



BROOKLYN BASED

A Hudson River merchant sailing ship is bringing goods to Red Hook again after 100 years

BY TYLER WETHERALL May. 20, 2021



Photo: Brad Vogel

Tomorrow, a 65-foot, steel-hulled ship will sail into Brooklyn with a cargo hold packed full of goods direct from the Hudson Valley. The **Schooner Apollonia**—designed in 1946 by a naval architect, and named after the Greek god Apollo (patron and protector of sailors)—is the only **sailing merchant vessel on the Hudson River** in the last century. But hopefully it won't be the last, as its captain, Sam Merrett, is set on re-establishing water-based, emission-free shipping throughout the region.

For local producers who pride themselves on sustainability, sail freight offers a carbon-friendly mode of delivering their goods, and the Hudson River was once the superhighway of this area, with 1,200 working ships moving goods up and down it. “It’s important to me that people start realizing the impacts of transportation, and it’s not just how you get from point A to B, but how your stuff gets from point A to B,” says Merrett, who previously had a business converting diesel engines to run on alternative fuel. He’s also the co-founder of the Hudson Sloop Club, dedicated to reconnecting the community with the Hudson River. “We’re not saying the Apollonia will solve all problems—but green energy is not about just one thing.”

Restoring the schooner to seafaring condition took five years—it was on “the hard” in Boston for close to three decades prior. Last summer saw her inaugural voyage, followed by a handful of shipments between Hudson River towns, Brooklyn, and Manhattan, limited by (what else?) the pandemic. Over winter, Merrett got busy connecting family farms, breweries, distilleries and makers, building a network of

trade routes to ship not just finished products, but also crops like malt and grain. Once word got out, like-minded clients stepped forward.

“There’s a real hunger in people to move from saying, in principle, they’re a huge supporter of sustainability and finding better ways to move goods to actually taking a tangible small step, and then seeing a result,” says Brad Vogel, another member of Apollonia’s team. “Even if it’s just one small subset of goods that’s been taken off the road, that’s a start.”

The Apollonia is not an experiment in climate-friendly trade solutions; it’s a for-profit business. Merrett was first inspired by the [Vermont Sail Freight Project](#), which sailed down the Hudson River in 2013 and 2014, loaded with fresh Vermont farm goods, demonstrating the potential for river cargo. These efforts tie in with the growing international sail freight movement, committed to developing carbon neutral shipping. When the Dutch [Fairtransport](#) first launched in 2007, their brigantine was the only engineless cargo ship on the seas; now there are dozens of ventures sailing goods around the globe, with bigger ships currently in development, like the [Ceiba](#) in Costa Rica, which will have the capacity to stow 250 tonnes.

But little ships like Apollonia have their part to play, too. This summer, Merrett’s schooner returns for her first full season. The backbone of each run will be harvests from Hudson Valley Malt and Stone House Grain delivered to breweries and

distilleries from Poughkeepsie to Brooklyn, including [Wild East](#) and [Strong Rope](#) in Gowanus, and [Van Brunt Stillhouse](#) in Red Hook—but future shipments will also include everything from pillows and maple syrup to yarn and salt.

You can watch the ship sail in and unload the cargo at a harbor event on Saturday, May 22, from 2–5pm at the [RETI Center Dock](#) at Gowanus Bay Terminal. There will be goods for sale and to sample from some producers, alongside live music. And for the next run, you'll be able to order the below goods directly from [Schooner Apollonia](#) to collect harborside.

Poor Devil Pepper Company

This community-based hot sauce brand collaborates closely with makers, farmers, and local food businesses in the Hudson Valley, with a big focus on sustainability, and some genuinely awesome merch. Co-founder Laura Webster says the fashion line is a creative outlet for when they're not making hot sauce (production is tied to the local growing season, so it's just once a year). But that doesn't mean we don't genuinely want a "Soil Health is Future Wealth" beanie. More importantly, the hot sauce is next level, literally—they use fermentation to create complex, probiotic, umami-rich flavor, and everyone from [Bon Appétit](#) to [Martha Stewart](#) agrees.

Treaty CBD

Spend most of your time oscillating between trying to focus on your work or trying to stay calm because, well, life? Treaty CBD has you covered in both departments with its plant-based tinctures. As well as “Focus” and “Calm,” they also have “Recover,” for the immune system and inflammation, and “Balance,” for a full-system boost. Each tincture contains broad spectrum hemp, enhanced with bioregional plant extracts, grown using regenerative farming techniques aimed at capturing carbon and restoring the ecosystem. Hemp, it turns out, is an **excellent soil cleanser**. This is a family-run operation out of the now-organic Old Mud Creek Farm in Hudson. All round good stuff.

Hudson Valley Bee Supply

Beekeeping started as a childhood hobby for founder Megan Denver. Now she manages 200 colonies across the Hudson Valley. Apparently, that’s around 10 million bees in her domain, and her Kingston-based business has become a hub for the Hudson Valley beekeeping community, starting conversations about the importance of bees to agriculture. In a rare piece of good ecological news, the honey bee population here has grown in recent years, which is all to say, buy some raw honey, because **it’s good for you**.

Greenpoint Cidery

Fermented from all New York apples, it's dry, unfiltered, fancy farmhouse cider of the boozy variety. It's handmade in small batches with minimal intervention, which means every bottle is unique. Greenpoint resident and Brooklyn bar owner-turned-cider maker and orchardist (yes, it is a word, we checked) Nika Carlson grows her apples and presses her cider on an 80-acre farm outside Hudson, which sounds idyllic.

Atina Foods

They use recipes from Ayurveda, an ancient, alternative medicine system started in India, and incorporate local and global produce to create fermented and preserved condiments that also look lovely on your shelves and taste better. Try the Garlic Scape Pickle, which was the 2021 Good Food Awards Winner, with pickled garlic flower (scape) spiced with chili, mustard seed and fenugreek. It'll add a whole new flavor dimension to your hotdog.

Future deliveries might also include: items from [Christin Ripley Studio](#) in Catskill; [Likeminded Objects](#) in Hudson; alpaca yarn from [Fluff](#); and more.