catskills.

GODEL: I think it's the Catskills. But it could be the Adirondacks. It's on panel so the condition is phenomenal. That's great.

ALEX BOYLE: All right, we've got to frame it. Obviously too ornate a frame but it gives you an idea that it's going to get a lot better once it has a frame.

GODEL: Even though people love landscapes that have figures in it, some of the greatest American landscapes have no houses and no people. Like Church's "Twilight in the Wilderness" or "Niagara Falls." These are about grandeur, they are about optimism, they're about expanding westward.

ALEX BOYLE: Do you know where Church got his "Twilight in the Wilderness Sky" from? He had a studio on 10th Street in Manhattan. And one night looking out across over Hoboken, he saw the most amazing sunset, but he realized people wouldn't buy it at the time if he set it over New York City. Which actually today would make it extraordinary. Instead he did it over some anonymous lake in either Vermont or the Adirondacks. But it was a New York sunset.

GODEL: Did he say this?

ALEX BOYLE: Oh yeah. People knew that at the time.

GODEL: This is one of my favorite Coles. It's Catskill Creek and it's got a magnificent sky, the autumn landscape, the serene water, the sort of glowing sunset on the horizon. To quote Cole in his own words when describing this picture. He says: "The Hudson for natural magnificence is unsurpassed. The lofty Catskills stand afar. The green hills gently rising from the flood, recede like steps by which we may ascend to a great temple, whose pillars are those everlasting hills and whose dome is the boundless vault of heaven." Cole says it all in his religious reverence for the land is evident in so many of his pictures.

MOYERS: Well is that part of the answer to this question? There was a James River, and a Charles River, and a Delaware River that played important roles in the early life of this nation. But there is no James River School of Art, there's no Delaware River School of Art, there's no Charles River School of Art. Why?

ALEX BOYLE: The Erie Canal. That made the Hudson the Queen City of the American continent. New Orleans was 2,000 miles farther away and this was the highway west because they could sail right...all the European immigrant who went out to places like Chicago, and Buffalo, and Minnesota. Once they got on the Erie Canal they were on the Great Lakes water system.

MOYERS: What did that have to do with Cole?

ALEX BOYLE: It implied, it ignited a shipping scale that you can't even dream of today. The resulting economic boom, post Erie canal construction, created New York City as the Empire City and created New York as the Empire State. Because it all ran through here.

GODEL: Philadelphia and Boston were big cities but this was the city of trade, and this was the city of commerce, and this was where the great finance capital of America was, Wall Street. So all the wealth, the greatest wealth of America was right in New York. So this is where the artists would have found patrons and would have found collectors.

MOYERS: Barbara Novak and Ella Foshay are writers and teachers and historians of American Art - assembling a show of Cole's art and the work of his colleague Asher Durand - at the New-York Historical Society. Since 1804 the Society has been the storehouse of the city's memory. The great landscape paintings have waited a hundred years in the basement to be rediscovered.

BARBARA NOVAK: I said to myself, why am I interested in these paintings because they are not Renaissance paintings, I had been raised on European art. And why am I fascinated? And then I realized I was fascinated because it taught me about the culture.

NOVAK: So we could, we could certainly put, you know, this one probably would work well with that.

NOVAK: I started out not knowing what I was going to find. And everywhere I looked, every bit of research material that I unearthed yelled, "God!" It was the most amazing thing. And I finally, after a few years said, well, God is it. This was what they all care about. You see it was pre-Darwin. And this is so important. There was still this belief in providential destiny. Geology was very important to them. Lyell had come in with principles of geology in 1830 and he had demonstrated to laymen, really, because it was very popular, that the world wasn't just 6,000 years old. And so then time had a different sense for them. And then they began to realize, hey, we live in this really providentially endowed landscape that God has given us and look how old it is and we are still very close to creation because so much of it hasn't been touched, it's the way He made it at the beginning. So they all had that feeling.

ELLA FOSHAY: What they didn't show you in the scenes on the Hudson was the commerce on the Hudson, the steamboats, the hordes of tourists going up to Niagara Falls. You see all these people in the Romans entering the classical city in the Course of the Empire but you don't find anybody near Catskill Creek. They looked really for the small out-of-the-way tributaries of the river where there wouldn't be the intrusion of civilization and of commerce.

MOYERS: So, they were out-of-date already, in one sense, weren't they?

FOSHAY: They were giving a very particular view, an ideal view.

MOYERS: They were what?

NOVAK: They're an idyllic garden, if you will. Or the wilderness, both different kinds of paradise which is what they were looking for.

ACTOR READS WORDS OF THOMAS COLE: I cannot but express my sorrow that the beauty of such landscapes are quickly passing away---the ravages of the axe are daily

increasing –the most noble scenes are made desolate, and oftentimes with a wantonness and barbarism scarcely credible in a civilized nation.

NOVAK: Cole was an early environmentalist.

MOYERS: How so?

NOVAK: Every time there was a tree that was cut down he cried. They were caught in this kind of paradox. They wanted to civilize the continent and they wanted progress and at the same time they wanted to preserve the wilderness and to preserve untouched landscape.

MOYERS: So is this what you meant when you wrote they were caught between nature and culture?

NOVAK: Oh yeah. It's always been the American dilemma.

NOVAK: I think it's something that this country has always felt, that this nation has always felt, that the landscape is sacred. That this land, that we were given this land to revere it, and to treasure it. And you despoil it at your risk.

MOYERS: New York was THE Hudson River town- a city with a great harbor that would become the capitol of everything. Always a cocky and spirited place, New York had an energy fueled by money, ambition and sense of opportunity-. And every young man who was anybody, or wanted to be somebody, was sure to be wearing a beaver hat.

MOYERS: There was a growing enthusiasm for machines in the early 19th Century- for things that were new- for science and technology- a belief that inventions were the way to wealth, prosperity and a better life for everyone. One fervent believer was Robert Livingston a man of immense wealth and landholdings who had invested in a new machine called the steamboat.

