

MARITIME HISTORY OF SKANEATELES LAKE, NY

A Thesis

by

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## ABSTRACT

The Finger Lakes region in Central New York has a rich, often overlooked maritime past. Its unique geography with many rivers and large lakes made water the most efficient means of early transportation. Additionally, the strategic location between critical waterways on the Great Lakes and the Hudson River spurred the improvement of water routes through the region by European colonizers. Many factors, including natural resources, environmental quality, regional geography, and the method of European settlement influenced the development of maritime activity on each lake.

Each lake in the Finger Lakes region developed different and distinct trans-lake industries largely depending on their location, resources, and later connection to transportation networks. The lack of connection to any canals prevented Skaneateles Lake from supporting much freight transportation, but the picturesque environment led to a thriving tourism industry.

In the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Skaneateles Lake was primarily occupied by rafts, sailing barges, and private yachts. Commercial steamboats were introduced to the lake in 1831, but they were not economically successful until 1866. The first four of these boats serving as freighters and stage connections were failures, and two of them were converted to schooners for freight service. Railroad connection, reduced fares, and recreation destinations along the lake led to four successful steamboats in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. By 1915 competition with automobiles and decreased demand caused steamboat service to cease.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION – MARITIME HISTORY OF THE FINGER LAKES REGION

The Finger Lakes region of Central New York has a unique maritime past that is underrepresented in academic studies. Most research regarding the maritime history of the Northeast United States focuses on the coastal New England cities, the Great Lakes, Lake Champlain, and the Hudson River. In Central New York, research gravitates toward the Erie Canal. Other than a few recent archaeological studies on Seneca Lake, Oneida Lake, and Onondaga Lake there is little archaeological data available on the maritime communities in this region. Likewise, there are scant studies on the collective maritime past of the lakes, rivers, and lesser canals of this region.

Since the region was settled by early Native Americans, these waterways have formed an integral part of the daily lives and the cultures of the people around them. My goal with this research is to analyze the major waterways in the region and examine how different groups have interacted with them over time until the end of the 19th century. This includes both the types of subsistence, commercial, and military activities that took place on the lakes and the types of watercraft employed.

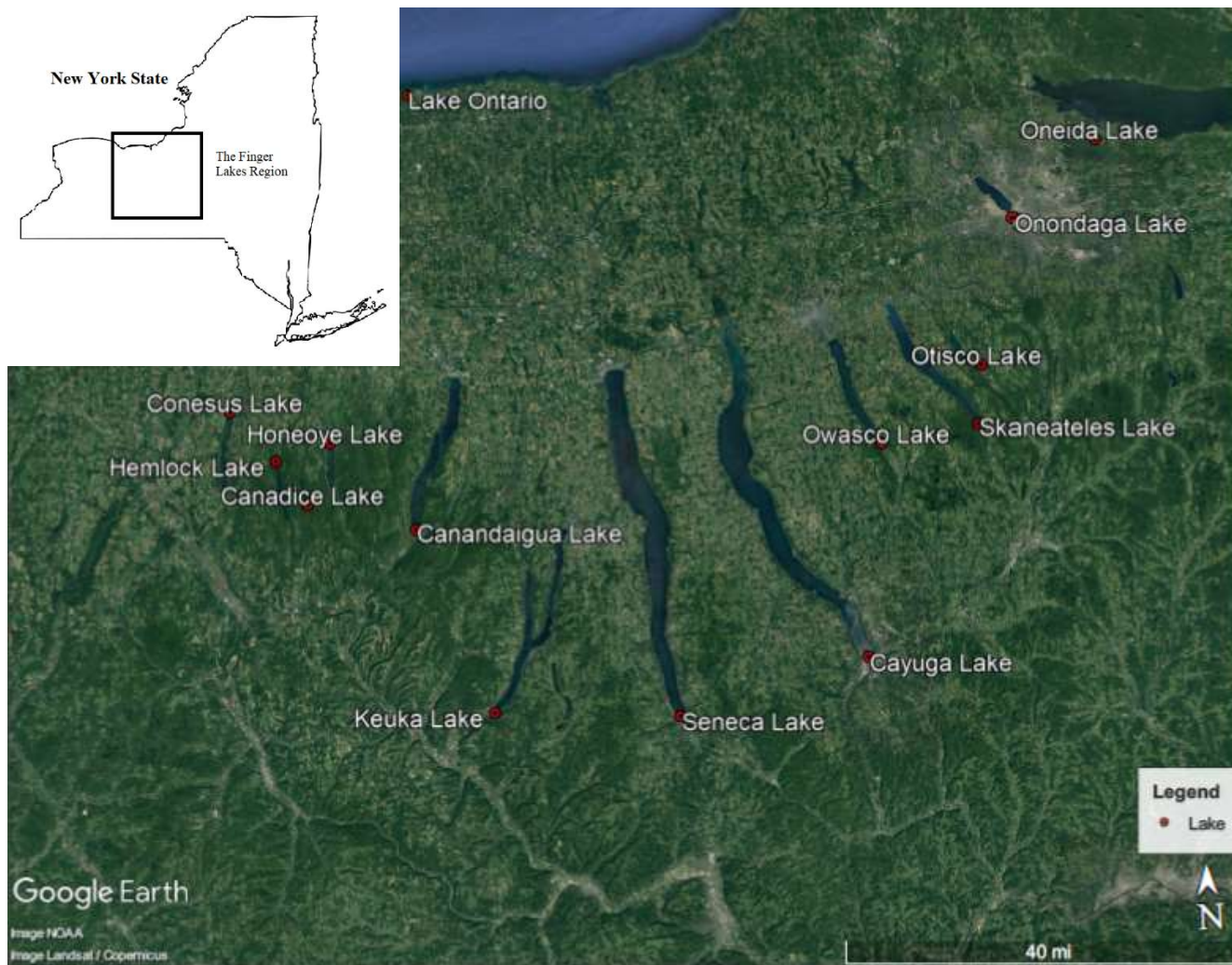
#### **Constraints: Limits of the Research Area**

