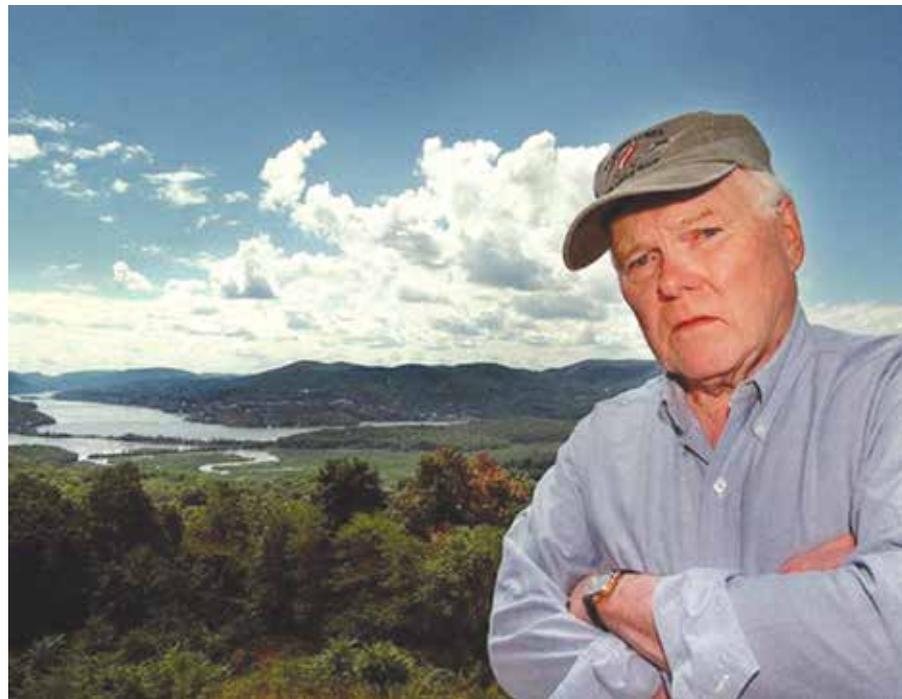


I Remember

Robert Boyle

by John H. Vargo, Publisher



Robert Boyle. photo: Journal News

Living in Verplanck since 1960 and being born in Buchanan, NY only a half mile away, my memory and experiences with Robert Boyle are many, some wonderful and a few not good at all....

Our lives were entwined throughout the 60's, 70's, 80's and 90's. (Bob lived on Finny Farm Road in Croton, NY only 4 miles away in the 70's.)

I was a simple, hard working salesman with an absolute passion for duck hunting, fishing, flying, ice boating and all things Hudson River. Bob Boyle, being a senior writer at Sports Illustrated also had a passion for the Hudson River. He, however, was in a very strong position to do something about the tremendous pollution that was occurring in the Hudson River and along its shores.

Harmon Yards in Croton, NY was, in many ways, the center focus of much of the pollution that sparked Bob's focus on pollution. At the end of the road leading down through what is now the parking lots for commuters was a huge 36' concrete pipe, (still there, but clean) that poured all the oil and waste from Harmon Yards into the south side of Croton Point. I can remember many times flying over the "point" and seeing a long plume of oil slick going out from the pipe into the Hudson River.

While all this pollution was pouring out of the pipe the marshes at Croton Point, once vibrant with thousands of ducks and other bird life, was being covered with Westchester Counties garbage. Home collections, industrial waste and hospital waste were all dumped into the marshes. A constant and steady stream of garbage trucks and every other type of waste trucks was deposited on a daily basis. What was created was a mountain of waste that caught fire at least once a week, sometimes three or four times a week. The Croton Fire Department would come out and try to put out the fires but the huge source of methane that was created by decomposing waste always reignited the dump!

It should also be pointed out that the Croton River that sourced at the Croton Dam provided a counter to the pollution and offered millions of gallons of clean, pure water to the effluent that were being created by the Croton Dump and Harmon Yards.

All this plus the raw sewage pouring from the villages sewer pipes along the river as well as the General Motors plant in Tarrytown screamed for something to be done.