MOYERS: Demonstrating the model is a gifted young inventor from Pennsylvania named Robert Fulton. Fulton was an artist who, like his colleague Samuel Morse, had turned to science and invention to make a living. His steamboat would be built in Manhattan with an engine made in England.

MOYERS: Fulton cannot be said to be the inventor of the steamboat. What he did was take the best features of many earlier efforts and combine them. And he had a genius for calculating the costs of the fares and the profits to be harvested from them.

MOYERS: August 17, 1807. The Maiden voyage. Heard in the crowd were jokes about Fulton's folly. A boat powered by a teakettle. And rumors that Fulton had hired a whale to tow the boat to Albany.

MOYERS: After a long morning of delays and frustration the young inventor gave a signal (for perhaps the very first time in history): Full steam ahead. The boat moved a short distance and then stopped.

ACTOR READS WORDS OF ROBERT FULTON: I was well aware that in my case there were many reasons to doubt my success. My friends were in groups on the deck. There was anxiety mixed with fear among them. They were silent, sad and weary. I read in their looks nothing but disaster, and almost repented of my efforts.

MOYERS: Suddenly Fulton's folly was Fulton's triumph. The doubters in the crowd became friends and admirers. And investors. Fulton would marry Livingston's cousin and become rich. There would be streets and towns and counties named Fulton. One writer proclaimed of the Hudson that day: "This river has been the theater of the most remarkable series of experiments in locomotion on water ever recorded by man."

MOYERS: The sight of the thing terrorized boatmen who up till now had lived by the rules of tide, wind, and current.

MOYERS: The North River Steamboat clanked and stunk of wood smoke and cinders. It's paddles splashed water on the passengers. One witness described it as a backwoods sawmill mounted on a scow and set on fire.

ROGER PANETTA: When the Steamboat came to the Hudson the machine really entered the garden.

MOYERS: What do you mean?

PANETTA: We tend to use this in our understanding of American history and thinking of the United States as a garden.

MOYERS: As the garden of Eden?

PANETTA: The garden of Eden. Untouched by modern technology. Untransformed. The steamboat really breaks the back of the that idea because it promises to conquer nature, that it promises to deliver you to a certain place on time, regardless of the tides and the currents, and that really is a manifestation of our ability to get control of nature.

MOYERS: That's a very American...even as you talk, I'm looking over your shoulder...the ferry schedule, leave Kingston Rhinecliff run at nine a.m. to 9:20, 9:40 to ten. That wasn't the case with the sloops, was it?

PANETTA: No. You could spend a week getting to Albany. And if we think of the early 19th Century as the beginning of capitalism, and we know the close connection between capitalism and time, and the emerging market economy, this delivering of people and goods on time becomes very central to the development of capitalism. And in fact, the whole history of New York City is so wrapped up in that, that it cannot be separated really from the history of the Hudson.

MOYERS: So, the steamboat enabled us to fix nature, tame nature...to put nature on a schedule, our schedule?

PANETTA: Yes. And that served the needs of this new emerging economy.

MOYERS: It was at this place on the river that Henry Hudson gave up his search for a shorter and faster route to the Pacific Spice Islands. Disappointed, he turned back. He could not foresee that this place would become an economic bonanza, an Eldorado, fueled by a phenomenon we know as the Industrial Revolution. Factories would bloom in the garden. Those are not trees along the river, but smokestacks.

MOYERS: It was a place where water tumbled from the hillsides near the Hudson and where the Mohawk headed west. Enterprising Dutchmen and New England Yankees would build a brand new city here, and call it Troy, a city made by water, water for transportation and water for power.

MOYERS: One of the marvels described by travelers was the world's biggest waterwheel built by Henry Burden to drive his new machines for making horseshoes and the nails to go with them. A million horseshoes a week, one every second.

ACTOR READS AD: Messieurs H. Burden and Sons desire to inform all concerned in the selling and use of horse and mule shoes that they have now a new and greatly improved machine and successful operation. It takes a bar of iron as it comes from the rolls of the mill and converts it into shoes of any desired pattern at the rate of one a second. Let anyone shoe a horse on one side with these shoes and on the other side with the best handmade shoes of the same wearing surface and thickness and he can judge for himself which he would prefer.

ACTOR READS AD: In the stove manufacture, as in every other branch of industrial productiveness to which the energies of her citizens are directed, Troy stands preminent.

There is not another city in the Empire State where so many stoves are annually manufactured as in Troy. This may seem a broad assertion but can be supported by statistics!

ACTOR READS STORY: The enterprise of Trojans is worthy of all imitation. We believe that without exception they are the most enterprising people in the United States. There is among them a noble spirit of rivalry untinged by jealousy of each other.

ANOTHER ACTOR READS ANOTHER STORY: Few towns in the country have advanced with greater rapidity. Prosperity is written upon almost every habitation and in every mart of business.

ANOTHER ACTOR READS ANOTHER STORY: Situated near the head of navigation and at the outlet of the great canals, her situation offers uncommon facilities for the purposes either of commerce or manufactures.

MAYOR MARK PATTISON: Troy was at one point the eleventh largest city in the country and the fourth wealthiest per capita. The Erie Canal opened up west of the country and Troy was the center of that, the crossroads. That's why the Burdens came, that's why the textiles and steel mills came and immigrants came up from New York to make their way.

JIM O'CONNELL: I mentioned today, I was talking to, I asked my father how did we wind up in Troy, you know, I mean, cause most of my cousins are in New York and Boston and when he was in Ellis Island his remark was, well, look up to Troy, there's plenty of work. That was all. Like you said, the mills were there, Burden Mill, that's how Burden Mill would get its raft of labor force. You know, the Irish were full of laborers, you know what I mean? And they were all laborers and you made a living here, you know and it was a living.

MAYOR PATTISON: Well, there's such history, the iron workers, it's really the birthplace of the labor movement in this country.

JIM O'CONNELL: Yes, I said that.

MAYOR PATTISON: Kate Mullaney was a nineteen-year-old woman in the laundry shops and she started the first woman-run, woman-only labor union in the country.

