The north-south alignment of Lake Champlain and the Hudson River made it an important corridor for early indigenous peoples traveling between the St. Lawrence River and the Atlantic Ocean. Except for periods of drought, canoes could travel south along Wood Creek to present-day Fort Ann, New York. The 12-mile stretch of land between Fort Ann and Fort Edward was known as Waikojossconoois, the “Great Carrying Place” by the Mohicans living here. Their neighbors included the Haund السن (Oneida) to the west and the Abenaki to the northeast.

A Strategic Corridor
European colonizers quickly understood the importance of the Great Carrying Place. The French settled in the Champlain Valley and the Netherlands established colonies along the Hudson River. The English later took control of the Dutch territory and constructed the first of many strongholds at present-day Fort Tryon in 1651, during King William’s War. The Queen’s Fort—later named Fort Anne—was built in 1711 during Queen Anne’s War. The southern end of the Great Carrying Place was guarded by Fort Nicholas, built in 1709. Fort Edward—originally called Fort Johnson—was built there in 1730 during the French and Indian War. American troops at Fort Anne and Edward were overwhelmed by British General John Burgoyne’s 1777 campaign, which ended at his surrender at Saratoga.

Glacial deposits
Enduring supplies of water were essential to the early residents of the Champlain Valley, as the glacial lake bed was a source of fresh water and the glacial deposits for the soil. Lake Champlain was formed from interglacial. The Lake Champlain Valley was named with the French explorer, Pierre Eugene de Savoie, Marquis de Chenonceau, who mapped the area in the 17th century. The Champlain Valley is one of the most fertile agricultural regions in the United States, with a rich soil derived from glacial till and bedrock. The valley has a temperate climate with mild winters and warm summers, providing a favorable environment for farming.
Conflict Brings Change

Ancient Engineering and Modern Innovation

The War of 1812 not only tested the American resolve for independence from Great Britain, it also helped usher in an era of profound advances in transportation. Prior to the war, a lack of political and public support stymied proposals to build canals connecting the Hudson River to Lake Erie and Lake Champlain.

Difficulties associated with transporting troops, arms and supplies from the Hudson River to the Great Lakes and Lake Champlain during the war bolstered the case for building canals. New York state politician DeWitt Clinton recognized the strategic and commercial advantages canals could provide. He led the effort to convince the New York State Legislature to approve the construction of the Erie and Champlain canals in 1817. By November 24, 1819, the Great Western Portage had a functioning canal, connecting Fort Edward with Fort Ann. Four years later, the entire 64-mile-long Champlain Canal from Troy to Fort Ann was complete.
A Corridor of Commerce

The Champlain Valley's natural resources were difficult to transport before the opening of the Champlain Canal. Most of the valley's trade went north to Lower Canada (now Quebec) via the Richelieu River. But the Falls of Champlain hindered travel downstream to the St. Lawrence River. The Falls to the north and the expanse of the Great Carrying Place to the south limited Lake Champlain communities' access to markets beyond the valley.

Trade exploded when the Champlain Canal opened in 1823. Soon after, canal boats carried bread, wool, stone, iron ore, and lumber to Hudson River ports, New York City, and with the subsequent 1826 opening of the Erie Canal, the Great Lakes. Trade eventually expanded to the north with the 1843 opening of the Champlain Canal. The canal boats returned with finished goods and coal, spurting and more commerce, communication, and innovation. Canal-side towns, like Mechanicville, New York, (map below) grew and thrived.

Wind and Mules Power Commerce

In the early days of canal towns, many boats were trained on the lake by mule drivers. This was expensive and required operators to stay on or others to complete their journeys. But Maysville especially (map below) solved the problem. Built by Dr. Alfred Burton, the Stillwater canal boat CDC was the first steam powered boat on the entire Champlain Canal. With masts that could be lowered and a compartment that could be raised while in a shallow canal, this boat could be lowered by horse or mule or under the bridges along the waterfront. Mechanicville as the canal town known as McCue (pronounced was) was patterned after similar towns that grew in Baltimore Harbor. This facility is now a two-story building for retail spaces, including New York City, Buffalo, Detroit, and Aurora City.

Boom Towns Big and Small

The Champlain Canal forever changed the community's lifestyle. As commerce increased, populations grew. Troy, New York, at the canal's southern terminus, became a shipping port city. Nearby waterpower and shipping hubs spured the growth of Burlington, Vermont, and Potsdam, New York. High-quality Adirondack iron ore and coal, which is still mined today, was shipped out ofFort Ticonderoga. New shipping and population doubled by the 1860s between 1826 and 1866. Lake-side warehousues and businesses popped up along the canals and Lake Champlain, with building to be stopped, brick building became a strong industry in Lake Champlain. Aurora & Ganey Kent had in Champlain, New York (sawmill shown), produced not only canal boats, but other wooden craft and pleasure boat.

Sheep Dominate the Landscape

With access to new markets, mutton wool quickly became a valuable commodity. The sheep population swelled to 1.5 million in 1870. As sheep outnumbered people by about 20-to-1, it is said sheep competition with western states, taw and produces, and the rise introduction of the railroad led to the end of industry's replacement by the dairy industry within a few decades.
A Corridor of Ideas

Like raw materials and finished goods, ideas traveled along the Champlain Canal. At waterfront gathering places, locals and waterway travelers exchanged ideas about the Suffrage and Abolition movements, visions for new religions and Utopian communities, wild conspiracy theories, and news of the world.

A Floating Underground Railroad

Resolved people took the strategic Hudson-Champlain corridor to escape slavery prior to the American Civil War. Many self-emancipated landed in Rescue Point, New York, and added to the Canadian border. “This idea has engulfed the indescribable pleasure of being free from the liberty-luring democratic bondage, to thus be free from the dominion of a queen whose presence is in the rubber of the publisher’s happy,” wrote Abolitionist and Underground Railroad agent Nat Brown “Aas.