To properly represent the maritime history of the Finger Lakes region, one must consider the geographical relationship of the lakes, navigable rivers and canals. In this study, the Finger Lakes region is defined as the part of New York State that contains the 11 Finger Lakes, and the surrounding area containing navigable waterways tied to the

human occupation of these lakes. These waterways include rivers such as the Oswego River, Seneca River, Oneida River and Mohawk River along with 19<sup>th</sup> century canals including the Erie Canal, Crooked Lake Canal, Chenango Canal, Chemung Canal, Oswego Canal, Genessee Valley Canal, and the Cayuga and Seneca Canal. In addition to the Finger Lakes, this region has other smaller lakes that attracted early settlers. Oneida Lake and Onondaga Lake were two which developed large maritime settlements and were included in this study (Figure 1).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Image retrieved from Google Maps, 2022.



**Figure 1: Satellite photo of the Finger Lakes region showing all 11 Finger Lakes, Onondaga Lake, Oneida Lake, and Lake Ontario (Google Maps, 2022).**

## **The Finger Lakes Region: Geography**

The Finger Lakes are a series of 11 lakes in Central New York south of Lake Ontario, named for their resemblance to fingers on a hand. The lakes extend generally from north to south and are characterized by being much longer than they are wide. For instance, the largest lake, Seneca Lake, is 38 miles long by 3 miles wide (61.1 kilometers by 4.8 kilometers) at the widest point.<sup>2</sup> These lakes were carved from the bedrock by the repeated advance and recession of glaciers during the Pleistocene glaciation from about 2 million years ago to 10,000 years ago.<sup>3</sup> With the deposition of rocky debris in recessional moraines at the heads of the valleys, natural dams formed and allowed the creation of the lakes.

The valleys containing the lakes are very deep with steep sides and sheer cliffs. Small tributaries can be found in deep gorges and glens around the lakes, with the steepest inclines towards the south where the glacial moraines terminated. The lakes are surrounded by rolling hills originally covered by thick forests, but now filled with a mix of pastures, agricultural land, vineyards, and forests. Nearby there are several large river valleys, such as the Tully Valley, which were not blocked by glacial deposits and now support pastures and agriculture.

To the north of the Finger Lakes and just south of Lake Ontario, the terrain is flatter and filled with rivers, streams, wetlands, and small glacial till deposits called

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<sup>2</sup> NYSDEC, 'Finger Lakes Fishing', n.d.

