
From Village to Small City

"I AM ABOUT to write up (in pamphlet form) a brief Puff for Poughkeepsie. This I have been requested to do by a party of gentlemen associated for the purpose of adding to the character and population of our idol city."¹ So wrote S. L. Walker, the city's first daguerreotype artist, to Benson Lossing, the historian, with a request for assistance in gathering the necessary facts. Walker's puffing belongs to the booterish years preceding the depression of 1873, one of two boom times in nineteenth-century Poughkeepsie which sparked high ambitions for the city's future importance.

By 1906, when editor Edmund Platt published his history, the failure of both booms to produce sustained rapid growth favored a soberer view. Chronicling in detail the innovations and casualties of a century among the city's industries, Platt generalized that "Poughkeepsie is not so very different from many other Eastern cities, but nevertheless has its characteristics. It has been a town of slow growth . . . Its people in the past have been by turns over-conservative and then over-enterprising, but the periods of conservatism and of enterprise have coincided with National conditions. As a result of the forces of the past Poughkeepsie is partly a manufacturing town, partly a trading town drawing upon a productive territory, partly a