

Have You Heard the News?



In the nineteenth century, word-of-mouth and hand-carried letters brought news much more quickly than newspapers, given the busy transportation network on the lake. Travelers—peddlers, itinerant preachers, westering emigrants, or sloop and canal boat captains and crews—were always welcome for the news that they brought from other parts of the world. Taverns and inns were the centers of storytelling: news was embellished on here, and was transformed into local folklore.

John Halstead began the first ferry service to the village in about 1801, and Halstead's house (built in 1800 on this very site) came to serve for 25 years as barroom and public meeting place. From 1833 until the opening of the Armory in 1861, town meetings were held at an inn across the street run by Harry J. Persons.



The Lake's Toll

In lake ports, like seaports, tragic stories of death by drowning were all too common. In 1825, John Halstead's 25-year-old son Jacob, 13-year-old son George, and their stepbrother Jacob Pardee, along with two other young men, were drowned when the canal schooner *Troy* went down in a November gale. Their tombstones and those of many other men, women and children swallowed by the lake can be seen at Westport's Hillside Cemetery. (Courtesy of Kevin Dann.)



Fashion on the Water

In 1850, Westport women traveled by steam packet to New York City to hear famous soprano Jenny Lind. They returned with many a tale of people and places seen, and lots of details about the latest fashions. Here, Captain Philomena Daniels (at the wheel, in the pilot house) sports a hat as fashionable as any of the passengers that the "Victor" might carry. The Victor was a steam ferry carrying passengers between Westport and Vergennes, Vermont with "flag stops" at all the small summer resorts and large private landings enroute. (Courtesy of the Bixby Memorial Library.)



"Village Tavern," John Lewis Krimmel, 1813, oil on canvas, courtesy of the Toledo Museum of Art.



Lake Champlain
Historic Landings
Heritage Trail

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