

SCENIC HUDSON PARK QUEST

MADAM BRETT PARK, BEACON

QUESTING:

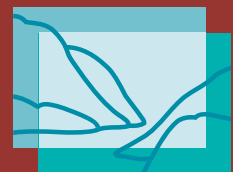
Use the information and map to learn about the history and ecology at Scenic Hudson's Madam Brett Park. At the end of your Quest, you'll find a box. Inside is a register for you to sign, a special stamp to mark this booklet, and more information about things you probably came across during your Quest. Don't forget to put the box back where you found it so other people can discover it too. The adventure takes about one hour, 15 minutes. Have fun!

DIRECTIONS:

From Newburgh-Beacon Bridge head 3.2 miles south on Route 9D, turn right on Tioronda Ave., then left under the railroad trestle. Parking area is on the left.

OPERATING HOURS:

Open year-round from dawn to dusk.



**SCENIC
HUDSON**

Madam Brett ParkQuest A Stroll through Nature & History

● Fishkill Creek

Native Americans called Fishkill Creek “Tioronda”—“little water that flows into big water”—because it drains into the Hudson River. The Hudson gets most of its water from creeks, streams and smaller rivers (known as tributaries) that flow into it.

From its source in the Adirondack Mountains to New York City, where it empties into the Atlantic Ocean, the Hudson travels 315 miles. The part of the river from New York City to Troy is called an estuary. It contains salt and fresh water, and its level rises and falls with the ocean’s tides. The estuary provides important habitat for fish and animals, including striped bass, blue crabs and great blue herons.

Fishkill Creek’s lower portion also is affected by the tides. As high tide approaches, the creek appears to flow upstream. As the tide turns, it flows back toward the Hudson.

Using the map on the back page, can you find the City of Beacon and the Fishkill Creek? Trace the water’s path to the Atlantic Ocean.



● Madam Brett

After the death of her husband in 1718, Catharyna Rombout Brett was left to fend for herself and three young sons in the wilderness. She turned to what resources she had—a 1/3 share in the Rombout Patent, 85,000 acres stretching along the Hudson River from Fishkill Creek to Wappinger Creek purchased by her father and two partners from local Indians in 1683. Here she and her husband had built a home and gristmill.

Madam Brett prospered by selling land to settlers, who built a bustling community out of the forest. Farmers all along the Hudson brought grain to be ground into flour in her mill.

No one’s sure where Madam Brett’s mill stood; its location was not recorded in detail. Where you’re standing, the power of Fishkill Creek and easy access to shipping on the Hudson made this a great location for commerce in the 1700s and for centuries to come.



● Using & Abusing Fishkill Creek

The large brick building next to Madam Brett Park was the Tioronda Hat Works, opened in 1879. Thanks to the railroad and the creek, the hat industry became a vital part of Beacon’s economy until the 1940s, earning the city the nickname the “Hat-Making Capital of New York.” Other industries relying on the creek included button makers and wool recyclers (which turned wool fibers from old clothing into new fabrics).

While these businesses provided jobs, they had a big drawback—pollution. Industries dumped wastes into Fishkill Creek or along its banks. (You can still find piles of buttons or mounds of wool.) The land also was excavated several times, allowing non-native, “invasive” plants like phragmites (on the left) to replace native species such as cattails (on the right). Both of these plants can be seen in the marsh.





● Observation Deck

From here you get a great view of Tioronda Falls and can see remains of an old sluiceway—an artificial channel for carrying off a portion of Fishkill Creek’s current to power a mill. Barely visible atop the falls is the stone foundation of a railroad bridge. It carried trains destined for Newburgh and western New York State on the Erie Railroad.



● Poison Ivy—Friend or Foe?

Poison Ivy is recognized by its clusters of three leaves. Because many humans are allergic to the oil poison ivy plants release—it causes a very itchy rash—remember the saying “Leaves of three, let it be.”

Poison ivy plants produce yellowish-white or greenish-white flowers that bloom from May to July. The flowers then give way to berry-like fruits that are whitish-gray.

Poison ivy may be a nuisance to humans, but many animals depend on it for survival. Birds such as Northern cardinals and American goldfinches use the thread-like hairs from its vines to build nests. Small animals like frogs, spiders, chipmunks and turtles rely on its leaves and stems for shelter. Poison ivy also is a food source: white-tailed deer, muskrat and Eastern cottontails devour its leaves and stems; birds like crows, bluebirds and turkeys eat the fruit; and insects munch the leaves.

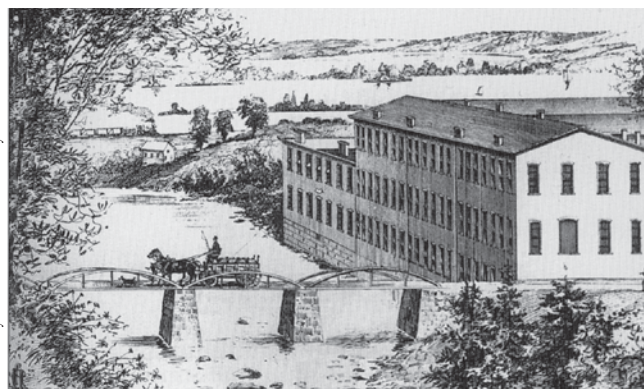
● Marsh Overlook



Fishkill Creek and its marsh are an important ecosystem. Different plants and animals inhabit the many areas found within the park: turbulent falls, swift rapids, lazy shoals and creek banks of varying types—high, low, rocky, tree-covered and swampy.