<sup>3</sup> NASA Earth Observatory, n.d.

drumlins.<sup>4</sup> It is through this area that the Finger Lakes drain into Lake Ontario, and through which the Erie Canal was constructed. Further to the east, the terrain remains relatively flat until reaching Onondaga Lake and Oneida Lake. Onondaga Lake drains into the Seneca River to the north, which is now connected to Lake Ontario via the Oswego River. The region south of this lake is bordered by rolling hills which lead to the Tully valley. Oneida Lake is surrounded by flat land and connected to the Mohawk River in the east by the canalized Pools Brook and to Lake Ontario via the Oneida river in the west. A list of the prominent lakes in this region, and their approximate sizes can be found in Table 1.<sup>5</sup>

**Table 1: List of prominent lakes in the Finger Lakes region and their approximate dimensions in miles, kilometers (km), meters (m), and square kilometers (sq km) (NYSDEC, ‘Finger Lakes Fishing’).**

Conesus Lake	Length: 8 miles (12.9 km) Max. Width: 1 mile (1.6 km)	Area: 3,420 acres (13.8 sq km) Max. Depth: 66 ft (20 m)
Hemlock Lake	Length: 7 miles (11.3 km) Max. Width: 0.5 miles (0.8 km)	Area: 1,800 acres (7.3 sq km) Max. Depth: 91 ft (28 m)
Canadice Lake	Length: 3 miles (4.8 km) Max. Width: 0.3 miles (0.5 km)	Area: 649 acres (2.6 sq km) Max. Depth: 95 ft (29 m)
Honeoye Lake	Length: 4.5 miles (7.2 km) Max. Width: 0.8 miles (1.3 km)	Area: 1,772 acres (7.2 sq km) Max. Depth: 30 ft (9 m)

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<sup>4</sup> McDonnell, ‘The Finger Lakes Region’. There are thousands of drumlins in Central New York which are essentially elongated, isolated hills made of glacial till. They are always aligned in the direction of the glacial flow, in this case North to South.

<sup>5</sup> NYSDEC, ‘Finger Lakes Fishing’.

**Table 1 Continued: List of prominent lakes in the Finger Lakes region and their approximate dimensions in miles, kilometers (km), meters (m), and square kilometers (sq km) (NYSDEC, ‘Finger Lakes Fishing’).**

Canandaigua Lake	Length: 15.5 miles (24.9 km) Max. Width: 1.5 miles (2.4 km)	Area: 10,558 acres (42.7 sq km) Max. Depth: 276 ft (84 m)
Keuka Lake	Length: 19.6 miles (31.5 km) Max. Width: 1.9 miles (3.1 km)	Area: 11,584 acres (46.9 sq km) Max. Depth: 183 ft (56 m)
Seneca Lake	Length: 38 miles (61.2 km) Max. Width: 3 miles (4.8 km)	Area: 43,343 acres (175 sq km) Max. Depth: 618 ft (188 m)
Cayuga Lake	Length: 38 miles (61.2 km) Max. Width: 3.5 miles (5.6 km)	Area: 42,956 acres (174 sq km) Max. Depth: 435 ft (133 m)
Owasco Lake	Length: 11 miles (18 km) Max. Width: 1.3 miles (2.1 km)	Area: 6,665 acres (27.0 sq km) Max. Depth: 177 ft (54 m)
Skaneateles Lake	Length: 16 miles (26 km) Max. Width: 1.5 miles (2.4 km)	Area: 8,960 acres (36.3 sq km) Max. Depth: 300 ft (91 m)
Otisco Lake	Length: 5.4 miles (8.7 km) Max. Width: 0.75 miles (1.2 km)	Area: 1,877 acres (7.6 sq km) Max. Depth: 76 ft (23 m)
Onondaga Lake	Length: 4.7 miles (7.6 km) Max. Width: 1.25 miles (2.0 km)	Area: 2,944 acres (11.9 sq km) Max. Depth: 60 ft (18 m)
Oneida Lake	Length: 21 miles (33.8 km) Max. Width: 5.5 miles (8.9 km)	Area: 50,894 acres (206 sq km) Max. Depth: 55 ft (17 m)