JIM O'CONNELL: Yes, an eighteen year old girl forming a union when you wouldn't dare, you know, open your mouth up, you'd be out of a job.

ACTOR READS WORDS OF TROY COLLAR WORKER: I considered myself unusually lucky to have been born and brought up in Troy, New York where the shirt and collar factories offered employment to women. The starching was about all there was for a girl of sixteen, so a starcher I became. And a starcher I am. In our factory all talking is strictly forbidden. You run the risk of instant dismissal. Even at the noon hour you can only whisper. I've seen girls discharged for talking and I know of a case where a girl lost her job for sneezing. The foreman said she did it on purpose. It seems queer, doesn't it, when we are told that our employer's business would go smash if we were allowed to talk to the girl across the table.

MOYERS: A million collars a day for a new class of people who worked in offices and had to have collars that were white, and clean, white-collar workers. In the days of coal smoke and soot, shirt collars quickly became soiled and during the summer months proper businessmen changed their shirts several times a day. An enterprising woman in Troy became tired of washing so many of her husband's shirts so she invented a collar that could be changed and washed separately from the shirt. It was the way smart men of business dressed for seventy-five years.

VOICE OF COLLAR WORKER: The starchers work very quickly of course, they have to both for the sake of the collars and for the sake of their wages. If a starcher drops one collar on the floor, she is docked five dozen collars. In other words for every collar dropped on the floor the girl must starch five dozen collars for nothing. These factories supply nearly ninety percent of all the collars and cuffs sold in the United States.

MOYERS: The glory of the industrial revolution was in the making of iron and steel. Troy was the first capitol of that Great American Romance.

ACTOR READS STORY: The sight of an iron manufactory has always struck me as grand and stupendous.

ACTOR READS STORY: Fire pouring out of so many crimson caverns and belching out flame and smoke as do the craters of Vesuvius and Aetna. Swarthy sons of Vulcan in attendance be smeared with smoke and dripping with perspiration. It all seemed like a picture of the lower regions. Peopled with devils as if each man was surrounded by the elements of destruction.

JIM O'CONNELL: Down here, with all that dust from the mills- this is a very dirty end of town. Okay, as you would know. It was very dirty and dusty because you had the blast furnaces, you had the coke plant that manufactured coke. Then the stench from the coke plant would kill you. You know what I mean? But we were born here and you didn't realize it. And when I came home in 1954 and a fella came with me that lived in New York, he wanted to come up here. And we were hitchhiking, I was in the Navy getting out, and we come over the Finch Bridge and he says, "Oh my God, what's that stink?" And I says, "what stink?" See I was born here and I was here all my life the smell, we accepted it. He never smelt that. It was like a bad egg smell, like rotten eggs. They were manufacturing coke and the soot from all the mills, Republic Steel, so you put your clothes out, you could always tell some kid from south Troy because his clothes had soot all over them. When you were out on a date with somebody out of your area, which is going out of south Troy, now they knew who you were. You know what I mean? So you had this thing about you, right. So there was two different elements in here, you know what I mean?

RICHARD SELTZER: How to explain to the riverless child what a river is. Imagine green and silver in motion you tell him. Now add a dog's tongue slowly lapping. But what is the real youth of a river, he interrupts. For those who live on its banks the river is time itself, approaching, surging past, vanishing, never to be called back. You can tell your secrets to a river, it just carries them away. The elderly can sit by its waters and weep for the passing of a better day.

MOYERS: Richard Seltzer was born in Troy in 1928 to parents whose car (an old Hudson) broke down there on the way from Montreal to New York. As a boy he became fascinated with the mythical Troy described by Homer. He would find, in his own Troy, echoes of the glories and dramas of that ancient Greek city.

SELTZER: Three times a week, at seven o'clock in the evening, someone sitting in the balcony of 42 or 46 Second Street might look out and see the door to 45 open and a skinny, oddly dressed boy of perhaps seven, rather small for his age, emerge and descend the six steps of the stoop, holding onto the wrought-iron railing His destination is the Troy Public Library, two blocks away. An hour later he will return, his arms piled with books. Later in his bed he will read far into the night.

SELTZER: It was another six months before I had the thrill of being admitted to the adult stacks of the library and there I found The Odyssey and the Iliad, which changed my life forever.

Obsessed with Homer's heroes and steeped in the novels of Raphael Sabatini, my own life seemed to me to have nothing of the heroic. Puny, ill clothed so as to resemble an ungainly parcel, distracted, I dreamt of building a raft and sailing it all the way down the Hudson to New York harbor. It would be in all the newspapers. I would be acclaimed the Admiral of New York.

MOYERS: The Admiral of New York went off to Yale and became a surgeon, professor of surgery and, later, gave it all up to become a writer. One of his passions is his hometown of Troy, city on the Hudson. He shares the memory of his boyhood with his old friend architecture professor Patrick Quinn.

RICHARD SELTZER AND PATRICK QUINN: Sweetest little fellow, everybody knows, I don't know what to call him but he is mighty like a rose. (laughter) I remember it from early childhood because it was...

SELTZER: Every once in a while when my eccentricities threaten to get out of hand, I send myself back to Troy where they are not so apt to be noticed among the general oddity. In my Troy, each street had its own personality. That block of Second Street, where I lived for the first seven years of my life, was a scene out of an Edith Wharton novel. In my Troy, if nowhere else, there was enough love to go around. If the hereafter is anything like my Troy, I may be readier for it than I thought.

MOYERS: Troy boasts one of the nation's first and certainly most beautiful crematoriums, built in 1889 by a wealthy family to honor their departed son, an early advocate of cremation. It's located in a cemetery high above the city.

QUINN: Your father brought you up here first, didn't he? As far as I remember.

SELTZER: My father first brought me here to see the autumn leaves. There's nothing like a cemetery for autumn leaves.

QUINN: Especially this one.

