

If there is one species of animal that has had the greatest impact on the development of the early Hudson Valley it's the beaver. *Castor canadensis* are second largest rodent in the world, and can easily weigh over 50 lbs. Giant beavers that lived here during the ice age were the size of small black bears.

Beavers had long been long highly prized in Europe for their durable, water resistant fur, which was used extensively for felted hats. Beavers were in short supply in Western Europe, they had been extirpated by the 1500s. So by 1609, the year of Henry Hudson's arrival in America, finding a valley full of beavers was an unexpected jackpot. The demand for beaver pelts was so high, the pelts themselves were used as currency and completely shifted the local trading economy.

But meeting this high demand proved unsustainable, and beaver populations plummeted under the intense hunting and trapping. Beavers nearly disappeared entirely from the Hudson Valley. In a way, Beavers owe their comeback to a fickle change of fashion tastes. European vogue shifted from fur to silks, and the demand for beavers finally abated. Today, beavers are back as important factors in maintaining ecological diversity in the Valley. While sometimes disruptive, beaver dams and ponds are havens of biodiversity, providing habitats for many species of fish, amphibians, birds, and mammals in the area.