## **Native American Maritime Activities**

### Prehistoric Period Communities

The Prehistoric Period in the Finger Lakes region, also known as the Pre-Contact Period before European exploration, can be divided into two eras: the hunter-gatherer/pre-agricultural subsistence era (10,000 B.C. – 900 A.D.) and the agricultural/hunter-gatherer subsistence era (900 A.D. to 1650 A.D.).<sup>6</sup> As the glaciers receded around 10,000 B.C., lowland depressions filled with water and created the Finger Lakes, Onondaga Lake, Oneida Lake, and the rivers in the region. Fluted points, a common artifact associated with Paleoindians (10,000 B.C. – 7,500 B.C.) in New York, have been found in multiple locations along the Seneca River, and miscellaneous fluted points have been found elsewhere in the region.<sup>7</sup> Sites adjacent to rivers likely indicate their use in travel or subsistence fishing, and even the sites distant from present day waterways may have been adjacent to contemporary waterways that have since disappeared with the glaciers. It is unknown exactly what relationship Paleoindians in this region had with the water since no contemporaneous fishing related artifacts or watercraft have been found in the archaeological record.

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<sup>6</sup> Sabick, *Phase 3 Underwater Archaeological Report*, 7; Kane, *Phase 1B Underwater Archaeological Report*, 7. Division based on subsistence measures based on archaeological evidence originally from Ritchie, *The Archaeology of New York State*.

<sup>7</sup> Sabick, *Phase 3 Underwater Archaeological Report*, 7; Kane, *Phase 1B Underwater Archaeological Report*, 7.

There is a lack of archaeological evidence for occupation during the Early Archaic Period (7,500 B.C. – 3,500 B.C.) in Central New York. Some researchers suggest that nomadic hunter-gather groups would have moved throughout the region to exploit several resource-rich areas such as valley floors, bogs, and rivers for short periods of time when the environment was not stable enough for long term habitation.<sup>8</sup> Since earlier Paleoindians sites are found near rivers, and rivers are a reliable source of food it is likely that subsistence fishing and harvesting existed at this time. It is uncertain if Early Archaic natives used watercraft.

Archaeological evidence indicates extensive lake and river related activities during the Late Archaic Period (3,500 B.C. – 1,500 B.C.) through the Transitional Period (1,500 B.C. – 1,000 B.C.) and Middle Woodland Period (1,000 B.C. – 900 A.D.). Many temporary and permanent settlements dating to the Late Archaic Period have been found adjacent to water bodies. These settlements tend to be located near weed filled shallow areas throughout the lakes, streams, rivers, and marshes.<sup>9</sup> Multiple sites have provided large assemblages of fishing tools such as stone net weights, and bone or copper fish hooks, barbed fish hooks, spear fishing equipment, stone sinkers, and fishnets.<sup>10</sup> Many small camps with woodworking tool assemblages have also been found along the shores of streams and lakes, or on islands. Additionally, artifact assemblages indicate increased contact between the peoples of Central New York and groups to the

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<sup>8</sup> Sabick, *Phase 3 Underwater Archaeological Report*, 7-8; Kane, *Phase 1B Underwater Archaeological Report*, 7-8. The lack of archaeological evidence leaves maritime activities up to speculation.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.



north of the Great Lakes and to the west in the Ohio River Valley. These discoveries show that boatbuilding and travel with canoes or other watercraft was likely common through the Middle Woodland Period.

The end of the prehistoric period, also known as the Late Woodland Period (900 A.D. – 1650 A.D.) is marked by the development of permanent hunter-gather/agricultural settlements.<sup>11</sup> Archaeological evidence indicates that fishing was still a common subsistence activity with the discovery of fishing spear tips, barbed and barbless hooks, and tools such as trotlines for prolonged bottom fishing. Travel by water was still common for communication, warfare, and trade with neighboring groups, as recorded by European explorers in the early 17th century. Although there is no archaeological evidence of when bark canoes were first developed, they were in widespread use during the latter part of this period.

#### Historic Period Communities

The historic period in Central New York begins in the early 17th century with the arrival of Dutch and French explorers. The Dutch settled near present day Albany in 1614 after the 1609 voyage of Henry Hudson, and the French entered the area through present day Canada with explorers, missionaries, and fur traders beginning with Samuel de Champlain in 1615.<sup>12</sup> Journals by these early explorers provide the first written accounts of native watercraft and the nature of their use in Central New York.