SELTZER: Yes. So here we came and I saw with astonishment this structure at the age of about eight or nine. You can imagine. I asked him then what became of the smoke, and he said, well it just drifts off out of the tower and I said, and we breathe it in do we. He said, well, it's just soot. So I said it falls on our vegetables and our fruit, right? Well, he couldn't deny it. And I said, and we eat it don't we? We are eating the dead.

QUINN: Oh dear.

SELTZER: He said, I think it's time to go home. Forget about the autumn leaves.

QUINN: The cabbage and the lettuce and all of that.

SELTZER: If we are what we eat, why then, I am Troy.

QUINN: Now you swam in that river.

SELTZER: I swam in that river.

QUINN: People don't swim in it today because of the pollution.

SELTZER: We swam there every single day.

QUINN: Just at the foot of State Street.

SELTZER: Yes, it was full of edible fish then, after all the Mohegan Tribe for generations survived on the bounty of this river. This was their main source of food. But I once was standing on the Green Island Bridge and looking down into the water and I saw a great dark shape in the river moving along the bottom. And I said to myself, Richard, that is a sturgeon and I have told that to many people, none of whom, including you, have believed me.

QUINN: I didn't say I disbelieved you.

SELTZER: But I shall go to my reward saying that there was at least one sturgeon in the Hudson River at Troy.

QUINN: When this confluence here, was filled with factories and foundries and all sorts of great things, there was money coming in and they were living high on the hog and there were buildings like this- no other city in the world could afford a crematorium like this at that time. They had money here. They had six opera houses, they had all sorts of things. I have to tell you a story about, a recent story about Troy Ironworks and you are not going to believe this.

SELTZER: Is this like my sturgeon story? Ahah.

QUINN: I went to Germany to look at a museum by an American architect Frank Gehry. I went to hate the museum because I disliked his work intensely. I like to go to hate things.

SELTZER: Oh, I see, it's a pleasure.

QUINN: It's a great pleasure. I stayed to like the museum. It is a very rationally organized thing and it's a museum of chairs. The Vitra Museum. Fabulous chairs, wonderful chairs, all the best chairs in the world, but the only historic chairs were the Tone chairs from Austria which began the ice cream parlor chairs of the world, and one cast iron chair, magnificent thing, with velvet seats and armrests, like the old chairs they used to use in Lucius Beebe's railroad cars and it said, from the Warren Foundry in Troy, New York.

SELTZER: Oh, be still your heart.

QUINN: The only one from any other city in the world that was earlier than the nineteen hundreds.

SELTZER: You should have died right then. You'll never be so ready to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

QUINN: I tried to explain in my appalling German to the curator, what a great thing this was he had there. I come from this city. This wonderful city. Now, that chair is today at an exhibition of those chairs in the Cooper-Hewitt Museum in New York.

SELTZER: I certainly hope you sat in it.

QUINN: They wouldn't let me. That was the temptation but they wouldn't let me. Anyway it's a beautiful chair. Absolutely magnificent. Made just down here in the Warren Foundry.

SELTZER: It's more a throne than a chair.

QUINN: It was actually.

SELTZER: Every few years the spring rains and the melt from the Adirondacks were too much for the riverbed to hold and the Hudson River would lash its tail and come brawling through the lower streets, seeping into foyers, saturating carpets, dislodging benches and hat racks and purging the town, like one of Mother's enemas from which the devil himself deserved to rise purified. Each time it happened the children of Troy exulted. Who could resist the ruination? Everything gone topsy-turvy.

SELTZER: No one thought of moving to higher ground. That was not our way. So we stayed and watched the river, licking bricks out of the walls, stones out of the street. One time through a scrim of rain I saw the figure of Christ walking on the water, just as he had done at Galilee. I went to get Billy. Look, I cried, pointing to the apparition. It's Jesus. Billy peered through the curtain of rain, that, he announced, in a voice dripping with disgust, is no such thing. It's old man Sheridan, standing on the roof of his Chevrolet. Don't tell anyone I pleaded. I might and I might not, he offered. By which I guessed he would not.

SELTZER: The day after the flood the sun came out. It was precisely then that Troy turned beautiful. Gone was all the sooty grayness. The whole town and everything in it took on a

kind of mineral splendor. It shimmered as though having risen from the pavement on a hot day. The men and women all wore halos. I mentioned it to mother. Not only that said Billy, he saw Jesus on King Street. I thought so, said mother, we'll have your eyes tested and two weeks later with my new eyeglasses pinching the bridge of my nose, Troy was once again Troy. And the dazzling uncertainty had vanished. It was a reverse of a glory, a happy conjunction of myopia and astigmatism had given the city that mirage-y look. Oh, the cruelty of 20/20 vision that sees too much that exists on the surface and nothing of the real real that lies just beneath. As soon as I was out of the house I took off the hated glasses and presto, Troy was once again Ilium. Bare-eyed and squinting, I decided, was the only way to look at Troy.

MOYERS: Across the Hudson from Troy were the factories and mills of Albany. Albany, New York was America's very first city, 1686. Albany was chosen as the state capital in 1797 and became the power base for the state, sent two presidents named Roosevelt to Washington and one named Van Buren. Key to the power of these places was the location – at the very spot the Hudson joined the Erie Canal.

MOYERS: When Thomas Edison set out to electrify America, he chose nearby Schenectady on the Erie Canal to build huge factories that would be called General Electric. The magic of the industrial revolution was electricity. The wizard who worked that magic was Thomas Edison, a man who took the darkness out of the night.

MOYERS: The bounty of the industrial revolution would bring prosperity, moving people off the farm and into town, revolutionizing the rhythms of everyday life. Faster, better, busier. And now, there would be leisure time, time to look back and dream of the old American landscape. In the midst of the rush to the American dream would linger an urge to rediscover nature an old yearning for wild places.

MOYERS: Adirondack Park, the world's largest state park, bigger than all of Massachusetts, bigger than Yosemite and Yellowstone and the Grand Canyon combined. That a wilderness so vast and wild can exist in the same state with the New York Yankees, Wall Street and Brooklyn, is an idea most people find difficult to grasp.

