# HISTORY OF LAKE CHAMPLAIN, FROM ITS FIRST EXPLORATION BY THE FRENCH IN 1609 TO THE CLOSE OF THE YEAR 1814

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IN

## 1609

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PETER S. PALMER.

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# HISTORY OF LAKE CHAMPLAIN.

## INTRODUCTORY.

General description of the Lake and of the most important points along its borders—Ancient and Modern names of places—Distances—Old Forts—Scenery—Original Indian name.

LAKE CHAMPLAIN extends from the 43°30″ to the 45° north latitude, and lies between Vermont and New York—the boundary line of those States running through its centre. The lake is about ninety miles in length, in a right line from North to South, with a length of coast, on each side, of about one hundred and twenty-five miles: its southern extremity, or head, being at Whitehall, and its northern near the boundary line between the United States and Canada. The lake varies in width from one-fourth of a mile to thirteen miles, and its waters cover an area of about five hundred square miles. It receives the waters of Lake George, at Ticonderoga, and discharges itself into the St. Lawrence, through the river Richelieu. There is no perceivable current in the body of the lake, and, its waters, at ordinary stages, pass into the Richelieu with a velocity of only one-third of a mile per hour.

The Lake has two arms; one on the west side, near its southern extremity, called South Bay, the other, on the east side, near its northern extremity, called Missisco Bay. This last mentioned bay stretches into Canada and covers about thirty-five square miles. The area of country, drained into the lake, is variously estimated from seven thousand to nine thousand square miles. It probably approaches nearest to the larger estimate. Numerous rivers and creeks discharge themselves into the lake, among the principal of which are,

on the New York side, Wood Creek, the outlet of Lake George, the Bouquet, Great and Little Ausable, the Salmon, the Saranac, and the Big and Little Chazy rivers. On the Vermont side are the Poultney river, Otter Creek, and the Winooski, Lamoille and Missisco rivers. The lake is subject to a rise and fall of from four to six feet during the year; the waters attaining their greatest height about the twentieth of May, after which they fall, gradually, until about the twentieth of September, when they usually reach the lower level of the remainder of the season. In 1869 the water reached a point nine feet nine inches above ordinary low-water mark, while in 1880 it fell to a point nine inches below low-water mark. The average between the highest and lowest water for thirteen years from 1875 to 1887—was five feet two inches.

Lake Champlain commences at the junction of Wood Creek with East Bay, in the town of Whitehall. The Indian name of this place was kah-cho-quah-na, "*the place where dip fish.*" Philip K. Skeene, an English Major under half pay, located here in 1763, and established a settlement at the mouth of Wood Creek, which was called Skeenesborough. This, for many years, was the most important settlement upon Lake Champlain. In 1773 it numbered seventy-three families, all of whom, with but two exceptions, were Skeene's tenants. The name of the town was changed to Whitehall in 1788.

About two miles north of the village of Whitehall is South Bay, an arm of the lake seven miles long and one mile wide extending to the south-west and separating the town of Whitehall from the town of Dresden. It was on the shores of this bay that the Baron de Dieskau landed, in 1755, with an army of fifteen hundred French and Indians, when marching against the English encampment at the head of Lake George.

Twenty-four miles below Whitehall is old fort Ticonderoga on the west, and Mount Independence on the east side of the lake. The waters of Lake George here discharge themselves into Lake Champlain through an outlet called, by the Indians, Cheonderoga; a word

signifying "noisy," and which was applied in allusion to the falls on the outlet near its mouth. The French erected a fortress here in 1756, which they called Fort Carillon, and which was a place of great strength. Mount Defiance lies on the south side of the mouth of the outlet of Lake George, opposite Ticonderoga. The summit of this mountain is seven hundred and fifty feet above the lake, and within cannon shot of the old fortress.

Twelve miles north of Ticonderoga is Crown Point, called by the French *Pointe à la Chevelure*. Here the French built a fort in 1731, which they called Fort St. Frederic. This fort was destroyed by them on their retreat to Canada in 1759, and the same year General Amherst commenced a much larger work, the ruins of which are still to be seen.

Opposite Crown Point is a landing called Chimney Point, which was settled by the French, about the time they commenced building Fort St. Frederic, and was destroyed by them in 1759. So complete was the destruction of the settlement that when the English arrived, a few days after the retreat of the French, they saw nothing but the blackened chimneys of the consumed houses, standing as grim sentinels amid the surrounding ruin. These chimneys were permitted to stand for years, and gave the name of Chimney Point to that locality; a name it yet retains.

