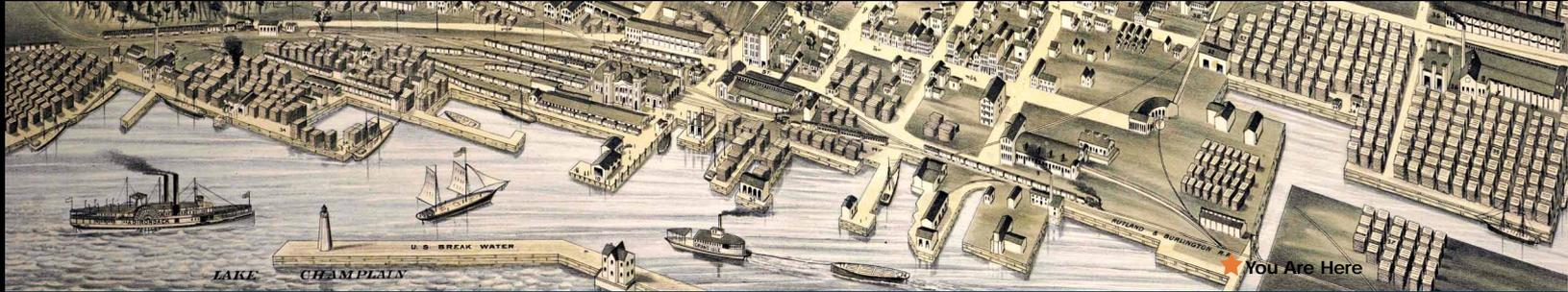


# Pine Street Barge Canal



1877 Bird's eye view of Burlington showing the Pine Street Barge Canal in the lower right. Note the milled lumber stacked around the canal and alongside much of Burlington's waterfront. (Courtesy Special Collections, Bailey-Howe Library, University of Vermont.)

Imagine the year is 1870. You're standing amongst acres of stacked, milled lumber that crowd the waterfront, destined for ports all over the world. Countless band saws screech and dust fills the air as mills and factories churn out their wooden products. A train rolls in from Chicago, loaded with fresh supplies from Michigan forests. To the south, sturdy boats fill the barge canal, awaiting their cargo.

The combination of raw timber, water and rail led to Burlington's rise in the mid-1800s to one of the nation's most important lumber ports. In the 1860s, entrepreneur Lawrence Barnes saw that more lakefront access was needed to load and unload boats at the increasingly busy industrial port. He owned a bit of swampy land, described as a "miasmic frog pond," near the lakeshore. With the help of forty men, Barnes transformed his swamp into a wood-flanked canal complete with a single-track drawbridge.

The city's booming lumber industry ended in late 1890s. Lumber companies around the canal were gradually replaced with other businesses, especially coal dealers. A manufactured gas plant opened near the canal in 1895. The plant converted oil and coal into gas for streetlights and heating. Toxic wastes from this process were disposed of in the wetlands around the canal, contaminating the area. In 1983, the canal was designated a Superfund site by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

After many years of study and extensive public input, a cleanup plan was devised and the site was restored as a wetland in 2003. The barge canal now supports a variety of wildlife including turtles, ducks, beaver and frogs. The wetland also acts as a natural filter for some of the city's stormwater runoff, helping to protect Lake Champlain. The only visible reminder of the barge canal's industrial past is the circa 1920 steel trunnion bascule ("see-saw") bridge at the outlet to the lake.



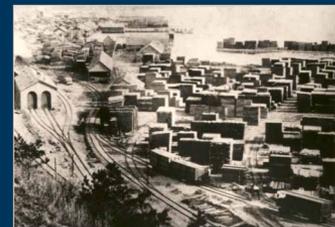
As the Pine Street Barge Canal fell into disrepair in the early twentieth century, at least five canal boats were abandoned in its waters. This is a composite picture of multiple photographs showing one of those boats. (Courtesy Lake Champlain Maritime Museum.)



The canal boats were documented by archaeologists from the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum when the canal was drained during the Superfund cleanup. The sunken vessels are considered historically important because they contain information about how these once common watercraft were built. (Courtesy Lake Champlain Maritime Museum.)



In the mid-1800s federal law exempted Canadian lumber from tariff. This created a profitable industry, with Canadian boats, known as "pin-flats," bringing forest products to Burlington. (Courtesy Lake Champlain Maritime Museum.)



During the late-1800s, much of Burlington's waterfront was taken up by lumberyards. In fact, parts of Burlington's waterfront today are actually built on top of thousands of tons of compacted wood chips! (Courtesy Special Collections, Bailey-Howe Library, University of Vermont.)