MOYERS: Deep inside this great north woods, the Hudson River begins its journey to the sea in mists that blanket the high peaks of the Adirondack Mountains. Droplets from the mists gather on the slopes of Mount Marcy and collect for a while in a little pond called Lake Tear of the Clouds. They wait here at 4,000 ft. above sea level, until there are enough to spill over into Feldspar Brook, then the race to the sea begins. A journey of 315 miles.

MOYERS: Gravity makes the little river hurry, as if it were impatient to get down to New York in time to make the show. Feldspar Brook becomes the Opalescent, joined by water from the Calamity River, the Indian River, the Goodnow River, the Cedar River, the Boreas. Water from Kunjamuck Mountain, Vanderwhacker Mountain, Ruby Mountain and Blue Mountain and mountains named Calamity, Kettle, Skylight, Bad Luck, Garnet and Gore.

MOYERS: At Newcomb, the river leaves the woods and makes its first public appearance, calling itself The Hudson. For the first 50 miles the little river moves quietly through protected forest land that is a miracle of ecological restoration. A monument to founders of the conservation movement who struggled here a hundred years ago to save the wilderness from destruction.

MOYERS: I've tried to imagine what must have gone through Verplank Colvin's mind as he threaded his way to the source of the Hudson. I'd have liked to have been a part of that, wouldn't you?

BILL MCKIBBEN: Yeah, absolutely.

MOYERS: Have you ever been up there?

MCKIBBEN: Oh yeah. It was funny for me because before I knew the Adirondacks I'd known New York City. And I'd known the Hudson pretty well in New York City.

MOYERS: Bill McKibben wrote a book entitled "The End Of Nature"- one that reawakened America to the perils that threaten the planet. After living on the banks of the Hudson in Manhattan, he moved to the North Woods for a different life and a better understanding of our relationship with nature.

MCKIBBEN: People from the city will come and visit and pretty often they will look up at you and say, now is that the same Hudson that flows by the upper west side. And I say, yeah, the same one. It's hard for them to imagine this thin ribbon of white, dancing white foam coming down off the shoulder of Mount Marcy, and seventeen miles of continuous whitewater. One of the great river trips in the whole east.

MCKIBBEN: What's really interesting about this place is that it's a story of redemption. It's a story of Eden lost and then, at least partially, regained.

ACTOR READS WORDS OF SENECA RAY STODDARD: East, West, North, South, limitless, numberless, a confused mass of peaks and ridges. Pen cannot convey the idea of its sublimity. The pencil fails to even suggest the blended strength and delicacy of the scene. The rude laugh is hushed, the boisterous shout dies out on reverential lips, the body shrinks down, feeling its own littleness, the soul expands, and rising above the earth, claims kinship with its Creator, questioning not his existence.

MOYERS: These words are from a young painter named Seneca Ray Stoddard who worked as an artist for a company in Troy that built railway cars. Elegant ones with beautiful scenes of mountains and streams painted on them. Work of this kind was a school and a day job for many Hudson River Painters. Seneca Ray Stoddard did very well with the railroad cars but longed to be near the scenes he was painting. He gave up his job in Troy and became a photographer. He clambered over rocks and through the brush, high into the uncharted Adirondack Mountains, trekked the trails and canoed the rivers and lakes with his enormous view camera and its fragile glass plates, finding the beauty in that special light called luminance, said to be coming direct from God's heaven.

MOYERS: Stoddard's photographs are little-known American classics, typical of the pioneering photographers of the late-19th Century who gave America a new way of looking at itself. Unlike the romantic paintings of the Hudson River School, Stoddard's landscapes included people - Human Nature.

MOYERS: Stoddard earned his living as a writer and publisher of Adirondack Guide Books to entice New Yorkers and Bostonians to make the arduous journey into the mountains. His elegant drawings graced the pages of the little books. His writing was whimsical.

ACTOR READS WORDS OF SENECA RAY STODDARD: I will point out places where it is considered eminently proper to go into ecstasies over scenery, etc. I'm not going to write a history, however, because the wear and tear on the ordinary brain must be immense and moreover, the country is full of them.

MOYERS: Well, that's Stoddard, the photographer. And that's his boat, "The Wanderer." He wanders all over the lake, taking views. And money.

MOYERS: Seneca Ray Stoddard focused his camera on the tourists, who came to the wilderness to find peace and quiet, to escape the dirt, heat and strife and diseases that spoiled summertime in the city. They came to the wilderness to hear the evening cry of the loon and

smell the pines and enjoy the cool, clear lakes. They learned to come in August and not before because the mosquitoes and black flies would feast on them. They came for the cool shade because ladies didn't want to risk their complexions at the seaside. And to the wilderness they brought their habits from home. They didn't sleep on pine boughs or a lean-to in the woods, but preferred the new hotels with their fancy dining rooms and elegant service.

MOYERS: Hotels in the Adirondacks grew like weeds on the lake shores and competed to be the biggest and best. Prospect House was the first hotel in the world that had an electric light in every room. Thomas Edison, himself, came to supervise the installation.

MOYERS: They would dress for dinner and dress for tea, expect to hear music from a fine orchestra while they enjoyed the sunset. The time in the woods where the Hudson was born was a beloved and cherished time, especially for generations of children who came to think of their summers here as the best part of their lives. For them, nature was a thing of curiosity and fun. And the waters of the Adirondack lakes spawned a life-long reverence for the mysteries and the majesty of the natural world.

MOYERS: But no matter how far they ventured into the deep woods, they couldn't escape a growing dilemma. How much of nature do we consume to sustain the good life? And how much do we leave alone? -a dilemma brought home to the ladies of the Horicon Sketch club when the quiet of the morning was shattered by the sound of the axe.