As this was going on, commercial fisherman, such as Charley White, Ace Lent, Tucker Crawford, Jimmy Bleakly and others up river, were still catching poundous quantities of striped bass and shad during the spring spawning runs. Many times they would be left in boxes to rot along the shores as the price per pound of fish would go down to the point that it was not profitable to move the fish to Fulton Fish Market in New York. A glut on the market caused by too many fish caught affected the price negatively. Bob Boyle became a "friend" to Charley, Tucker and the rest of the "boys"!

Bob during this time was fly-fishing for stripers and trout in the Croton River. There are many photos of him fishing while describing the pollution adjacent to the Croton River.

This is a mere speck of a description in describing what was going on during those years but hopefully will give you some background as why Bob Boyle, Art Goulka, and Dominck Perrone formed what would be called the Hudson River Fisherman's Association.

I clearly remember being in the living room of Bob Boyle's house in 1975 with a large group of "locals" some with their half boots still on their feet, as Bob, running upstairs to see to his dying wife, and we downstairs contributing to the discussion by our experiences of contaminates polluting local areas of the Hudson River. Some of these locals actually worked at Harmon Yards or at sewer plants along the river. They especially were in danger of losing their jobs by reporting what they experienced on a daily basis. It did not matter, everyone in the room felt that something had to be done to "clean up the Hudson River".

Many of these commercial fisherman, and others had a funny feeling for a long time afterwards, that they were "used" as the very lively hood of many of the men in the room, the commercial fishing industry on the Hudson River was shut down.

In order to relieve this pressure the NYS DEC hired several of these fisherman as "consultants" to study the commercial fishing shut down. Some, while being consultants were also still commercial fishing at night. Running the striped bass to fish market early in the morning. Of course being fisherman they had to brag while fingering the large wads of cash they had rolled up in their pockets. The largest wads came from the Sturgeon that was caught and sold to the market. There was many a morning I would wake up to a solid mark of drained water from pickup trucks as they came up the

hill from Steamboat Dock below my house loaded with Hudson River fish being taken to the early market fish market in New York City.

All this just brought more trouble on the local fisherman and they in turn began mumbling about Bob Boyle's vision of a clean Hudson River.

The reason for the shut down of the commercial fishing industry was the PCB danger created by Bob and his writings on the effect of eating the fish. (Hello at 81 I still eat the wonderful tasting fish from the Hudson River)

Throughout the 70's, 80's and the early 90's the Croton Dump was still being used as the main dumping grounds for Westchester's garbage. To force the closure Bob Boyle, John Cronin and the Hudson River Fisherman's Association brought Westchester County to federal court in New York City. Instead of targeting the officials of Westchester County to testify they subpoenaed a Westchester County worker, and dear friend of mine, to go to Federal Court in New York City and testify as to how Westchester County was pumping wastewater from a collecting pool at the base of the mountain of garbage into the Hudson River.

The basis of this testimony provided the reasons to shut down the dump. Who cared that the county worker was traumatized because of his experience in going to New York City, nobody cared!

I had a very bad taste in my mouth for a long time after this episode.

One other incident, of many comes to mind where Bob Boyle actually stopped, with some simple telephone calls a disaster about to take place. One bright sunny afternoon in the 70's, I and another person had come ashore on the beach on the south side of Croton Point in our canoe. Just as we pulled up a big green Lincoln pulled up and three men stepped out of the car. Waving their arms around in an expansive gesture they began to describe how they were going to dredge all the sand out of the south side of Croton Bay and use it for construction purposes. We were only a few feet from these men but they never paid any attention to us. We heard all we needed to hear and left. My favorite duck hunting spot was about to be destroyed!

When I got home I called Bob and described the men and what they intended to do. I am convinced to this day that Bob stopped this incredible idea before it even got started based on what I had told him

So you see I have mixed feelings about this man. There is not a shred of doubt that he was the main and most instrumental man in bringing the Hudson River to where it is today. Did we envision the results that have occurred certainly not the branding in a negative way of the Hudson River as has been done.

Today thanks to Bob's efforts and others that followed we have a totally different River than when I was four years old.

The sad part is that generations of folks living along the river have turned their backs on the Hudson River.