

Pirates and Campers on the Gold Coast



 Lake Champlain
Basin Program
Historic Landings
Heritage Trail

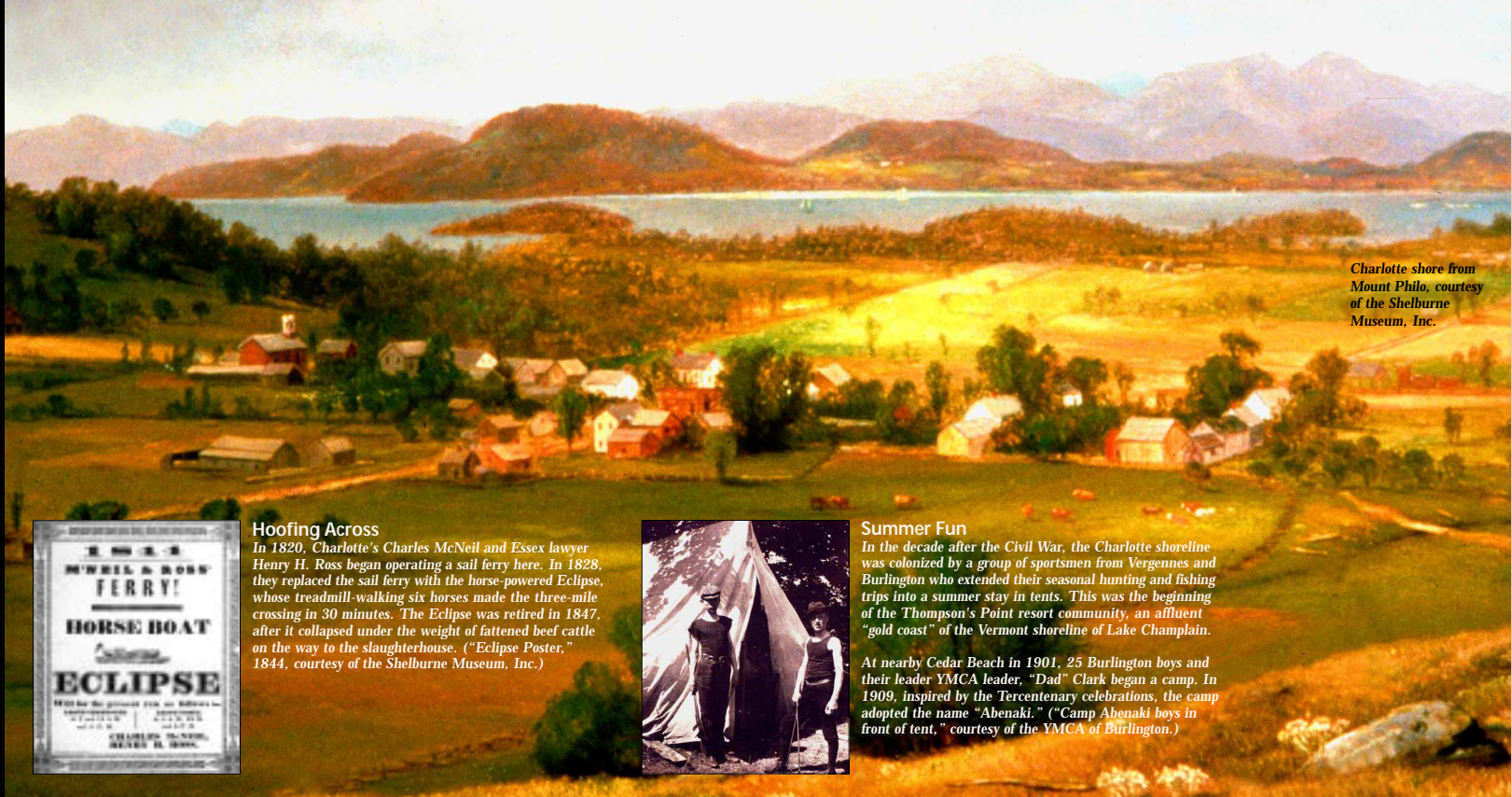
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During the first half of the 19th century, McNeil's Landing was a busy place where merchant craft stopped to pick up local produce for transport through the Champlian Canal, while northbound vessels dropped off sugar, salt, molasses, liquor, dry goods, notions, and other merchandise. Once the whistle of the first locomotive from the Rutland and Burlington Railroad was heard in 1849, these sounds began to fade, eventually replaced by the sounds of summer campers at play.

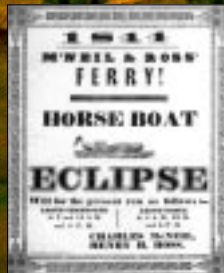


Lake Champlain "Pirates"

The summer residents of Thompson's Point and other resort areas on the lake sometimes clashed with neighbors whom they labeled "pirates." These were families who transformed abandoned canal barges into houseboats, making their living moving firewood, coal, and other goods about the lake. During a November storm in 1904, the caretaker of Birch (now "Garden") Island set adrift a so-called "pirate" family that had moored for safety at a private dock. Eventually their houseboat smashed into pieces on the shore. The family sued, and the Vermont Supreme Court ruled in their favor. ("Pirates on Houseboat," courtesy of Special Collections, Bailey-Howe Library, University of Vermont.)

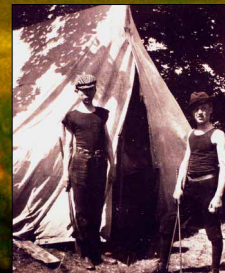


Charlotte shore from
Mount Philo, courtesy
of the Shelburne
Museum, Inc.



Hoofing Across

In 1820, Charlotte's Charles McNeil and Essex lawyer Henry H. Ross began operating a sail ferry here. In 1828, they replaced the sail ferry with the horse-powered Eclipse, whose treadmill-walking six horses made the three-mile crossing in 30 minutes. The Eclipse was retired in 1847, after it collapsed under the weight of fattened beef cattle on the way to the slaughterhouse. ("Eclipse Poster," 1844, courtesy of the Shelburne Museum, Inc.)



Summer Fun

In the decade after the Civil War, the Charlotte shoreline was colonized by a group of sportsmen from Vergennes and Burlington who extended their seasonal hunting and fishing trips into a summer stay in tents. This was the beginning of the Thompson's Point resort community, an affluent "gold coast" of the Vermont shoreline of Lake Champlain.

At nearby Cedar Beach in 1901, 25 Burlington boys and their leader YMCA leader, "Dad" Clark began a camp. In 1909, inspired by the Tercentenary celebrations, the camp adopted the name "Abenaki." ("Camp Abenaki boys in front of tent," courtesy of the YMCA of Burlington.)