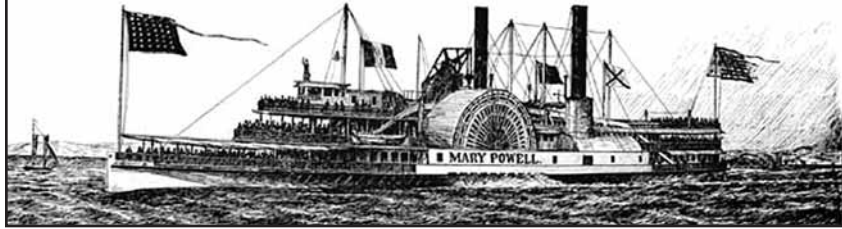


Mary's Whistle Is Back Home

By George S. Nammack



We recently received a press release from Public Education Director Lana Chassman of the Hudson River Maritime Museum in Kingston, NY informing us that the steam whistle from the famous steamboat *Mary Powell*, which cruised the Hudson River for 56 years (1861-1917) has been loaned to the museum to display alongside the *Powell's* bell, a carved centerpiece from one of her paddlewheel covers, a name board and other artifacts from the celebrated vessel.

The whistle is on loan from William H. Ewen, Jr. of Providence, Rhode Island, who, reported Museum Curator Allynne Lange, graciously agreed to have it "ceremonially blown" for the museum's annual "Steamboat Days" that occurred on Saturday, August 16, 2008. Apparently, the whistle has retained its commanding tone, another plus that added to her speed, reliability and striking beauty, and contributed to her eventual chesty sobriquet, "Queen of the Hudson".

Following her years of carrying many thousands of travelers and excursionists between Kingston and New York City, the *Powell* was retired and her whistle was transferred to the Hudson River Day Line steamer *Robert Fulton* for another 30 years of service aboard that fine vessel.

Glancing back to the mid-19th century, we see that commerce on the Hudson was thriving and, according to an outstanding article by Roger Mabie, President of the Museum, the Hudson River-Erie Canal corridor, one of the main gateways to the west, opened in 1828, AND was the route along which coal was brought from Pennsylvania to Kingston on the Hudson River. The railroads were just starting to appear on the scene, so the steamboat became the principal method of moving people and freight.

By the 1860s, the city of Kingston had become the leading port between Albany and New York. Between 1861 and 1963, three large steamboats were built to tap the booming economy and homeported at the village of Rondout, which in 1872 became part of the city of Kingston. Two of these steamboats were night boats for freight and overnight passengers. The third was the *Mary Powell*, designed to be a day steamer solely for carrying passengers. Her schedule involved departing Kingston early in the morning and make landings at Pough-

keepsie, Milton, Newburgh and Cornwall, arriving at her pier in lower Manhattan in late morning. Returning from New York started at 3:30 p.m. and her arrival back at Kingston occurred in early evening. Her period of operation was usually from mid-May to late September or early October.

Come with me to the 1861 bow of this story and watch the *Mary Powell* being built at a Jersey City, NJ shipyard to the order of one Captain Absalom Anderson at a cost reported to be \$80,000. He was to be both her operator and her captain. As happened over a period of 40 years, the vessel had only two captains: Captain Absalom and his son, Captain A. Eltinge Anderson. Other captains commanded the vessel for short periods of time; during her final two years of service, her captain was Arthur Warrington of Kingston.

At the end of her first full season in 1862, Captain Anderson was somewhat disappointed in his new boat's speed. He sent her back to the shipyard, had her cut in two and ordered 21 feet to be added to her length. The extra length did the trick and from then on *Mary Powell* became one of the fastest vessels on the Hudson. She enjoyed such a reputation for speed that newly-built yachts were brought out to cruise alongside her to test their speeds.

She was always superbly maintained and had a yacht-like appearance. She was known as a "family boat," and Captain Anderson required all passengers to conduct themselves properly. If they did not, they risked being put ashore at the next landing. No boozing or bothering the female passengers. Gee whiz, Captain Anderson!

At the end of the 1902 season, *Mary Powell* was bought by the Hudson River Day Line. She sailed her old Kingston to New York route back and forth and underwent some minor physical changes. During the 1914 through 1917 seasons, she was used for charter trips, such as up to Bear Mountain or to Albany. On September 5, 1917, she sailed her final trip with passengers. She was then laid up at her old "winter dock" on Rondout Creek, and in January 1920, the old gal was sold to be scrapped.

Given her history, I like to think that the old girl was treated by the scrap team with at least a modicum of dignity or even better was granted voice for a few moments during which she grandly insisted upon it.

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