

A Way to the World



The LaChute River supplied more than power for the mills. It also connected to Lake Champlain and the wider world. People and goods traveled much more easily by water than by land, so the corridor formed by Lake Champlain, Lake George and the Hudson River formed a veritable inland highway. After the War of 1812 ended and this area began to fill with settlers, New York State built the Champlain Canal to connect Lake Champlain with the Hudson River and the Erie Canal to the West. Twenty years later, the Richelieu Canal made a connection to the north with the Saint Lawrence River in Canada.

Almost overnight, the “Ti Creek Basin” filled with canal boats. They arrived full of iron ore, coal and pulpwood and all manner of store goods. They left filled with milled lumber, paper pulp, refined graphite, pig iron and foundry castings such as anchors, stoves, fire dogs and machine parts. Ticonderoga’s industries enjoyed cheap transportation for both incoming raw materials and outgoing manufactured goods.

Thanks to local supplies of lumber and iron, many of the canal boats plying in and out of the creek basin originated in local ship yards. Ticonderoga’s first local historian, Joseph Cook, said that the opening of the canal “raised a fever; all the town were about to become boatmen.” Between 1819 and 1850, Ticonderoga boat builders constructed an average of ten canal boats per year.



Like all carriers of cargo, canalers only made money if they were moving goods. So families lived on their boats, occupying a tiny cabin in the stern. In winter, they “rafted up” in the larger ports and sent their children to the local school until the spring thaw. Illustration from Picturesque America, 1876.



The canal system knit together dozens of ports in the northeast United States and southern Canada. In any harbor, boats from both countries tied up together, as here in Saint Jean sur Richelieu, Quebec. Courtesy of the Canal Society of New York State.



The paper and pulp industry in Ticonderoga employed dozens of canal boats during the shipping season. Pulp mills needed to store up enough wood to carry them through the winter months when the waterways froze up. Courtesy of the Ticonderoga Historical Society.



After French explorer Samuel de Champlain fought a battle with Iroquois Indians in July 1609, he pursued the retreating group until he reached the falls before turning back to Canada. Collections of Fort Ticonderoga.