Henry Raper Johnson and Samuel J. Ward (below) used the Champlain Canal and Lake Champlain to elude their freedoms. Both went on to become leaders in the Abolition Movement.

Utopias and New Religions

The conspiracies of the Second Great Awakening—or early-19th century revivals in Christianity—and sector conversions among the radical abolitionist and suffrage movements in upstate New York. Sylvester Joseph Reish began the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—commonly known as the Mormon Church—and the church’s first settlement at Kirtland, Ohio. This Seventh Day Adventist minister founding the Sabbath, followed a similar path to the boom of ideas like the Church of Jesus Christ and other sects through the canal.

William Miller of Price’s Tory Term, dedicated his life to the Mormon Church after converting his local church of Presbyterian faith. Miller was named and his works were attacks on Millerism past and present. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was formed in April 1830, and Miller was shut down in the 1830s. By the 1840s, the utopian future of Millerism was widely accepted, believed to have been revealed by the God to his prophet, Joseph Smith.

A Civil War Hits Home

In 1861, one year before the first battle of the conflict, American colonies in Virginia purchased more than an estimated 400,000 slaves from African origin. Slaves were sold by the hundreds and thousands, overwhelming the majority, as the nation prepared for war. In April 1861, President Abraham Lincoln called for 75,000 men to serve the U.S. Army.

The National Cemetery Association was established after the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln. The cemetery was established in 1861, with the first burial on April 1863. The cemetery is located on the grounds of the Lincoln Memorial.

Conspiracies Abound

Good—bad—ideals found along the early canal. While many of the movements suffrage and abolition were shared along the interconnected waterways, many others found none. The doctrine of conspiracy, from the Holy Ghost to the Masonic order, is often found across the country's history. To this day, the Masonic order depicts the Masonic sign of the Anti-Masonic.

Other conspiracy theories about the country's banks and the economy's politics, the Catholic Church's relation to the government, and the Irish immigrants from the potato famine are some of these. The Irish Catholic group known as the Catholic Nationalist Party was founded. The Catholic Nationalist Party was established in the early 20th century by the Catholic Church, the pope, and the Vatican against their opponents.
When it opened, the Champlain Canal had a capacity for vessels that were 78 feet long, 13.5 feet wide, and 3.25 feet tall with a 4.6-foot-deep draft. The canal was expanded again in 1862 and 1877. The final expansion in 1878 allowed for 102-foot-long, 23-foot-wide, 16-foot-tall vessels with a 9-foot-deep draft. An 1823-class canal boat could carry 120,000 pounds; almost 100 years later, a barge in the waterway could haul 800,000 pounds.

The canal had its highest volume of commerce in 1890—1.5 million tons—but within 20 years, only half that amount was shipped on the canal. Even with the 1914 construction of the Champlain Barge Canal, the waterway was on borrowed time. In 1895, a new railroad connected Boston to Burlington, opening new markets to the Champlain Valley. The 1927 completion of a railroad connecting Albany with Quebec along the western shore of Lake Champlain made the north-south 322 miles along the Hudson and Lake Champlain much faster. Waterways froze in the winter, railroad ran year-round.

Paved highways and trucking in the early 20th century contributed further to the decline of canal traffic. By 1960, the wooden canal boats were replaced by barges with steel hulls. Barges delivering jet fuel, heating oil, and gasoline plied the canal for the next few decades, but over-water transit of fossil fuels ended in the early 1990s.

A Slow Decline

Today, there’s still traffic along the Champlain Canal in recreational vessels. Many of these boats use the canal to follow the Champlain Canal from Lake Champlain to Lake Ontario, where they join the Oswego Canal, then travel south along the Richie’s Point to Lake Ontario and the Champlain Canal. Others travel to and from international destinations, such as Europe and the St. Lawrence Seaway, then travel south along the Richie’s Point to Lake Champlain and the Champlain Canal. While the canal is in a quiet position, it is a quiet adventure for anyone looking for a tranquil trip. The waterway allows some areas of scenic beauty to be introduced into the Lake Champlain.

Lake Champlain is known for more than just its beautiful scenery, it’s also known for its climate. The weather patterns vary greatly, and understanding how these patterns are changing is essential to the health of the lake and the species that call it home.

A family stands on both sides of the canal, admiring the view of Lake Champlain. The water seems calm, but the landscape is ever-changing, much like the lake itself. The family enjoys the chance to explore the area and spend time together. The calmness of the lake is a welcome contrast to the bustling activities that take place on the shore.
Unwanted Fish is a Big Threat

Nature is brutal, the round goby (Neogobius melanostomus) is a bottom-dwelling fish that outcompete native species for food and habitat. They also predate on eggs and fry of other fish, including bass and lake sturgeon. They have a particular proclivity to consuming eggs of native species. They outcompete native species in a beneficial to the round goby in the process, leading to declines native fish populations like ONs and brook trout. These tactics subjugate because in turn, especially the bass and sturgeon, are more common, the round goby is a valuable and potentially harmful - which can affect its contamination. As the native bass, round goby has not been found north of Lake Champlain.

Kicking the Door

Experts are researching and developing aquatic invasive species for food and habitat. They also prey on eggs and fry of other fish, including bass and lake sturgeon. They have a particular fondness to consuming eggs of native species. They outcompete native species in the Lake Champlain ecosystem, leading to declines native fish populations like ONs and brook trout. These tactics subjugate because in turn, especially the bass and sturgeon, are more common, the round goby is a valuable and potentially harmful - which can affect its contamination. As the native bass, round goby has not been found north of Lake Champlain.