

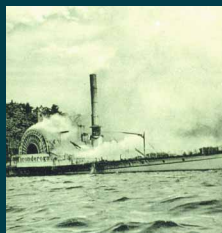
# Danger Afloat



## Maritime Perils

Lake Champlain can be a dangerous waterway. The lake's many islands, reefs and points of land make navigation hazardous in foggy conditions. When a storm hits, navigation becomes dangerous. Gale-force winds can turn the calm, peaceful lake into a frothing nightmare for mariners.

Wind and waves have claimed many vessels and lives on Lake Champlain. Its bottom is scattered with hundreds of wrecks. The *O.J. Walker* was sunk by a windstorm just off the Burlington breakwater in 1895. The *Walker* sits in 65 feet of water about a mile due west of here, and is now a part of an underwater historic preserve.



Fire was always a concern on steamboats. Wood and coal-fired boilers burned extremely hot to produce necessary steam to move a 1000-ton vessel. Fiery embers could easily ignite wood soaked with engine oil. This steamboat, for example, burns uncontrollably on Lake George in the early 1900s.



Accidents happen. On a calm night in July, 1875, the steamboat *Champlain II* ran aground while cruising north of Westport, New York. No one was killed, but the steamboat was a total loss.

Other vessels have been lost to mechanical failure. The lake's first steamboat, the *Vermont*, sank to the bottom after her engine's connecting rod punched a hole in her hull. Fire has also claimed a number of vessels on the lake. The steamboat *Phoenix* burned and sank during a night crossing a few miles northwest of here in 1819.

The steamboats and cargo boats are gone today, but the danger remains. Luckily, when there is trouble on the lake, the U.S. Coast Guard is there to help. Search and rescue operations are launched from the Coast Guard Station here.