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<sup>11</sup> Sabick, *Phase 3 Underwater Archaeological Report*, 9; Kane, *Phase 1B Underwater Archaeological Report*, 9.

<sup>12</sup> Freshwater Press, *History of the Great Lakes*, 65.

By the time European explorers first arrived in North America there were a wide variety of specialized watercraft designed for specific activities and water bodies.

Kayaks constructed of skin, bones, and/or wood were used in the far north on both the Pacific and Atlantic coasts. Different group of natives used different designs depending on the available resources, vessel purpose, and the types of waters navigated. Boat dimensions, ribbing material, lashing/sewing methods, and deck covers varied among native tribes such as the Beothuk and Inuit natives of Northeast Canada and the various tribes of the Aleutian archipelago in Alaska.<sup>13</sup>

Along the northeast coast of North America, and through the inland waterways, different varieties of canoes were commonly used. In contrast to the sparse availability of wood in the far north, the large forests and variety of trees in the Finger Lakes region allowed for the development of dugout and bark canoes. Dugout canoes were crafted from a single tree that was hollowed and shaped by a combination of burning and carving.<sup>14</sup> Large canoes could hold at least 10 – 12 people and were much heavier than their bark-built counterparts. Dugout canoes were typically be used in a single water body and not be carried over land to other lakes or rivers. Dugout canoes were observed in Central New York by early explorers, and they were used for navigation in the lakes and rivers within Iroquois territory.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Norton, 'The Native American Canoe-wright', 401 - 406 provides descriptions of native watercraft in Canada and the Northeast United States while Hudson and Mason, 2010 discuss native watercraft of the Aleutian Islands with descriptions of dimension, building materials, and specialized uses.

<sup>14</sup> Norton, 'The Native American Canoe-wright', 406.

<sup>15</sup> Sabick, *Phase 3 Underwater Archaeological Report*, 10; Kane, *Phase 1B Underwater Archaeological Report*, 10.

Bark canoes were constructed with a flexible inner frame of wood strips covered in layers of tree bark. In regions north of New York, such as modern-day Ontario, Quebec, Maine, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia, birch bark canoes were common. In these regions large diameter birch trees were common and made an ideal building material for strong, light canoes. Birch canoes were not the common watercraft in Central New York but were used in this region when war parties from northern groups such as the Huron and Algonquin made their way south.<sup>16</sup> The Iroquois natives who occupied the entirety of Central New York did not have the same large birch trees and constructed bark canoes of elm. Elm canoes were heavier and more difficult to maneuver than birch canoes, but still lighter than dugouts.<sup>17</sup>

Like the skin boats observed in the north, bark canoes of locally available materials were built as specialized watercraft. Although constructed of similar materials, bark canoes could range in sizes to carry large amounts of cargo or men. Champlain in 1603 observed canoes with two paddlers outrunning his fully manned longboat and canoes with 13 men navigating the rivers and lakes in southern Canada.<sup>18</sup> Champlain also measured some Algonquin canoes as nine paces long and one and one half paces wide, likely 20 – 23 feet (6 – 7 meters) long and 40 – 50 inches (1 – 1.25 meters) wide.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Beauchamp, *A History of the New York Iroquois*, describes many conflicts where Huron or Algonquin war parties invaded Iroquois land via the rivers and lakes; Champlain, *The Voyages and Explorations*, 75 – 79 describes his assistance to a Huron war party attacking an Iroquois village near Oneida Lake. Champlain describes rivers that Algonquin and Huron natives told him were used to make war with the Iroquois.

<sup>17</sup> Beauchamp, *A History of the New York Iroquois*, 180; Norton, ‘The Native American Canoe-wright’, 405.

<sup>18</sup> Norton, ‘The Native American Canoe-wright’, 402; Champlain, S., 1902: 161.

