PORT OF OPPORTUNITY

New York's Hudson River maritime history is a rich one. Before European colonization, thousands of Native Americans lived along its shores, utilizing its waters for trade and fishing. Beginning in the early 1600s, Dutch and then English settlers relied on the Hudson to carry freight and passengers between Albany and New York City and points in between. During its heyday, many sloops and steamboats plied the Hudson. The Erie Canal, completed in 1825, connected the state's capital of Albany to Buffalo, thus opening the Great Lakes to the Eastern Seaboard and goods from overseas.

With the advent of the railroad in the mid-1800s and the superhighways of the 1950s, reliance on the Hudson for commerce diminished. And it didn't help that the river was simply too shallow north of New York City to accommodate modern ocean-going vessels. Ports and their communities up and down the river struggled.

But in the 1960s, the Army Corps of Engineers began to dredge the Hudson from Tarrytown all the way up to Albany — to not only make the capital city an ocean-going port, but increase commercial activity all along the river.

RECYCLING GREAT IDEAS

Ten miles south of Albany and 110 miles north of New York City, lies the small community of Coeymans (pronounced Queemans). Occupied since the early 1600s, the town had lumber mills, flour mills, and at least six brick manufacturing companies. One of those brick companies — Powell & Minnock, later P&M Brick — was founded in the late 1880s and was situated on the banks of the Hudson. Although it had a port, it wasn't much of one.

(Above) The Port of Coeymans encompasses 2,500 acres with 3,300 feet of river frontage. There is a 300-foot hard-face dock, a crane, truck scale, office space, controlled access, parking, and warehousing. Barge and tug rentals, trucking, foreign trade zone, and stevedoring services are also available.

P&M went through some hard times. Great efforts were made to save the historic business, as it was the last brick manufacturer in the state of New York. In 2002, a partnership of area businessmen bought the company from its overseas owners as an investment. But no matter how they crunched the numbers, keeping the facility as a brick factory wasn't adding up.

"Then we looked at the facility as a port, and realized that's where the potential lay," says Carver Laraway, Managing Manager, Port of Coeymans Marine Terminal and one of the partners in the business. As owner of Carver Sand and Gravel, Laraway was familiar with moving materials. But a port? That was a brand new ballgame.

"We started the permitting procedures to build a dock. It took about four to five years to get approval from all the various agencies. We didn't use lawyers and we didn't use any state or federal dollars. I think God put little bites at a time in front of me, because if I'd seen the whole project in its entirety, I would have probably run and jumped in the river!"

The potential Laraway saw was more than a mere port. "I can see 30 companies here

P&M Brick's old horse barn was renovated and now serves as the Port's office.

at the Port, each with 30-plus employees working for them. That's a thousand people working here. And then the Port will be untouchable, because the chances of 30 companies going under are much slimmer than one massive company going under."

So although the brick factory did close, the site has been transformed into a full-service marine terminal and port facility, capable of handling 750-foot long vessels with a draft of 32 feet, and warehousing a variety of materials. Vessels dock from Egypt, Turkey, Italy, Chile, and many more.

The Port is doing more than "recycling" the Hudson's transportation glory days. "We consider this activity to be very much recycling," explains Stephen Kelly, V.P Sales and Operations. "We can move 3,000 tons with one barge — that equals 100 truckloads that we can keep off our roads and bridges. We're saving fuel too. Shipping by barge is more energy efficient — we can move one ton of cargo 514 miles for every gallon of fuel burned. That's far more efficient than trucks and rail."

"In developing this site, I saw the potential to take thousands of trucks off the road, reducing noise and air pollution, and reducing accidents by transporting goods to and from NYC by barge," adds Elias Weis, Co-owner and Member of the Port. "We can service our clients quickly and efficiently because we are a privately owned and operated port, and can make decisions more rapidly."

THE KAWASAKI CONNECTION

Although the Port started out with two older, smaller wheel loaders as a part of the services they offer their tenants, they realized they'd save money if they modernized and got one larger one. So Terminal Manager Matt Hofmann and Kelly put their heads together and looked at a lot of loaders.

Cleaning up the debris from the old brickyard was quite a challenge. The lot had a lot of dilapidated buildings and even a landfill.

"It came down to Cat® and Kawasaki," says Hofmann. "We were already familiar with Kawasaki because Carver Laraway runs 17 of them at Carver Sand and Gravel.

Everything just outweighed the Cat. Kawasaki was the best with loader specs and the price was very fair. And I'm a big believer in your equipment is only as good as the dealer support. Contractors Sales, our local Kawasaki dealer, is very attentive. The parts support and service are good."

"We selected the Kawasaki 115ZV-2 for its speed, cycle time, and size," says Kelly. "Because our property is so spread out, if we need it to move from the dock to the top of the hill to fill trucks, it can get there twice as fast as our old ones, and load twice as fast too. So we're actually doing the same amount of work with one loader as we were with two. It really saves us money."

The Port's 115ZV-2 tackles a wide variety of materials including salt, gypsum, slag, bauxite, sand, gravel, and harbor stones.The tent-like structures in the background are actually a part of Megrant Corporation's 24-cell GEA air-cooled condenser for the Astoria II Generating Station in New York City. It is the largest project of its kind to address the power-generation needs of New York.

Typical items the 115ZV-2 handles include salt, gypsum, slag, bauxite, sand, gravel, metal scrap, and harbor stones. Sometimes the loader drives right out onto the barges to discharge its load. In spite of the wide variety of corrosive and destructive materials it handles, the 115 continues to do its job well.

THE FUTURE

A number of area businesses already utilize the Port's ever-growing facilities, including Lafarge (building materials), Megrant (mechanical contractor specializing in power-generation systems), Fort Miller Co. (precast concrete products), and Apalachee Marine (rock salt). Construction giant Kiewit has used the facility to construct and then barge downstream the new replacement swing span of the Willis Avenue Bridge that connects Manhattan to the Bronx.

"We have 125 acres here with 3,300 feet of river frontage," says Kelly. "We have a 300-foot hard-face dock, a crane, truck scale, and office space. Plus we can offer a lot of additional services. But our main business plan focuses on getting activity for our dock. So we are looking for tenants who have a need for water. The rest of what we do spins from that. The dock is our heart.

The swing span for the Willis Avenue bridge in New York City was constructed by Kiewit and D.A.Collins at the Port.

"We have worked with a lot of smaller companies. By having access to water, those mom-and-pop companies are now growing into medium-sized players. For example, R.K. Freedman & Son is our scrap tenant. He used to sell his scrap to exporters. But with this facility, we gave him the opportunity to sell directly to the export scrap market. Now he's at the stage where he can create more volume to sell at better rates and grow his business.

"With the Port, we all have opportunities to expand and spread. It's the American Dream."

The Port of Coeymans Marine Terminal, Coeymans, NY, is serviced by Contractors Sales, Albany, New York.

After construction, the swing span was floated down the Hudson on two welded-together barges powered by several tugs.