MCKIBBEN: Once people found a place they found it with a vengeance. There was an insatiable need for wood in this country. Wood played the same part in the American economy in the late 19th Century that fossil-fuel does today. I mean, it was the cheap way to do everything. You heated your home, you needed many, many cords of wood because your home didn't have any insulation and you had a couple of wood stoves to heat it and so you were burning cord upon cord. Railroads began. You needed millions and millions of acres of woodland just every year to provide the ties for the railroads. They were cutting wood here on an enormous scale. It was a wood-based economy and this was one of the Saudi Arabias of wood.

MOYERS: For a hundred years, the Hudson River way to carried the timber out of the woods and down to Glens Falls where the sawmills waited. The river drive took 60 days and covered a hundred miles - an elaborate symphony of water traffic in which logs are released at just the right moment from fifty different dams upstream.

HUSSON: According to where the drive was, they would open the dams up at a certain time at night so that all of the water from these three or four or five dams all got to where the end of the river drive was the next morning. So you got that flood and picked it up and took your wood down.

HUSSON: There are several places, well, there's Everett's Rift,- there's a guy named Everett that drowned there on a river drive. And Jenkins Rift, there was a guy named Jenkins that drowned there. It was kind of miserable work. You got wet and you stayed wet.

JOHN FISH: You worked 30 days in a row. You slept with your clothes on, Didn't matter of you were soaking wet or not. You left them on and they'd dry right on you. Twenty or twenty-one years old you didn't care if you got wet or you got dry, as long as you got supper... you had something to eat.

JOHN FISH: So the first time I went down there and three of us were going along with our pike poles and there were some logs up there and we couldn't reach them. So the old boss come by, Jack Donohue, and...

MABEL FISH: He was really old then.

JOHN FISH: Yeah. And he said, what's your problem? I said, we can't reach that wood up there. He said, jump right in, it won't burn you. So we had the choice of either jumping in and pushing it or go home. Well nobody is going to go home we all jumped in and took a bath.

MILDA BURNS: My father was the head of the river from 1885 to 1940.

MOYERS: Head of the River? What does that mean?

BURNS: That means that he was in charge of all the logs and all the river men that went down the river. He delivered all the logs from the logging camps to the big boom in Glens Falls. From 1885 to 1940.

MOYERS: What did you see when you went down?

BURNS: A river massed with logs, just like this.

MOYERS: Oh yeah, look at them. There's no way to even count them, there are so many of them.

BURNS: Well, you know how they counted them.

MOYERS: How?

BURNS: You see those two things down there, those iron hammers.

MOYERS: Those?

BURNS: Each company that went down the river and there were eleven companies that went down the river, had a mark like this. Now this is Finch & Pryne mark. This is a starburst and this was put on the end of the 13 x 5 sawlog,

MOYERS: So they would brand the tree just as we brand cattle in Texas

BURNS: Correct except you don't have to heat it.

MOYERS: How many board feet came down in those 29 years? How many? Tell me.

BURNS: I can't tell you. I have to read it because I can't remember. 1 billion...

MOYERS: Billion?

BURNS: 1 billion, 238 million, 250 thousand board feet. Now this is accurate- this is nothing that Milda made up. This is a genuine accuracy.

MOYERS: In 1609, it is said, the forest in America was so thick a squirrel could run through treetops from the Atlantic Coast to the Mississippi River without touching the ground.

JOHN COLLINS: The first thing was the King's ships the great white pines. They were the first to go and they went in the very late 1700's and early 1800's. The great white pines went for masts on the wooden sailing ships. Then the lumbermen, they came and cut the softwood because they could float them down the river and then the railroad began to come in and these are the Mick & Mack. Just lumber railroads for the sole purpose of getting the trees out and then picked up and put down somewhere else so that the hardwoods could go.

COLLINS: Everywhere that people went and along all the rivers, it was cut. So the tourists that were beginning to come in to the Adirondacks would come one year and have this wonderful ride on the Racquet River and come the next year and find just desolation.

ACTOR READS WORDS OF SENECA RAY STODDARD: The lumberman engaged in an honorable and profitable business is not to be blamed for making what he can of it. It is a pure matter of business with him. With dynamite and giant powder he clears away obstructions in mountain gorges and wilderness streams and with dams, floods and drains valleys until retiring waters leave behind them decay and death. The duff, opened to the sun becomes as tinder. Then comes the fire.

COLLINS: The railroads had wood burning locomotives, burning wood especially soft wood and you get sparks going right up the chimney. 1903 and 1908 were like this year. Dry years. Not drought necessarily, just very dry years. The locomotives would spew those sparks and the woods would go up in flames.

MCKIBBEN: 600,000 acres burned in the Adirondacks in an area where without human intervention there's almost never a sizeable forest fire. They call it the asbestos forest.

MOYERS: With the mosses and undergrowth burned away the woods were no longer able to hold and regulate the flow of water heading for the Hudson. The result was a growing number of floods in the spring and drought in the fall. The Hudson was silting up, it's navigation threatened. The Erie Canal and the Hudson were the lifeblood of New York's economic supremacy. The men who ran things became interested. And alarmed.

COLLINS: Albany and Troy were under water in the spring and without water in the late summer and fall. It didn't take a wizard to say hey, what's happening here, what's going on? And there were some people who could see right away what was going on.

ACTOR READS WORDS OF SENECA RAY STODDARD: There exists today hardly one important lake or stream in the Adirondacks that has not been tampered with, damned in the name of soulless utility. The beautiful valley, once fair and sweet, as Eden, has become a foul, malaria-breeding pit.

MCKIBBEN: Our first images of what ecological unraveling looked like where those series of engravings and early photographs that came out of the Adirondacks. It hadn't occurred to people before in quite the same way that you could wreck a place. It was some of the first questioning of the idea that progress was always what we wanted. There was a beginning sense that there were other values that people might want to protect and think about.

COLLINS: The word was getting out, primarily through the tourists, but again that was the noise. The power was the industrialist saying, where's our water? You know, we either have too much or not enough. We don't have that constant flow that we have to have.

MOYERS: On May 15, 1885, the New York legislature passed a law that for people who love the outdoors, has become the Magna Charta.