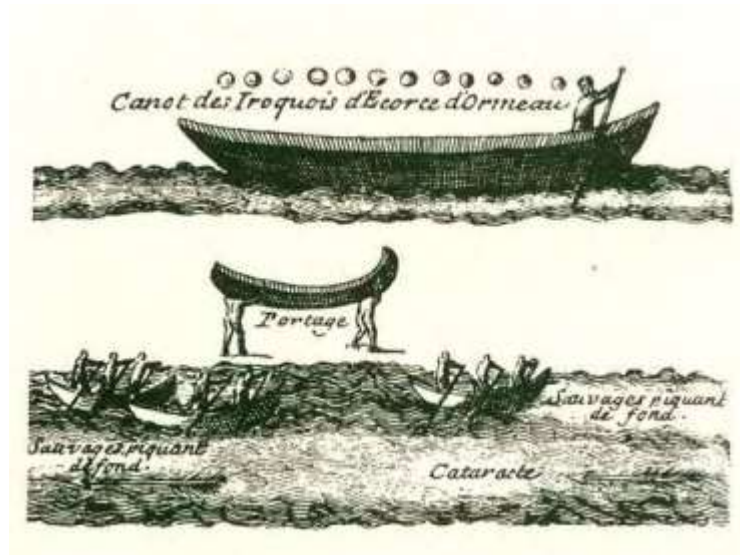
<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

Canoes made by the same groups could be of different sizes depending on their use for fishing, trade, war, or other purposes.<sup>20</sup>

Throughout the inland waterways of the Northeast watercraft needed to be light and easily maneuverable. To move between the lakes and rivers, and to pass rapids and waterfalls, canoes were

removed from the water and carried over land, an action referred to as portaging.

Thus, canoes needed to be easily carried by only the paddlers for distances that could reach several miles.<sup>21</sup>



A sketch of canoes used by

**Figure 2: Sketch of Onondaga bark canoes by the French soldier LaHontan c. 1680 (Sabick, 2014).**

the Iroquois, and their method of portaging, was produced by the French soldier

LaHontan in the 1680s (Figure 2).<sup>22</sup> This sketch shows a range of different sized canoes including a small one portaged by two paddlers, a larger one paddled by three, and the largest one carrying 13 people.

### Maritime Communities after European Colonization

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<sup>20</sup> Champlain, *The Voyages and Explorations*, 1, 5, 37, 60 describes different numbers of canoes with men and supplies ranging from 2 – 7 men per canoe. He observed Ouescharini canoes as ‘large’ in comparison to his own when they joined his party.

<sup>21</sup> Champlain, *The Voyages and Explorations*, 198 – 199 describes a long portage and discusses the importance of native canoes for anyone traveling the waterways of the Northeast.

<sup>22</sup> Sabick, *Phase 3 Underwater Archaeological Report*, 11.

### Early Settlement until 1825

During the 17th and most of the 18th century, the Finger Lakes region was predominantly occupied by the Iroquois and other smaller tribes which migrated to the region as they were removed from their homelands by European colonists. The Iroquois presence in the region prevented settlement by European colonists until the late 18th century. During the 17th century most European contact in the region was by French Jesuit missionaries, French and Dutch fur traders, and French and British soldiers.

Determined to create a presence on Lake Ontario and to interrupt the French fur trade, the British Governor of New York, William Burnet, fortified a former French blockhouse at the mouth of the Oswego River to create Ft. Oswego in 1727.<sup>23</sup> This fort and trading post guarded the Oswego River, which led to Oneida Lake and Onondaga Lake. From this fort, British traders ventured into the Finger Lakes region to trade English goods for furs. Since the French controlled trade in the north via the St. Lawrence River, the English needed a different route to transport goods to New York City. The easiest route was through the Oswego River to Oneida Lake and up Wood Creek. From Wood Creek, goods could be portaged over a one to six mile (1.6 to 9.7 km) path to the Mohawk River which led to the Hudson River and New York City.<sup>24</sup> This critical point in the British supply lines was highly developed with two landings at each end of the portage and was protected by a series of stockades from 1755 – 1756 in

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<sup>23</sup> Freshwater Press, *History of the Great Lakes*, 100.

<sup>24</sup> Fort Stanwix National Monument.

response to the beginning of the French and Indian War in 1754.<sup>25</sup> From 1758 to 1777 the carry was protected by Fort Stanwix until the fort was captured by the Continental Army.<sup>26</sup> During this time, the most common vessels used on the rivers were bateaux and canoes which were small enough to be portaged through the Oneida Carry. Journals from a 1754 excursion through the carry mention seeing canoes and many bateaux.<sup>27</sup>

In 1779, during the Revolutionary War, George Washington sent generals John Sullivan and James Clinton with an army of 5,000 men into the southern tier of New York and the Finger Lakes region to destroy Iroquois villages in response to British and Iroquois raids on western settlements.<sup>28</sup> This campaign along with a concurrent assault by Colonel Goose Van Schaick on the Onondaga Castle settlement was devastating for the Iroquois and largely cleared the land for westward expansion following the war.<sup>29</sup> The bulk of European settlement in the Finger Lakes region began in the late 1780s and 1790s.

