

“Clermont II”

A Solar-Powered Boat for New York State’s 2009 Hudson-Fulton-Champlain Quadricentennial
Connecting American History with a Sustainable Future

Robert Fulton revolutionized the transportation industry in 1807. His “Clermont”, the first commercially successful steamboat, ushered in the industrial revolution by initiating the transition “from sail to steam.” In 2009 the State of New York will, as it did in 1909, observe the anniversary of this event as part of the Hudson-Fulton-Champlain Quadricentennial. A state-wide commemoration, this series of events will provide local residents and visitors from around the world an opportunity to celebrate and reflect upon the impact these three men had on the history of the State of New York, the United States, and the entire world.



New York’s 1909 commemoration centered largely on a steam-powered replica of the original “Clermont”, which fell into neglect and was broken up in 1936. Given the plans for 2009, a new replica vessel would most certainly play a marquee role in events taking place at waterfront communities throughout the State of New York. Yet in the contemporary context, a unique opportunity exists to go beyond a simple replica by using renewable energy technology to connect the past and the future, and to mark another emerging revolution in engineering, transportation, and commerce.

The “Clermont II” will appear to be another reproduction of Robert Fulton’s original steam-powered vessel. However she will rely completely on solar power for propulsion, using existing photovoltaic technology and improving upon the systems design of solar-powered vessels currently operating in Europe and Asia. Just as sail gave way to steam some two hundred years ago, the time has come for clean, renewable energy to take the place of carbon-based fuels to meet the needs of the modern world. “Clermont II” will eloquently illustrate that this can be done now.

The “Clermont II” will be designed and built in the Port of Albany, NY by Scarano Boat Building, Inc. Using contemporary techniques and materials, the Scarano Brother’s yard has completed many traditional-looking vessels and is a perfect match for this project. The boatyard is located on the historic Hudson River in the Empire State. Commissioning is anticipated to be in April of 2009 at a cost of one to two million dollars, depending upon design details including scale and hull length. A legacy project, she will be capable of carrying her message statewide throughout New York’s coastal and inland waterways and will attract visitors wherever she travels. Managed by a new not-for-profit organization similar to the Hudson River Sloop Clearwater, the “Clermont II” will serve primarily as a floating classroom to educate and inspire visitors of all ages in the areas of renewable energy, sustainable and efficient transportation, waterfront access, and clean air/clean water solutions for the 21st century. The “Clermont II” will also serve as a platform for the real-time demonstration of emerging technologies from organizations such as The Solar Energy Consortium based in Kingston, NY. Natural extensions of the project would likely include, for example, the establishment of a solar-powered water taxi/ferry system in the Mid-Hudson Region to be expanded throughout the state as resources permit. This unique vessel can also demonstrate the application of solar electric systems on recreational boats, which can potentially become a new source of clean power to augment existing sources for the long periods when boats are moored and can be feeding electricity back to the grid.

The solar-powered “Clermont II” not only represents the essence of the 2009 Quadricentennial, it is simply an idea whose time has come. The historic and future context of this event presents an opportunity to illustrate countless compelling connections between the past and the future- in areas of history, commerce, the environment, planning, tourism, and, most significantly, the concepts of “peak oil” and “relocalization” and their implications for a transportation dependent economy. And the setting is attractive, exciting, and inspirational: a special boat in a very special place; the Hudson River and the waterways of New York State, where this educational model can be experienced by people from all over the world. Please contact Captain John B. Wenz at 845-527-6107, Captain Robert Anderson at 914-489-2301, or clermont2@verizon.net for more information and to lend your support.