At the present day Lake Champlain is regarded as extending as far up as Whitehall, but among the early writers its head was knocked about in a manner most perplexing to modern readers. Kalm, who visited the lake in 1749, fixes upon Crown Point as the head, and speaks of that portion south of Crown Point, as "the river which comes out of the lake St. Sacrement to Lake Champlain." Doctor Thatcher, who was with St. Clair's army in 1777, considers the lake to reach no further south than Ticonderoga, and refers to South Bay as extending from that place to Skeenesborough "a distance of about thirty miles." By several the passage between Ticonderoga and Skeenesborough was

called South River. Some writers have run the head of the lake as far up as the falls of Wood Creek, in the present village of Whitehall, while others describe Wood Creek as running as far north as the outlet of Lake George. I refer, at this time, to this difference of opinion among the early writers to guard the reader against the confusion which it has frequently produced and to explain an occasional discrepancy, apparently, between this work and the narratives of the events here collected.

Two miles north of Crown Point, and on the same side of the lake is Port Henry, and about eleven miles farther north is North-west Bay, called Bay *du Rochers Fendus*, in Sauthier's map of 1779. The village of Westport stands at the foot of this bay. On the opposite side of the lake, about ten miles north of Crown Point, is a small bay in which Arnold grounded and burned his galley and five gondolas after the engagement with the English, of the 13th October, 1776. Otter Creek, called by the French *la rivière aux Loutres* empties into the lake about seven miles north of this spot. The creek is navigable for lake vessels as far up as the falls of Vergennes, a distance of eight miles. In this creek Macdonough fitted out the fleet with which he gained the victory of the 11th of September, 1814. During the last war a small breast-work was thrown up on the north side of the creek at its mouth, where Lieutenant Cassin of the Navy, and Captain Thornton of the Artillery, with two hundred men, repulsed a large British force, sent out from Canada to destroy the American fleet fitting out at Vergennes. A few miles north, and on the opposite side of the lake, is Split Rock, called by the French *rocher fendu*. This rock has always been considered a great natural curiosity. It projects one hundred and fifty feet into the lake, and is elevated about thirty feet above the level of the water. The part detached contains half an acre, and is separated from the main rock by a channel about fifteen feet wide. The popular opinion is, that this rock was separated from the main land by an earth-

quake, *but Professor Emmons, who examined it particularly, supposes the separation to have been occasioned by the wearing away or decomposition of a mass of rock containing a large amount of pyritous iron.

The lake between Split Rock and Thompson's Point, formerly called Point *Regiochne*, is not quite one mile wide. A light-house has been erected by the general government, upon the main land, a few rods south of the rock. From this point the lake increases in width as it extends towards the north. Between Essex and Charlotte, four miles north, it is three miles wide. Opposite Burlington it is nine and three-quarters miles, and from shore to shore, opposite Plattsburgh, about thirteen miles wide.

Between Essex and Charlotte is Sloop Island, so called because an English vessel of war, during the revolution, fired upon it, mistaking, in the fog, the stump of a pine tree standing near its centre for the mast of a sloop. A short distance below Essex, on the New York side, is the mouth of Bouquet river. At the falls, two miles up this river, Burgoyne encamped and gave a war feast to a party of about four hundred Indians, previous to his attack on Ticonderoga in 1777. Fourteen miles north-east from Essex and on the opposite side of the lake, is the city of Burlington. About midway between these two places are four small islands called the Four Brothers. They are called *Isle de quatre vents* on Charlevoix's map of 1744 and the Four Winds Islands on Sauthier's map. Two and one-half miles south of Burlington is Pottier's Point, called *Erkly's* by Sauthier. It forms the west side of the mouth of Shelburne bay. Three miles south-west of Burlington is Juniper Island, on which stands a light-house erected in 1826.

North-west from Juniper Island and near the west

* In the winter of 1663 there was a severe earthquake in Canada. "Lakes appeared where none ever existed before; mountains were overthrown; rivers sought other beds or totally disappeared. The earth and the mountains entirely split and rent in innumerable places, creating chasms and precipices, whose depths have never been ascertained."—*Jesuit's Journal, Quebec*, 1663.