

# A Water Highway



Lake Champlain is a natural highway. Its waters lead to the Atlantic Ocean and the Great Lakes via the Richelieu and St. Lawrence Rivers. Before trains, trucks, and airplanes, boats were the only effective way to transport bulk goods over long distances, making the lake a very important transportation route.

Lake Champlain's importance grew in 1823 with the opening of the Champlain Canal. This manmade water route connected Lake Champlain to the Hudson River. The canal allowed cargo boats to sail from Burlington to Albany and New York City. Burlington became a major port with this new interstate water system in place.

Imagine yourself here in the late 1850s. The lake is crowded with traffic. You see steamboats busily puffing across the lake, graceful schooners racing with the wind, and squat canal boats weighed down with lumber heading south to New York markets.

Factories, warehouses, shops, and offices crowd the waterfront.

*A canal boat loaded with lumber sails south to the Hudson River via the Champlain Canal in the late 1850s. At one time, there were over 1000 canal boats traveling between here and New York. They were as common as tractor-trailers on today's interstate highways.*

The raw sounds of sawmills, blacksmiths, stonecutters, laborers, and horse teams fill the air behind you. You smell acrid smoke from forges, wood fires, and the sweet smell of fresh sawdust.

Longshoremen unload barrels from a canal boat docked in front of you. The boat's sailors shout to another crew – telling them about their long trip from Poughkeepsie. This was a very busy place. And the lake connected it to the rest of the world.

Advances in transportation eroded that connection. The 19<sup>th</sup> century's railroad and the 20<sup>th</sup> century's highways made water travel outdated. Instead of being a connection, the lake's broad waters became a barrier.



*In the late 1700s, giant rafts of logs were built on the lake's ice during the winter. Once spring came, they were floated north to Québec City on the St. Lawrence River. In Canada, the logs were milled, loaded onto ocean-going vessels, and then shipped across the Atlantic Ocean. Wood from Vermont was used to build cities in Europe 200 years ago.*



*In the late 1800s a steamboat awaits passengers at the Central Vermont Railroad dock. This interconnected system takes passengers from rail to boat to lake resorts.*

