

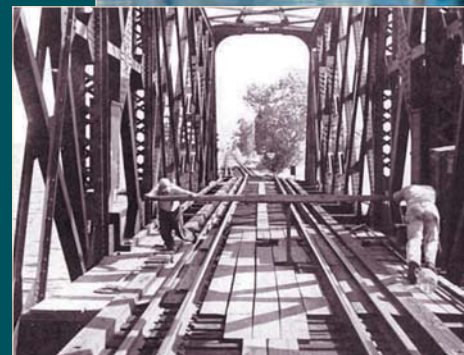
Connecting the Islands



Before the completion of the 3.4 mile long causeway in 1899 from Colchester Point to Allen Point in South Hero, the Rutland Railroad's freight and passenger cars were transported by way of a steamboat between Burlington, Vermont and Rouses Point, New York. Constructed in just over one year's time, this incredible accomplishment of industry and immigrant laborers was one part of the Railroad's 41-mile *Island Line* linking Vermont via the Champlain Islands to New York. It crossed the Winooski River, miles of beautiful but foreboding wetlands, and spanned Lake Champlain three more times to connect the Champlain Islands, Vermont and New York.

With the completion of this *Rail Link*, and with Dr. William Seward Webb, owner of Shelburne Farms as its President, the Rutland Railroad then experienced some of its most prosperous years since its founding in 1843. The *Island Line* also opened the door to prosperity for the small island farming communities by connecting them with the markets of New York City and Boston. Farms and businesses sent milk, butter, vegetables and huge quantities of block ice cut from Lake Champlain in winter.

Two miles further north is the gap in the causeway known as "the cut". A rotating 196' swing bridge, made in Wilmington, Delaware, spanned this navigational channel into Mallett's Bay. Competition from larger railroads and the trucking industry and the rise of the passenger automobile accelerated the *Line's* decline. The last passenger and mail trains rode the causeway in 1953 and the last freight train ran on September 24, 1961.



Courtesy of Vermont Life Magazine



The bridge tenders, who lived on site, opened and closed the 230-ton bridge by hand! The bridge was dismantled and its high quality steel recycled.



Courtesy of Paul O. Boisvert



Courtesy of John Gardner

Over 598,000 cubic yards of fill and marble "armor stone" was needed for this engineering achievement. To limit the amount of fill needed, the causeway was built on the shallowest depths, which explains its curved alignment.

Although the trains are silent, this causeway is now a unique part of a network of recreation paths throughout the Lake Champlain region. In 2000, a demonstration "bike ferry" began carrying passengers across the cut on a limited summer schedule.

