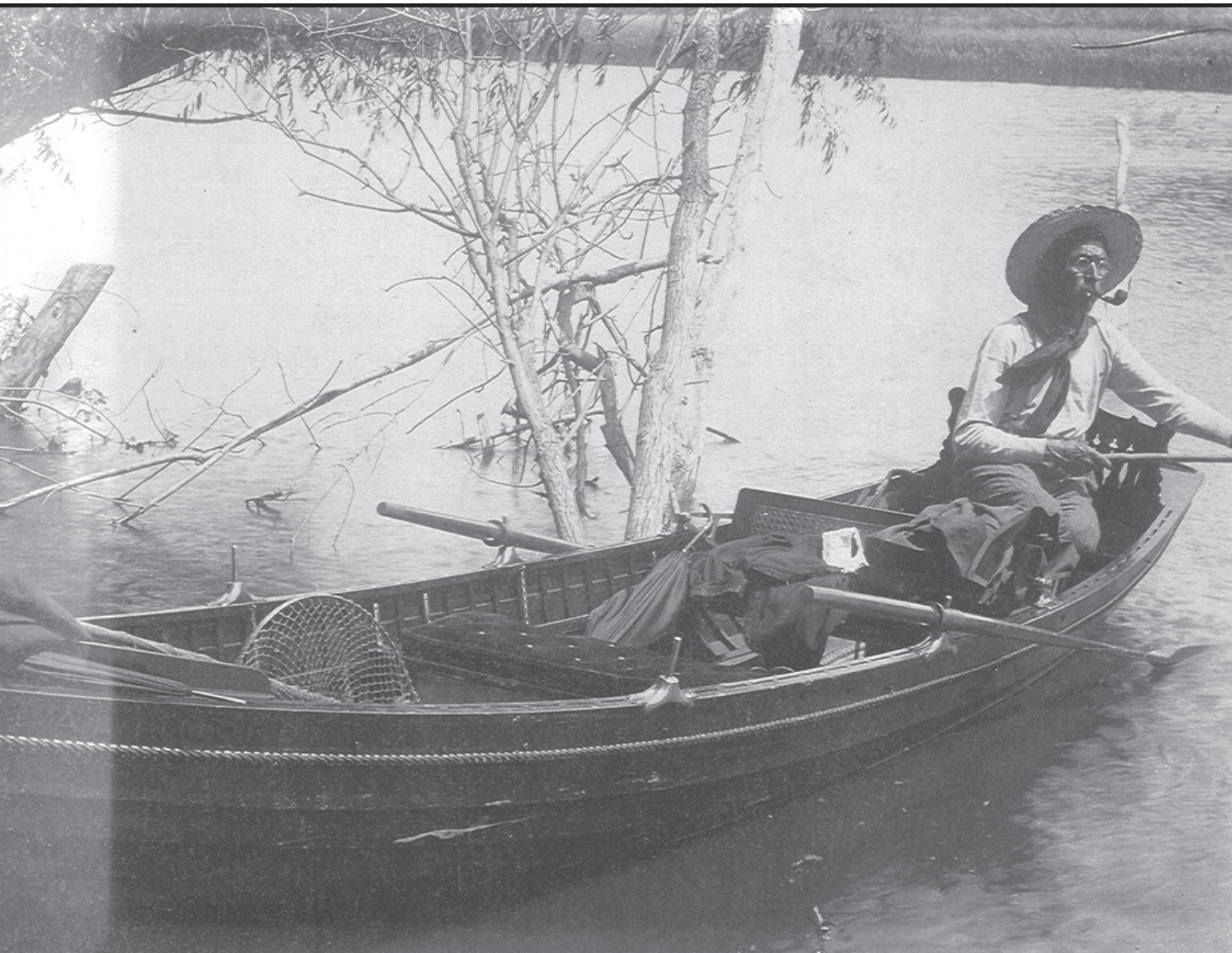
EUROPEANS & NATIVE AMERICANS: A LASTING IMPACT



