

Here's the Hudson prologue in the same "ancestor's-eye" voice—before there was New Netherland, there was a ship, a river, and many nations.

## **1609 — “A river without a colony”**

### **The wider world**

The Dutch are perfecting a new kind of empire: companies with war powers. The VOC has just been chartered, and an English navigator in Dutch employ—**Henry Hudson**—is told to find a shortcut to Asia. Ice stops his polar try, so he turns west and sounds an unfamiliar coast. That detour changes your family's map.

### **Who is already here (the scale you can feel)**

The Lower Hudson and its bays are **Lenape/Munsee** country—many small communities arrayed along saltmarshes, tidal creeks, and barrier beaches. Across the Narrows and up both banks stand **Hackensack** and **Tappan** towns; on western Long Island the **Canarsie**; in the mid-Hudson the **Wappinger**; farther north the **Mahican (Mohican)**. Think **thousands of people** distributed across dozens of villages and seasonal camps, not one big capital—fish runs, maize fields, tobacco patches, dugouts sliding through eelgrass channels. There is **no European hamlet** anywhere on this estuary.

### **One small ship arrives**

In September a bluff-bowed Dutch flyboat—**Halve Maen / Half Moon**—edges in from the Atlantic with **about twenty men** aboard. They anchor, take soundings, and begin the awkward work of **first meetings**: gifts traded for furs, a demonstration shot, cautious meals hosted in each other's craft or houses. Within days there is **a fatal clash**—an English sailor killed in an exchange of arrows and musket fire in the Narrows—proof that one misread gesture could tilt a parley into violence. Still, most encounters are transactional: **iron for skins, cloth for corn**, and the crew's astonished notes about the harbor's size and the sweetness of the river water once past the brackish mouth.

### **Up the river**

Hudson's mate keeps the **lead-line** going as they work north past the **Palisades** and the great widening we call **Tappan Zee**. Canoes come out with **beaver, otter, mink**; onshore, smoke rises from **late-season maize**. Beyond the Highlands and Catskills, the river narrows and shoals; they reach roughly the latitude of **future Albany/Fort Orange**, discover it is a **river, not a strait**, and turn back. They have mapped a trade, not a passage.

### **What it felt like to people on both shores**

- **For Lenape/Munsee, Wappinger, Mahican communities:** another ship—larger and stranger than the Basque and Breton fishing craft heard of to the north—whose crew wants **furs** and flashes **iron, copper kettles, knives, cloth**. The visitors are **few** (scores at most), their arrival **brief**, but their goods are potent and their weapons loud. Most people here never set eyes on the Half Moon, but **news travels fast** by canoe; by month's end, the river towns all know the story.
- **For Hudson's crew:** a water world that feels **inhabited everywhere** but **owned by no European**. They can anchor safely in lee after lee; they can't **claim** anything yet. The journals read like field notes from a crowded market you don't speak the language of.

### Headcounts that ground the scene

- **Indigenous population, Lower–Mid Hudson and Raritan–Delaware bays (c.1600):** order-of-magnitude **many thousands**, spread among **dozens of settlements** (Lenape/Munsee families typically in the low hundreds per band).
- **Europeans present in 1609: one ship, ~20 men** for a few weeks; no wintering post; **zero** permanent households.

### Why this matters for your later chapters

When your **Volckertszen/Dircks** people appear in the 1630s–50s, they step onto shores that already had **names, paths, and politics**. Smit's Vly (Pearl St./Maiden Lane) is a **marsh edge** known to fishers long before it is a deed; Bushwick's tidal gut (later "Noorman's Kill") is a **canoe cut** before it is a farm ditch. The **crowd size** in 1609 is Indigenous—**thousands**—while the European presence is a **single, temporary speck**.

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### Optional micro-essays you can commission next

1. **The Narrows:** first parley, first fatality—how one fight didn't define the month.
2. **Trading at Mannahatta:** what changed hands (iron, cloth, copper) and why beaver drew Europeans upriver.
3. **North of the Tappan Zee:** Wappinger and Mahican towns as seen from a deck—signals, gifts, misreadings.
4. **Turn-back at the shoals:** how a shallow reach near today's Albany kept the Half Moon from pretending this was a passage.

If you want, I can stitch this directly to your **1610–1619** chapters: Champlain at Quebec, Jamestown’s recovery, and the first Dutch fur voyages back to the river—so you see **how quickly “a single ship” becomes a circuit.**