

# Ground Beneath Your Feet

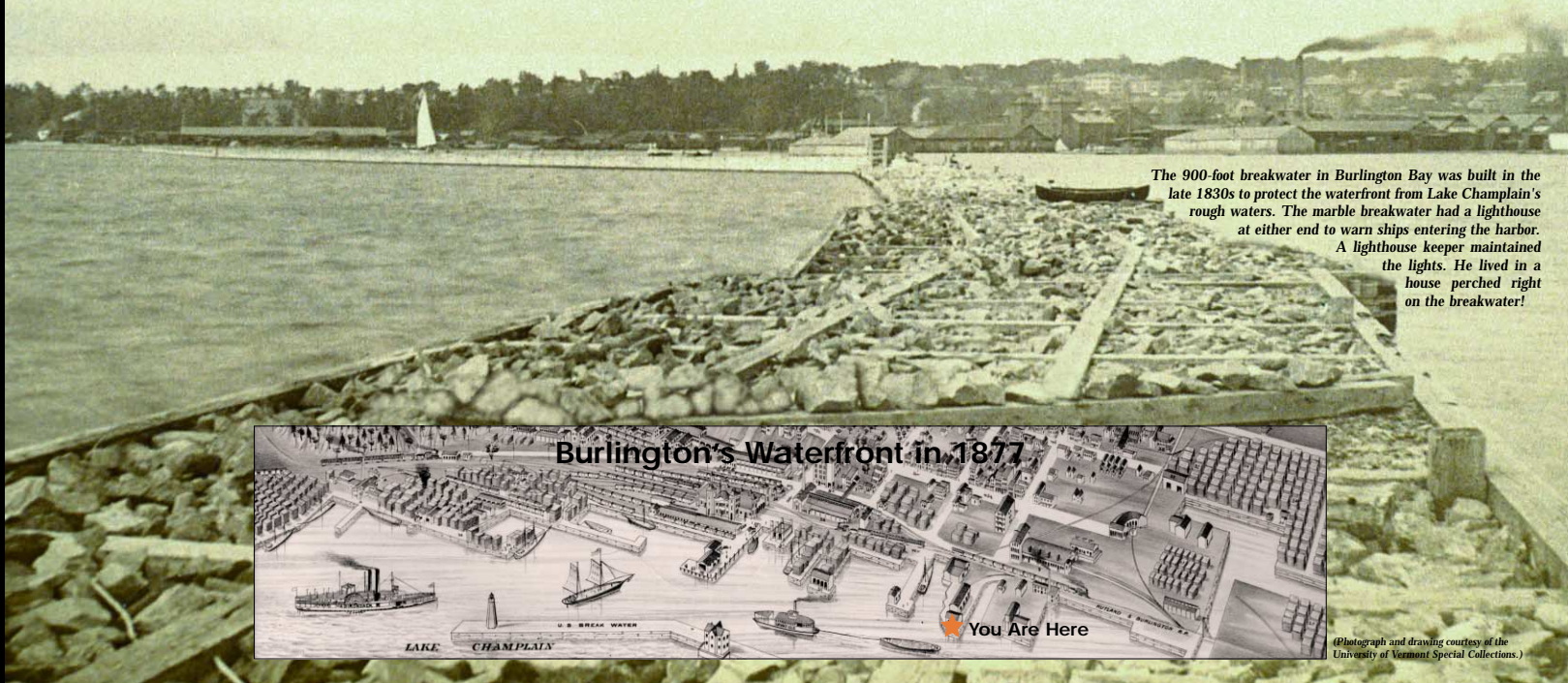


If you were standing here 200 years ago, you'd be wet. The natural shoreline ends about 500 feet behind you. Burlington's first dock was built here in 1810. Before that the waterfront consisted of a raft of logs tied to the shore. Cargo delivery was hard, because big ships couldn't dock in the shallow water. Resourceful sailors pushed barrels—containing pork, salt, rum or molasses—overboard and floated them to shore.

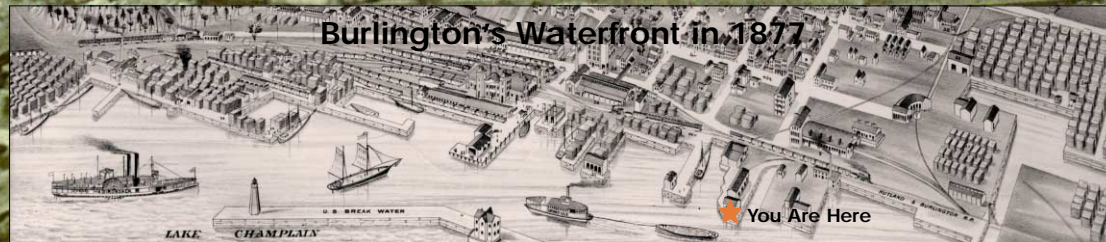
The waterfront began to take its current shape when the railroad came in 1849. Railroad companies filled swampy land to build rail yards, passenger stations, freight houses, warehouses, and transfer stations. The Rutland Railroad built this pier in 1868, bringing tracks to the water's edge. Millions of tons of freight, and thousands of passengers, shuttled between ships and trains right where you stand.

By the 1870s, the waterfront was a thriving place. Factories, warehouses, shops, and massive stacks of lumber crowded the shore. Twelve wharves jutted into the lake. Burlington was the nation's third largest lumber port. So much wood was milled here in the 1800s that most of the waterfront is made up of sawdust!

The lumber industry began to fade by the 1890s. By 1950, the automobile and airplane replaced the steamboat and locomotive. The waterfront became a lonely place. Only a few businesses remained and huge oil tanks had replaced the railroad tracks. Vermonters "rediscovered" the waterfront in the 1980s and created the vibrant recreation area you see today.



The 900-foot breakwater in Burlington Bay was built in the late 1830s to protect the waterfront from Lake Champlain's rough waters. The marble breakwater had a lighthouse at either end to warn ships entering the harbor. A lighthouse keeper maintained the lights. He lived in a house perched right on the breakwater!



(Photograph and drawing courtesy of the University of Vermont Special Collections.)