A Lasting Impact on Native Cultures

LCMM and Dr. Fred Wiseman

Archaeologists believe that in the early sixteenth century, the St. Lawrence Iroquoians, the Mahican, and the Western Abenaki occupied the Champlain Valley. In 1534, French explorer Jacques Cartier entered the Gulf of St. Lawrence while looking for the Northwest Passage. During the following two years, Cartier attempted to develop trade relations with the St. Lawrence Iroquois and other tribes living along the banks of the St. Lawrence River. This was a time when the first "virgin ground" diseases swept through the valley decimating the local natives. The French attempt to establish a colony in the St. Lawrence Valley during the sixteenth century failed, although sporadic trade for furs in exchange for metal tools did occur between the French and the St. Lawrence tribes. This trade with the St. Lawrence Iroquoians continued until sometime before 1603, when they vanished from the area. The reason for their disappearance is unknown, but it appears that they were devastated by warfare with neighboring tribes over the possession of metal tools and from European diseases to which they had no natural immunity. The St. Lawrence Iroquoian monopoly over European metal may have upset the balance between the St. Lawrence Iroquoians and neighboring tribes, who apparently waged war with the St. Lawrence Iroquoians in order to secure metal tools and weapons for themselves. Archaeological evidence also suggests that the St. Lawrence Iroquois were assimilated with the Western Abenaki and came to occupy areas along northern Lake Champlain (Haviland and Power 1994:152-153; Trigger and Pendergast 1978:357-361).

The diseases which the St. Lawrence Iroquoians and others contracted from the French no doubt spread quickly throughout the Champlain Valley. The struggle over French trade also caused great unrest in the Champlain Valley. The Mohawk Iroquois, who inhabited primarily the Mohawk Valley, became a dominant tribe from Quebec to Connecticut. In the early 1600's French Missionaries listed several villages, probably Abenaki on the eastern side of the lake (H&P:1), but inland and up river valleys as protection in war. Old stories and toponymy (place-names) also give evidence for an old, continuous Abenaki presence in the valley during these tumultuous times.

In 1609 the Mahicans living in the Hudson Valley came in contact with Dutch explorer Henry Hudson. Shortly thereafter, the Dutch began to trade metal tools to the Mahican in exchange for furs. The Mahican also developed alliances with the French. When the English captured New Amsterdam in 1664, a region which included much of the Mahicans' traditional territory, the Mahican were forced to develop alliances with the British. By 1700 the Mahican population had been decreased from an estimated 4000 to about 500 through European diseases, famine, wars, and political pressures. Many of the Mahican merged with other groups, including the Dutch, the Western Abenaki, the French, and the Mohawk Iroquois. By 1720 the Mahican no longer existed as an organized native tribe in the Champlain and Hudson Valleys (Brasser 1978:198-206).

The influx of Europeans to the Northeast caused great upheaval among the region's Native American populations. Disease, confusing political and economic relations, and continuous warfare split native communities apart and forced them to join outlying groups. The area inhabited by the Western Abenaki at the northern end of Lake Champlain became a haven for Native American refugees from all over the Northeast, who were displaced by European settlements and wars. The Champlain Valley's community of Native Americans also relocated numerous times due to military and political conflicts in the region throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but they always returned to Lake Champlain and their homeland (Calloway 1990).

Exploration/Contact Period (1609-1664)

French explorer Samuel de Champlain was the first European to see the lake and valley that now bear his name. In July 1609 Champlain joined a war party of Algonquin, Huron, and Montagnais who paddled up the lake with twenty-four canoes in search of their enemy the Mohawk Iroquois. Champlain and his war party confronted a group of Mohawk warriors at Ticonderoga, where Champlain killed three Mohawk with his arquebus. Thus were established French allies and enemies that endured for nearly two centuries (Bellico 1992:9-12).

For Europeans, one of the important results of Champlain's exploration in the Champlain Valley was the discovery of a nearly complete water route from the St. Lawrence River to the Hudson River. Shortly after Champlain's expedition into the valley, the Dutch explorer Henry Hudson sailed up the river that now bears his name in search of the Northwest Passage. He sailed as far as present-day Albany, New York, and claimed the lands north into the Champlain Valley. Although the French and Dutch did not initially settle the Champlain Valley, they both had a great interest in the area's natural resources. Both colonial powers were heavily involved in the fur trade and depended upon the Native Americans of the Champlain Valley for their fur supply.

Throughout the early seventeenth century, the Iroquois raided Native American and French settlements in the St. Lawrence Valley using Lake Champlain as their invasion route. In the 1640s, French Jesuit missionaries began an effort to develop peaceful relationships with the Western Abenakis of the northern Champlain Basin at Isle La Motte and Swanton/Alburg, and Iroquois of the Mohawk River to Christianize them by establishing missions within their villages. Early Jesuit attempts to make alliances with the Iroquois in northeastern New York largely failed, however, because the Iroquois felt threatened by the Jesuits and believed that they brought bad luck. However, these efforts planted the seeds that later bore fruit in the eventual establishment of French-allied Iroquois villages that became Akwesasne, Kahnesetake and Kahnawake, as well as the great Peace of 1701. By 1655 relentless Iroquois raids had spread fear throughout the farms and villages of the St. Lawrence Valley. Numerous fortified outposts had been constructed throughout the Richelieu and St. Lawrence Valleys, but they failed to stop the Iroquois war parties (Coolidge 1989:16-21).