ACTOR READS WORDS OF NEWSPAPERMAN: The lands now and hereafter constituting the forest preserve, shall be forever kept as wild forest lands. They shall not be sold. Nor shall they be leased or taken by any person or corporation, public or private.

MOYERS: You spend much time out here alone?

MCKIBBEN: Spend a lot of time out here alone. In the summer- there'll be other people out here. Generally in the middle of the day anyway - some fisherman, whatever. In the fall and the winter and the spring it's a pretty lonely and beautiful place.

MOYERS: This is the only wilderness, I understand, that is constitutionally protected forever.

MCKIBBEN: That's right, there's probably a higher level of protection for the wilderness in New York State than any place on earth. It's in the constitution, and you need to have two sessions of the legislature in a vote of the people of New York in order to make any change in the forest preserve. It is the great example of ecosystem restoration anyplace on the planet.

MCKIBBEN: There are a lot of places where we've saved beautiful pristine wilderness, you know. Alaska, Yosemite, but there's no other place on this kind of scale where we've come in and used a place and then backed off and watched what happened. It's been an enormous experiment and the experiment worked remarkably well. These woods are healthy again.

MCKIBBEN: Because of its history, because of its sort of second chance wilderness, it offers the world an enormous amount of hope that you might be able to, that even places where we've made big mistakes and done real damage we might yet be able to climb out of some of those holes.

MOYERS: What's the key to climbing out? What's the ladder?

MCKIBBEN: The first step here at least was just to back off. Just for human beings to take a step back and say we're going to leave some room for something else too.

ACTOR READING THE WORDS OF FREDERICK CHURCH: About an hour, this side of Albany, is the center of the world and I own it.

MOYERS: These words by landscape painter, Frederic Church, who chose this spot to build his Persian Palace, selecting the most perfect view of the Hudson he could find, then placing the house in the setting as a three-dimensional work of art. He arranged the grounds to fit his vision of what a landscape should be. Olana is queen of the Hudson Valley castles, of which there are hundreds. From the time of the Dutch Patroons, the east bank of the Hudson has been a 100 mile long boulevard for America's rich. Old money and new deposited all along the banks of the river.

MOYERS: It was the view that brought them to the river- a view that advertised their love for nature. A view that money could buy.

FRED OSBORN: They built big houses that displayed their wealth and it was probably 150 years ago that one of the first big economic booms of the country were there were fabulously wealthy people suddenly, from the railroads, and they built big houses and they, many of them, several of them, chose this Hudson Highlands area to do that.

MOYERS: Who were these people? Morgan and Fish and Osborn and Harriman? We think of them as Robber Barons. That's what we were taught growing up. They were Robber Barons. Were they?

FRED OSBORN: They were tough business people.

FRANCES DUNWELL: They were known for fairly cutthroat practices on Wall Street and had a fairly different home life than their business life.

MOYERS: How So?

DUNWELL: Well, home life was jolly and fun and very family oriented and go out and pick flowers and milk the cows and Wall Street was competition all the way and it was what they called the "bare-knuckle era" it was bare knuckles.

FRED OSBORN: They would create panic on Wall Street so that their competitors would lose value in their stock and then they would snap up their stock and take over their whole company. They did things that created the SEC, The Securities Exchange Commission, in order to stop the behavior that these people invented.

MOYERS: But when they got up here they were gentlemen farmers. They went to church, they went J.P. Morgan's home and prayed and sang hymns.

DUNWELL: And many of them were friends and relatives. In fact the Osborns and the Morgans had the Sturgess sisters.

FRED OSBORN: The Sturgess' were the spouses. So there was endless social activity. That seemed to be the whole reason for being here was to see each other and visit each other. And quite closed, I would say. They saw each other and there was kind of a restrictive exposure to the rest of the world.

MOYERS: That's how they would marry each other.

FRED OSBORN: The intermarriage came from that too. But there was a real class consciousness, I'm sure too. That there were women who were appropriate for the young sons to court and there were others that you didn't want them associating with. I know my grandfather was very strong about instructions to his children and his grandchildren about...

ANNE OSBORN: Do you want to get the book, dear, it's in the library.

FRED OSBORN: It's kind of outrageous, but the title of his essay is, "To my grandsons on considering marriage," and he gives us instructions on how to test the women that we might potentially wish to marriage, to marry, and of course, we are all sailors and athletes and adventurers and you've got to take the potential spouse into some very uncomfortable situations and see how she behaves. For instance, camping or sailing, or swimming in terribly cold water or some kind of almost survival exercise like a canoe trip and a camping trip. And you must do that before... and you mustn't make wedding plans before you've made sure that she can survive things like that and be pleasant and cordial and polite.

MOYERS: Fred Osborn and his wife Anne live in one of several Osborn family castles overlooking the Hudson near West Point. It's an old family tradition to gather here for Thanksgiving. For them this mountain is a source of warm memories of a privileged childhood where they were encouraged to explore and enjoy and respect the wonders of nature. They are descended from William H. Osborn, a man who made an impressive fortune in railroads and on Wall Street.

MOYERS: Osborn built Castle Rock in 1881 as a weekend retreat. – on a site selected by his friend Frederic Church.

CHIP MARKS: This is William Henry Osborn, he is the one who built the castle.

MOYERS: He's the original?

MARKS: The original.

MOYERS: Your great, great grandfather?

FRED OSBORN: Great, great grandfather.

MOYERS: Look at the resemblance. The same age too, huh?

FRED OSBORN: I don't look as vicious as he looks.

MOYERS: And he was then President of the Illinois Central?

FRED OSBORN: That's right, at about age 55 or so.

MOYERS: He became one of the early advocates of conservation, didn't he?

FRED OSBORN: He did indeed. He started giving land away and creating parkland and that was sort of a start of it for our family.

MOYERS: Saving God's scenery has been a mission for the Osborns - - a tradition of philanthropy that could be traced back to a day in 1897 when a steam whistle screamed out from the Palisades.