After the war, Europeans started to move west to settle the land with a diminished native population. Many of these early settlers were veterans of the Revolutionary War who were issued land grants as payment for their service. In 1791, after the 1788 Treaty of Fort Stanwix with the Onondaga natives, much of the land in Central New York was divided into military townships.<sup>30</sup> Many of these townships were

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Beauchamp, *Past and Present of Syracuse and Onondaga County*, 135.

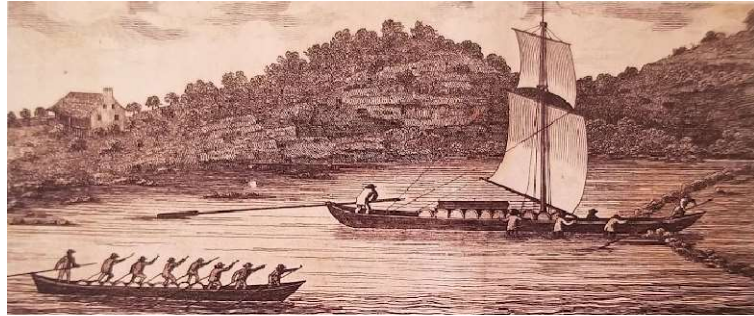
<sup>28</sup> Cohn, *Seneca Lake Archaeological Survey 2018*, 8; Koehler, 'Hostile Nations', 430 – 432.

<sup>29</sup> Koehler, 'Hostile Nations', 435 provides greater detail on the methods used to remove natives from the region.

<sup>30</sup> Beauchamp, *Past and Present of Syracuse and Onondaga County*, 7 – 8.

located on the lakes and streams to take advantage of the water for transportation and industry.

The early settlers brought their own watercraft building technologies. Skiffs, dorys, scows, and other shallow-draft boats common in



**Figure 3: Sailing Durham boat and other watercraft on the Mohawk River, by J. Riley 1810 (Cohn, 2018).**

eastern rivers were used for freight transport. A new type of boat, the Durham boat, was a double ended, shallow-draft craft employed on the rivers (Figure 3).<sup>31</sup> This vessel could be sailed or punted, and landed on either end for loading goods.

Log rafts and arks were another common mode of water transport throughout the lakes and rivers. These types of watercraft were used extensively throughout the Northeast United States for one-way transport of lumber and goods. Rafts were platforms of logs or rough-cut lumber that could be floated downstream, punted, or



**Figure 4: Sketch of a log raft in the Chemung River c. 1855 (Cohn, 2020).**

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<sup>31</sup> Cohn, *Seneca Lake Archaeological Survey 2019*, 15.; Caza, ‘Oneida Lake Wrecks’ discusses the archaeological remains of a Durham boat found in Oneida Lake in 2011.

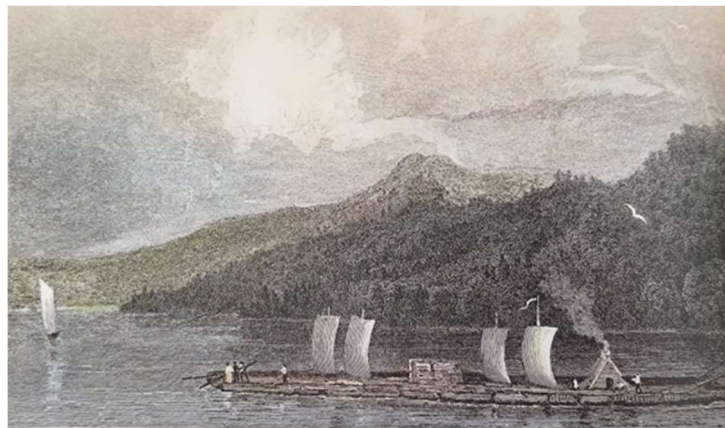
towed by boat or animal in the rivers to transport lumber to sawmills (Figure 4).<sup>32</sup> Once reaching their destination, the rafts were disassembled and the timber cut for market.