Bellico, Russell Paul. *Sails and Steam in the Mountains: A Maritime and Military History of Lake George and Lake Champlain.* Fleischmanns, NY: Purple Mountain Press, 1992.

Coolidge, G.O. *French Occupation of the Champlain Valley from 1609 to 1759.* Hargor Hill Books, Mamaroneck, New York, 1989.

Calloway, C. G. *The Western Abenakis of Vermont, 1600-1800: War, Migrations, and the Survival of an Indian People.* Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990.

Brasser, T. J. "Mahican". In B. G. Trigger, ed., *Handbook of North American Indians,* Vol. 15 of *Northeast*. Washington D.C: Smithsonian Institution,1978.

Haviland, William A., and Marjory W. Power. *The Original Vermonters: Native Inhabitants, Past and Present.* 2nd ed. University Press of New England, Hanover, 1994.

Trigger, B. G., and J. F. Pendergast. "Saint Lawrence Iroquoians". In B. G. Trigger, ed., *Handbook of North American Indians,* Vol. 15 of *Northeast*.1978.

European Settlement

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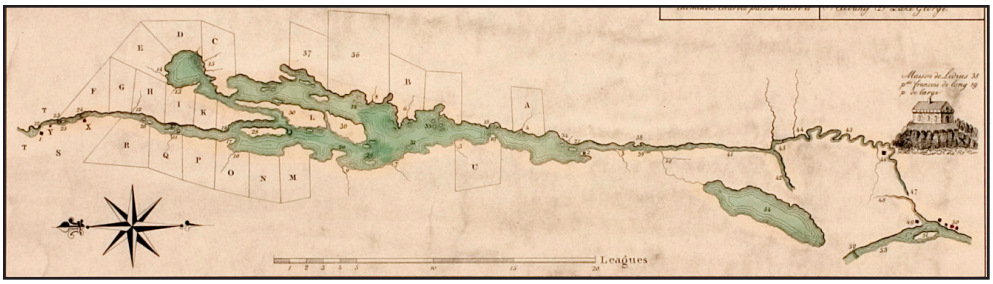
The long history of human habitation in the Lake Champlain Valley goes back as far as ten or twelve thousand years ago when the glaciers receded. In 1609 Frenchman Samuel de Champlain became the first European known to enter what he named Lake Champlain. He traveled at least as far south on the lake as what is now Chimney Point, in Addison, Vermont, and Crown Point, New York, if not further to what is now Ticonderoga, New York. He made notes on the region, its inhabitants, and surveyed its physical attributes and resources in order to create maps. He observed there were "several rivers flowing into the lake, on whose banks are many fine trees of the same varieties we have in France, with many of the finest vines I had seen anywhere. There are many chestnut trees which I had only seen on the shore of this lake, in which there is also a great abundance of many species of fish." (Samuel de Champlain, *Voyages*.)

Reports from the travels of Champlain and others generated great interest in the area in Europe. Soon both France and Great Britain were vying for control of the region and its vast natural resources. The French traded with the native peoples for fur, as wild animals were depleted in Europe and beaver pelts, for example, were prized for use in making hats. Europeans brought with them new diseases, for which the original inhabitants had no resistance, and strife. From this time until the 1760s, the area around the lake was in the path of numerous expeditions and military operations by the French, headquartered to the north of Lake Champlain and the English, to the south of the lake, disrupting and changing forever the way of life of the native peoples.



1748 Map of Lake Champlain. Vermont French-Canadian Genealogical Society.

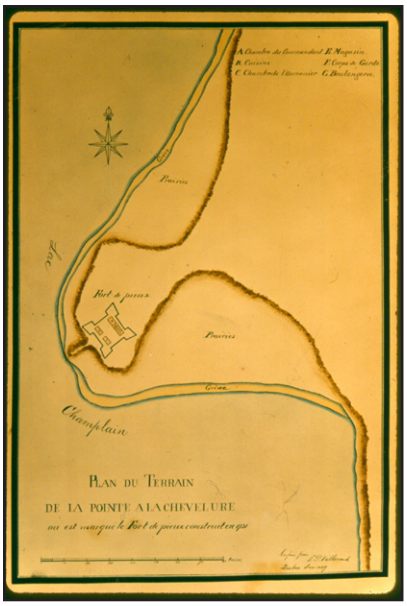
By the 1640s, the French had trading posts near the mouths of the Winooski River and Otter Creek and in 1666 Captain Pierre La Motte built the first fort on Lake Champlain, on what is now Isle La Motte, as part of a chain of French forts along the Richelieu River and the lake as defenses against the Iroquois and protecting trade routes. Fort St. Anne was used for about five years.