The marsh before you is particularly important. Known as a freshwater tidal wetland, it’s a spawning ground and nursery for anadromous fish (such as American shad and striped bass), which live in oceans but breed in fresh water. It’s a home for amphibians such as frogs and aquatic mammals (including muskrats) and a hunting ground for ospreys, bald eagles and other birds of prey. It also serves as a stopover for migratory birds.

To complete your ParkQuest, look to your right, beneath the observation platform, as you gaze at the marsh. You’ll find a box containing a special Quest stamp. Mark your guide, return the stamp to the box and replace it, for others to discover.



Courtesy: Beacon Historical Society

● Tioronda Bridge

Constructed between 1869 and 1873, Tioronda Bridge is one of only two iron truss bridges in the United States with a unique “bowstring” design. Where has it gone? It’s being restored by the Beacon City Council and Beacon Historical Society.

Why we protected this place...

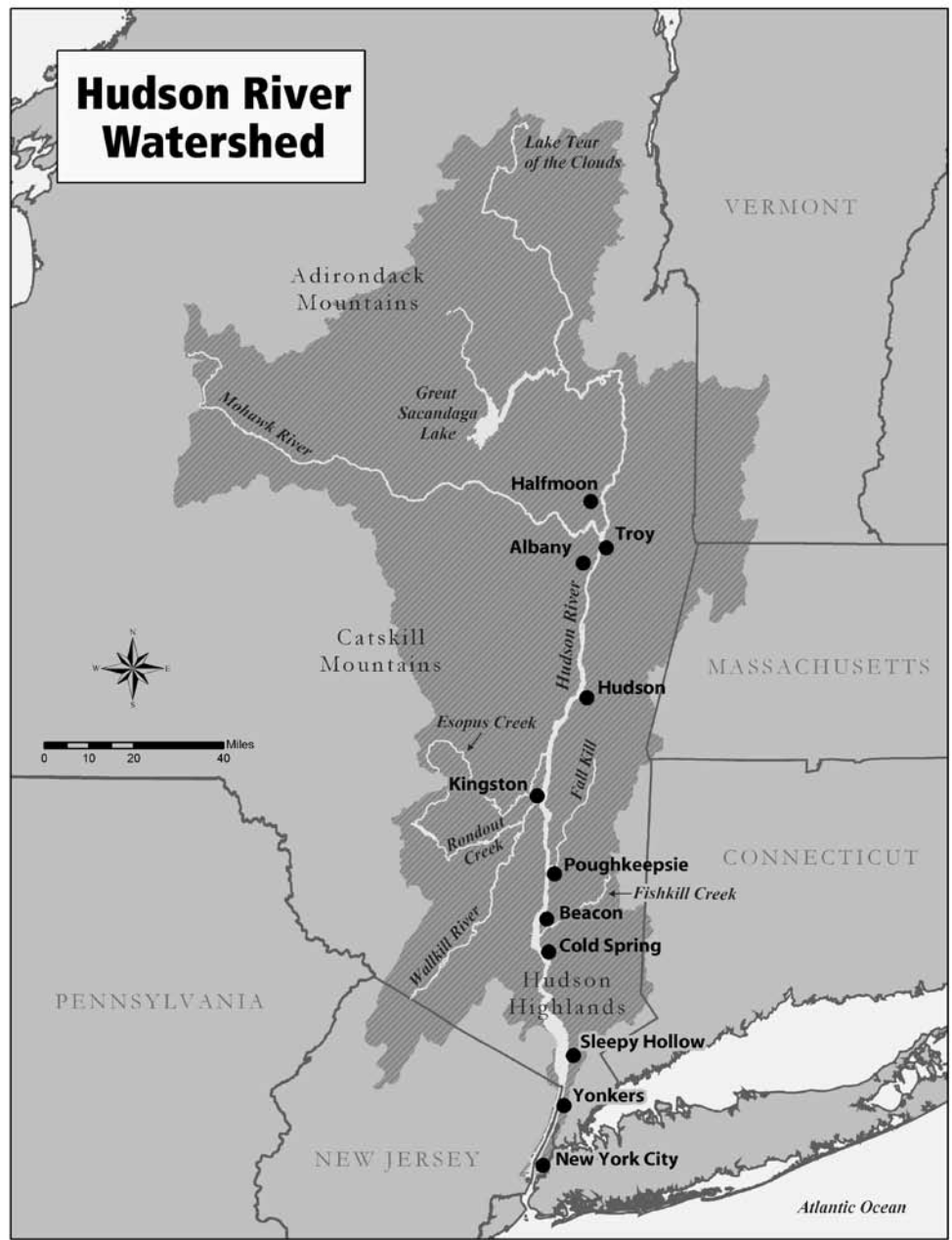
Scenic Hudson purchased the 12-acre Madam Brett Park in 1996 to protect it from further development, providing an urban oasis where people can experience nature. This land is slowly recovering from years of abuse as an industrial dumping ground. While most regeneration occurs naturally, conservation projects undertaken by Scenic Hudson help speed up the process. Today, school groups come to Madam Brett Park to learn about the site's history and ecological renewal. The many waterfowl species that live and feed in Fishkill Marsh also make it a popular destination for bird watchers.

Who's Scenic Hudson?

We're a group of dedicated people who care about the area we live in—the Hudson River Valley. Forty-five years ago, our founders fought to protect a mountain from being made into a power plant. Since then, we've continued to work together with local communities to protect special places. We've created or enhanced 40 parks and preserves for you to enjoy.

For more information about our parks, visit

www.scenichudson.org/parks.



Josh Clague



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Let us know what you think of this Quest. E-mail your comments to shereth@scenichudson.org.