

Bustling Port to Quiet Retreat



Today a tranquil place to live or pass through on the way to the ferry, Port Kent was once a busy port for canal boats picking up iron ore, lumber and other raw materials from the nearby Ausable Valley. Later the town became a popular vacation destination.



Port Kent might have slumbered on for years if not for Elkanah Watson who pushed the New York State legislature to support construction of the Champlain Canal (completed in 1823).

Watson was instrumental in canal development in the state and traveled many of the rivers and lakes of New York to help determine the best routes. The Champlain Canal, at the southern end of the lake in Whitehall, connected the lake to the Hudson River, opening a huge market for raw materials from the Champlain

Valley and cargo traveling between the United States and Canada. Watson's grand house on the bluff, with its windowed cupola for viewing the waterfront, is a reminder of the prosperity generated by this increased trade.

As railroad shipping became increasingly faster and cheaper, beginning in the 1870s, canal boat trade was affected and Port Kent ceased to be a thriving port. Its beautiful location in the Adirondacks along Lake Champlain, however, made for an ideal vacation spot for visitors arriving by train and steamboat. Small hotels (now private residences) dating from before and after the turn of the 19th century still dot the lakeshore.



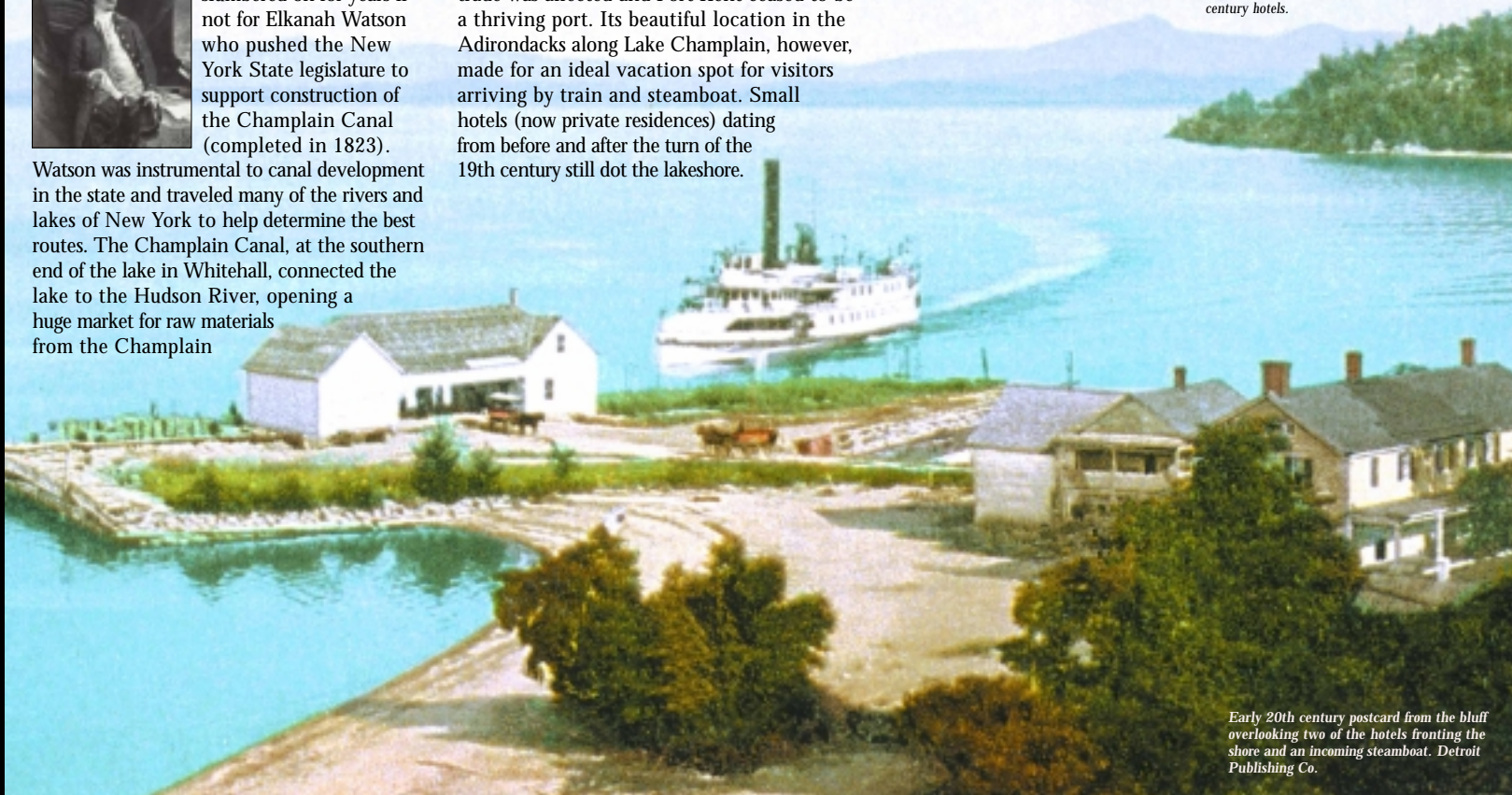
A lazy summer afternoon at the Lakeside Inn.

Courtesy Anne Porter and Associates, Inc., Keeseville, NY.



Visitors had ample access to fresh breezes and lake views from the porches of these late 19th century hotels.

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Early 20th century postcard from the bluff overlooking two of the hotels fronting the shore and an incoming steamboat. Detroit Publishing Co.