The French, based to the north in Canada, and the English to the south worked to claim vast areas of land, up and down the northeast and out to the Great Lakes. Lake Champlain was a transportation corridor for trade, and military and diplomatic activities. Limited by the difficulties of recruiting people in their home countries to come and the problems of transporting them on small vessels, it was a slow process. In 1690 the British governor of New York sent Captain Jacobus de Warm, a Dutchman, from Albany up to what is now Chimney Point to watch the French on Lake Champlain. He built a small, probably temporary, stone defense, and he, 20 Mohawks, and 12 English were there for about a month. In the late 1600s and early 1700s the English granted land tracts at the south end of the lake, but some were not successful.

In 1711 France and England signed the Treaty of Utrecht, which settled many property and boundary issues in Europe and the "New World." In the Champlain Valley the dividing line between English territory and New France was settled on as Split Rock, near what is now Westport, NY, and Basin

BACKGROUND

Harbor in Ferrisburgh, VT. Because waterways were the easiest ways to travel, whoever controlled Lake Champlain controlled the region. The French became concerned about English coming into the lake to trade, and in 1731 they built a wooden stockade of posts (fort de pieux) on the bluff at Chimney Point, well below Split Rock, at one of the narrowest points on the lake. The British were angered, as this blocked their travel on the lake and they felt it was a violation of the Treaty of Utrecht.



Fort de Pieux (Chimney Point), date unknown.

The stockade at Chimney Point was thought to have measured about 100 feet by 100 feet. It had chambers for the commandant, a chaplain, and the guard, and also a kitchen, bakery, and storehouse. There was room for thirty soldiers and over the first winter of 1731-32 was garrisoned by twenty soldiers, the start of long-term French settlement of the Champlain Valley. Because of the topography of rounded mounds, the French called the area Pointe a la Chevelure or Crown Point, the "crown" referring to the shape of the top of one's head—or crown—not to royalty. Starting in 1733 the French granted large land tracts (seigneuries), along the lake and in 1734 they built a more permanent stone fort, St. Frédéric, opposite Chimney Point, in what is now New York.

Most of land tracts were returned to King Louis XV in 1741 after the grantees did not develop these lands, and in 1743 the king granted to Gilles Hocquart, the intendant (presiding officer) of new France, a large seigneury on the lake's east side to encourage permanent domestic settlement. Settlers built houses here and on the other side of the lake, cleared land up to three or four miles north of the fort, and started farms, planting gardens and fields with grains and peas, and planted fruit trees. As an incentive they were able to procure some supplies from Fort St. Frédéric. By 1753, when Swedish naturalist Peter Kalm traveled through the area, he observed that there were 21 houses on the east side of the lake and 19 on the west side. Another small French settlement was started near the mouth of the Missisquoi River.

During the French and Indian War (1754-1763), French and British struggle for control intensified. In the summer of 1759, as British Major General Jeffrey Amherst and his army advanced northward from Albany, the French on the lake decided to retreat to Canada. They destroyed Fort Carillon (renamed Fort Ticonderoga by the British) and Fort St. Frederic, and burned all their houses around Crown Point. All that remained were the house chimneys and a new name—Chimney Point.

British control of what had been part of New France began. Amherst built a large new stone fort at Crown Point in 1759 and ordered the completion of the military road across Vermont that connected Crown Point to Fort No. 4 on the Connecticut River at what is now Charlestown, New Hampshire. The Crown Point Military Road was the first major cleared land trail into the area. By 1761 New Hampshire Governor Benning Wentworth began making grants for town charters in the area. The British and French signed a peace treaty in 1763, ending hostilities, and by that year Wentworth had granted charters for fifteen towns in what would become Addison County, Vermont. After the region was no longer a war zone, new settlers from Connecticut, New York, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire began moving in, traveling on Lake Champlain, the Otter Creek, Winooski River, or overland on the Crown Point Road. Although under English rule, many of these settlers were born in America.