ACTOR READS NEWSPAPER STORY: Amid a cloud of brown smoke with a roar that was heard miles away, tons of loose rocks were thrown high into the air. Immense boulders weighing tons and the beautiful cliff was a thing of the past, sacrificed to the demands of modern paving.

MOYERS: Many people objected to the destruction of the Palisades but none with the determination of the New Jersey Federation of Women's Clubs. They lobbied and pressured the men who run things into doing something about the destruction- persuaded some of those gentlemen to accompany them on a yacht trip to witness the blasting firsthand.

VOICE OF ACTOR READING VOICE OF GARDEN CLUB OFFICER: This famous Hudson River scenery which citizens of New Jersey hold and trust for all the world will eventually become a thing of the past to their lasting shame and disgrace.

MOYERS: The states of New Jersey and New York formed a Palisades Park Commission. And studied the matter. But the process was slow and the blasting continued.

MOYERS: An appeal was made to the banker J.P. Morgan, Emperor of Wall Street, who owned an estate on the river. Morgan wrote a check to buy the quarry and close it down. The Palisades would become a park.

MOYERS: The Rockefeller family's home in Westchester County also enjoyed a fine view of the Palisades. And when the great cliffs were again threatened, John D. Rockefeller, Senior and Junior, quietly contributed to buy more parkland.

MOYERS: Edward H. Harriman was said to be the richest man in the world. He terrified his competitors on Wall Street and when he blinked the market jumped. But to his wife Mary and his family, Harriman was a man who loved nature. When New York State decided to build a new prison near their home on Bear Mountain, the Harrimans offered the governor 19 square miles of their estate and a small fortune in cash to forget about the prison and turn the whole mountain into a park.

PANETTA: The transformation of those millionaires into advocates and defenders of the river is one the interesting processes we need to pay attention to. So that in order to preserve those estates and those homes and those vistas they become strong advocates and eventually they become budding preservationists. It's one of those interesting evolutions from initial self-aggrandizement to something that does have a public payoff.

MOYERS: The Harrimans envisioned Bear Mountain Park as a place for the urban poor. A place to discover nature and have fun. Mrs. Harriman's pet project was the Camp Fire Girls. In 1919 there were 29 camps with 50,000 young women from the city. More people went to Bear Mountain than Yellowstone. And you could get there on a Hudson River Steamer.

MOYERS: The mighty Hudson had become, "A healthful playground for the people."

MOYERS: It's a real enigma and paradox to me that these really powerful men of industry, these captains of capitalism, the earliest ones in our country, were the founding fathers, in a way, of the conservation movement.

FRED OSBORN: It is a strange paradox to have those two characteristics but human beings have lots of opposing parts of their personalities. I see it as a way of recognizing that, almost in, perhaps out of guilt or out of, to atone for the viciousness of the business cycle you would do something very big and very good for the sake of your fellow human beings.

PANETTA: The central question about the history of the Hudson is, whose river is this? And so much of the preservation, certainly the creation of the Palisades Interstate Park System is the work of the elite. The Hudson is probably such an important river in our consciousness because it's a river that's been fretted over. And the reason it's been fretted over is because it has a very high concentration of educated, concerned citizens on its banks. That may not be everybody, it may not be democratic, but that has created a kind of critical mass that has made it a kind of laboratory for preservation. We may be raising the question of whether democracy and preservation are hospitable ideas. And it may be that the leadership of the elite is essential to setting the standard that we can all then follow.

FIRST MATE: I'm going to miss you.

CAPTAIN FROST: Glad to hear you're going to miss me. I'll miss you, too.

FIRST MATE: Well, come around and see us once in a while when you get lonesome.

CAPTAIN FROST: I have crossed the Hudson River for about 47 years. During that time I have made 465,600 trips. I think this is enough for any man.

MOYERS: By the 1920's the glory of the mighty Hudson had begun to fade. The great city of New York was its product. A river town that had become the grand metropolis of the whole world, built with brick and stone and cement and oak brought down from the Hudson Valley. The Hudson gave the city its life - a harbor that could hold a thousand ships. Capital of the world's business.

MOYERS: It was the Hudson River that welcomed generations of immigrants and carried them into the heartland.

MOYERS: Surrounding the city, the river refused to be ignored, its damp and bitter winds buffeting its citizens as if trying to get their attention. But the city turned up its collar and turned its back, looking inward, away from the waterfront where the view is a street or a man-made park. No more Mighty Hudson or Lordly Hudson. Now it's just "the river."

MOYERS: The railroad robbed the mighty Hudson of its supremacy, carrying the freight away, following the easy and level path that the river carved from the valley a million years ago. Take the 20th Century Limited to Chicago. Maybe catch a quick glimpse of the Palisades. A hundred miles an hour.

MOYERS: Millions of Ford cars from Edgewater and Chevrolets from Tarrytown mock the river. Each one going its own way on roads paved with stone from the river's great shoulders. Each one stealing a little more of the river's old dominance. The river runs north and south. The fords run in any direction they want.

MOYERS: Speed is what matters, and the river is too slow. Now there's a new Holland Tunnel under the river and soon the new George Washington Bridge.

MOYERS: The Mohawks are ironworkers now - walking the high steel and taking the city into the sky. Triumph over nature.

MOYERS: An airplane to Albany. 90 miles an hour. No more leisurely sightseeing in the Catskills. No painters and writers making this trip. Look down there. The machine has conquered the river.

AIRPLANE PASSENGER: Look Faye, there's West Point Military Academy.

MOYERS: For all this, the Hudson retains much of its original splendor- for two hundred years people were inspired here by a vision of America The Beautiful...and devoted themselves to saving it. This is where we first learned that nature is not indestructible, and that if we are to survive in the natural world we must care for it as we would our own children. Thomas Cole knew this back in 1836 when he wrote:

VOICE OF ACTOR READING WORDS OF THOMAS COLE: Nature has spread for us a rich and delightful banquet. Shall we turn from it? We are still in Eden; the wall that shuts us out of the garden is our own ignorance and folly.