

Henry Hudson

by Edward Shaw

Henry Hudson was one of the best sea captains in all England. He loved the ocean, and he did not know the word "fear."

In 1607 a company of London merchants sent him to look for a northwest passage to China. These merchants knew that if such a passage could be found, the journey to China would be much shorter than by the overland route then used. It would take less time to sail around the earth near the pole than to sail around the earth near the equator. Besides, every one who had attempted to reach China by sailing west had reached, instead, that long coast of the New World, through which but one opening had ever been found. The route through this opening, the Strait of Magellan, had been proved by its discoverer, Ferdinand Magellan, to be too long for use in commerce, so traders were trying hard to find a northwest passage.

Captain Hudson proceeded northwest from England, and tried to pass between Greenland and Spitzbergen and sail across the north pole into the Pacific. Failing in this attempt, he made a second voyage, during which he tried to pass between Spitzbergen and Nova Zembla. This voyage also was unsuccessful, and Hudson returned to England. He had found no northwest passage, but he had sailed past mountains of snow and ice and had been nearer the north pole than any man had ever been before.

Captain Hudson was not discouraged by his two failures. He still believed a northwest passage could be found; and when the Dutch people asked him to make a voyage for them in search of a passage to the Pacific Ocean, he was quite willing to accept the offer.

In 1609 Hudson sailed from Amsterdam in a small craft of eighty tons, called the *Half Moon*. After sailing many days through fog and ice, the sailors refused to go farther in that direction, and then Hudson headed his ship across the Atlantic toward America. You may think it strange that Hudson should change his plans so quickly, but he knew what he was about. He had received a letter from his friend Captain John Smith, who was then in Virginia, telling him that a northwest passage was to be found along the coast of North America, north of Chesapeake Bay. This letter Hudson had in mind when he started on his voyage.

He reached Chesapeake Bay, but did not enter it, as the weather was stormy. Instead, he proceeded up the coast, looking for an opening. At length, in September, he entered a beautiful bay. Into this bay a wide river flowed which Hudson thought might be a strait that would lead into the Pacific Ocean. The water in this opening was salt, and this strengthened Hudson in the belief that it was the strait for which he had been searching so long. At the mouth of the river there was a beautiful island, long and narrow, and wooded to the shore.

At first the island seemed deserted, but soon the sailors saw here and there slender curling columns of smoke rising from among the trees. This smoke showed them that the island was inhabited, and presently an Indian appeared on the shore.

This Indian looked for a moment in astonishment at the ship, and then, shouting the war whoop, bounded back into the forest. In a few minutes he reappeared, bringing other Indians with him. All were amazed at the sight of the strange ship, and they gazed in wonder and fear at it and at the white-faced,

bearded strangers. Little by little, however, they lost their fear and talked with Captain Hudson. These Indians told Hudson that the name of the beautiful island was Manhattan, and that the stream led far, far to the north.

So Hudson entered the river and sailed slowly north, enjoying the charming scenery, and stopping now and then to trade and to talk with the Indians.

For twenty miles he sailed along a great wall of rock about five hundred feet high, which we now know as the Palisades. This name was given to the rocky wall because it looks like a palisade, or high fence of stakes set close together and upright in the ground.

Soon after this the river became very winding, and high mountains arose on all sides. The *Half Moon* now entered the beautiful Highlands, and her crew were the first white men to see this enchanting spot. The vessel sailed on, and at length it came to the place where the city of Hudson now stands. Here an Indian chief invited the captain to go ashore. Hudson did so, and the Indians prepared a great feast in his honor.

They gave him roast pigeons and a roast dog to eat. Hudson did not like the dog meat very much, but the Indians insisted upon cooking it for him.

The Indians wanted him to stay overnight with them, and one Indian arose, and gathering together all the arrows, broke them and threw them into the fire. By this act he meant to show Hudson that he and his tribe would do him no harm.

Hudson felt that he had no time to lose, but must go on and find out whether this wonderful body of water would lead him into the Pacific. So he bade the Indians good-by and sailed away.

He went on up the river until the place was reached where Albany now stands. Here the little *Half Moon* was anchored. Indians came running down to the shore in wonder at the sight of the strange vessel. They brought with them strings of beaver skins, which they gave Hudson in exchange for pieces of gold lace, glass beads, and other trinkets. Hudson was quick to see the importance of this fur trade, and took back with him many valuable furs. Here the stream had become narrow, and was so shallow that the captain feared his vessel might run aground. He knew at last that the water was a river and not a strait, and that he was not likely to find here a passage to China. So Hudson, turning back, started down the river.

On the way down, an Indian who was in a canoe stole something from the ship. One of the crew saw the Indian commit the theft, and, picking up a gun, shot and killed him. This made the other Indians very angry, and Hudson had several fights with them.

Nevertheless the expedition reached the mouth of the river in safety, and early in October Hudson returned to Amsterdam. He had not found a northwest passage, but he had secured a large tract of country in the New World for Holland.

He told the Dutch about the rich furs to be found there, and they immediately began to build trading posts where the cities of New York and Albany now stand.

The next year Hudson made another voyage in search of a passage to Asia. This time he sailed far north into Hudson Bay. Here his crew mutinied and refused to obey him. They seized him and put

him, together with his son, into an open boat, and set them adrift in the icy water.

As Hudson was never heard of again, it is supposed that he perished in the waters of the great bay which he discovered, and which still bears his name.

Source:

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