BACKGROUND

Proprietors of these new towns were required to lay out villages and clear the land within certain time frames. The governors of New York and New Hampshire squabbled about who had the right to grant charters in what would become Vermont, and there were many overlapping grant claims in the Champlain Valley. New settlers sometimes found their land had already been claimed by another. A number of the new residents already were familiar with the area. During the recent French and Indian War they had passed through during their military service, under the British, or were stationed at Crown Point. The most knowledgeable knew that the lakeshore near Chimney Point, "having been cleared and cultivated and made ready to receive the plough, rendered this a desirable location for those, who were removing into this new country."[1] A saw mill was constructed on the Otter Creek Falls in Vergennes in 1764 and another was built in Shoreham, but neither lasted long. Early houses had to be built of logs with bark floors. In 1765 French and Indian War veteran John Strong, the first settler in the town of Addison in this wave of settlement, built his house on top of an old French house site.

Strong and his fellow settlers found some of the French apple and plum trees, as well as the old cellar holes. Conditions were very rugged and additional settlement efforts were very slow to proceed. In 1766 sixteen men from Connecticut attempted clearing land in Addison and Middlebury, but most returned home, not to try again until 1773. As they cleared more fields and planted crops, many were fascinated by their discoveries of stone tools of all kinds, cooking pots and pottery fragments, flints and chips, stone fire hearths, tilled land along some streams, burial sites, metals and stones not native to the area, and foundations of longhouses, all evidence of a much more ancient past.

A South View of the New Fortress at Crown Point, 1759. Winterthur Museum.

As the American Revolution got underway in 1776 this region was in the path of war. This time the enemies were the British and Americans. It became quite dangerous for those living here, and many moved south to the places they had originally come from. In July 1776 the American Northern Army began building an extensive fortification on Lake Champlain at Mount Independence in Orwell, Vermont, across from Fort Ticonderoga in New York, to defend New England and points south against a British attack from Canada. When British General John Burgoyne pushed south on the lake in the summer of 1777, the American forces withdrew from Mount Independence and Fort Ticonderoga, some of them fighting a successful American rear guard action at Hubbardton on July 7, 1777. The next day in Windsor on the Connecticut River delegates ratified the Vermont Constitution and the territory New Hampshire and New York had been struggling over became the Republic of Vermont.

The few settlers who remained in the region suffered great hardships, with men being taken prisoner and sent to Canada, properties plundered and burned, with nearly everything destroyed in a British raid in November 1778. When peace returned to the valley in 1783, settlement began anew—this time it was in the United States of America.

[1] Rev. Thomas Merrill of 1840 in Vermont Division for Historic Preservation, *The Historic Architecture of Addison County* (Montpelier, Vt.: 1992), p. 3.

Timeline

9,000 BC -- present	Native American occupation of Champlain Valley
1534	Jacques Cartier explores St. Lawrence River Valley
1609	Samuel de Champlain enters Lake Champlain
1666	French build Fort St. Anne on Isle la Motte (first French occupation & first fort on Lake Champlain)
1690	Stone defense built at Chimney Point, VT, for English to watch French on the lake.
1731	French build a wooden stockade fort at Chimney Point; start of long-term French settlement in Champlain Valley
1734	French build permanent stone fort (St. Frédéric) at Crown Point, NY
1743	King Louis XV of France grants 115,000 acres around Chimney Point to Gilles Hocquart to encourage permanent domestic French settlement in Champlain Valley
1759	British oust French in valley, capturing Carillon (Fort Ticonderoga); French abandon Fort St. Frédéric and settlement around the fort
1761	Gov. Benning Wentworth of New Hampshire begins granting towns along lake
1763	French and Indian War ends
1775	Americans capture Crown Point and Fort Ticonderoga from British
1776	Americans begin construction of Mount Independence in Orwell
1777	British Gen. John Burgoyne invades Lake Champlain, takes Crown Point, Fort Ticonderoga, and Mount Independence
1783	American Revolution ends
1784	American settlement of Champlain Valley resumes

With the assistance from the Institute for Museum and Library Services, the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation and the University of Maine at Farmington Research Center are learning more about early European settlement in the Champlain Valley. Through the community-based, "hands-on" archeological survey and field investigations of French settlements, creation of 21st century web-based teaching/learning tools, and a television documentary chronicling stories from the 17th and 18th centuries about the lake region's diverse people and amazing places, Lake Champlain Voyages of Discovery will offer our region's residents multiple voyages of discovery and will bring history to our doorsteps. In the process, the partners hope to encourage historic preservation projects in this internationally significant place and conservation of its abundant natural resources.
Learn more at www.historicvermont.org .