Arks were simple boats designed to carry cargoes such as grain, potash, salt, maple sugar, and whiskey.<sup>33</sup> Arks could also be disassembled at the end of their journey and sold for lumber.

Land along the Finger Lakes was rapidly deforested to make room for agriculture and provide lumber to build the new settlements. Logs were dragged down the steep hillsides to the shores and assembled into rafts for transport to mills in the lakeside towns. These rafts could be propelled by punting along shallow shorelines, by sailing, or

by towing (Figure 5).<sup>34</sup> In the lakes log rafts were commonly used to transport lumber harvested on steep hillsides.

Some of the smaller lakes had the benefit of thick winter ice which allowed lumber to be



**Figure 5: Log raft under sail in Lake Champlain (Cohn, 2020).**

towed across by horse or oxen.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Cohn, *Seneca Lake Archaeological Survey 2019*, 65 image originally from the Harper Brothers' *New York and Erie Railroad* guide book of 1855.

<sup>33</sup> Cohn, *Seneca Lake Archaeological Survey 2019*, 15 from an excerpt in *Lumbering in the Susquehanna Valley* by Albert Hilbert; Harvey, *It Started with a Steamboat*, 3 discusses early rafting of goods from Central New York down the Susquehanna River to Baltimore.

<sup>34</sup> Cohn, *Seneca Lake Archaeological Survey 2019*, 64 photo originally provided by the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum.

<sup>35</sup> Personal communication with GERALYN HUBA of the Skaneateles Historical Society.



The fragile construction of these temporary rafts caused many to break apart in foul weather and choppy water. While conducting surveys at Seneca Lake in 2019, the Seneca Lake Archaeological & Bathymetric Survey team located what appears to be the remains of a log raft at the bottom of Seneca Lake.<sup>36</sup> A popular SCUBA diving destination in Skaneateles Lake, referred to as the ‘Log Jam’, is similar in structure to the feature in Seneca Lake, and likely also a log raft. Other divers have reported seeing log piles in other finger lakes, but these have not been archaeologically recorded.<sup>37</sup>

In the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century bateaus and other small boats ferried freight and passengers. The first Finger Lakes ferry began service on Cayuga Lake in 1788 to carry westward-bound settlers around the large swamp to the north.<sup>38</sup> As lakeside populations grew the demand for freight and ferry service led to the introduction of sloops, schooners, and scows as transports. The first commercial sloop on Seneca Lake, called *Seneca*, was built in 1796 and was significant enough to attract a crowd of several thousands to its launch (Figure 6).<sup>39</sup> As settlers



**Figure 6: A 1798 sketch of Geneva on Seneca Lake by Edouard Charles, likely depicting the sloop *Seneca* (Cohn, 2020).**

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<sup>36</sup> Cohn, *Seneca Lake Archaeological Survey* 2019, 62 – 63.

<sup>37</sup> Personal experience diving on the ‘Log Jam’ and communication with local divers who have seen a similar feature in Owasco Lake.

<sup>38</sup> Cohn, *Seneca Lake Archaeological Survey* 2019, 17.

<sup>39</sup> Cohn, *Seneca Lake Archaeological Survey* 2019, 16.

continued to pour into Central New York and further west the need for faster, cheaper, and more efficient means of travel was answered by new technological advancements.

### **Transportation Boom: Canals, Railroads, and Steamboats**

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, water was still the most efficient means of travel through the interior of New York. The Hudson River and Mohawk River provided the easiest route to Central New York from New York City, but this route was not without its challenges. The rivers were frequently obstructed by trees and sediment and had natural barriers such as waterfalls and rapids where boats needed to be portaged to the other side.<sup>40</sup> Cargo from sloops and other relatively large boats on the Hudson River was transferred at Albany since the Mohawk River could only be navigated by smaller boats, and boats needed to be portaged to other rivers by travelers attempting to enter Oneida Lake, Onondaga Lake, or Lake Ontario.

The issues of navigating the inland waterways of the state were well known during the colonial period. Cadwallader Colden, Surveyor General to the province under Governor William Burnet issued a report which outlined his concerns about the predominance of French trade through Quebec via Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River.<sup>41</sup> The primary connection to Lake Ontario at this time for the British was via the Oswego and Mohawk rivers, which was more difficult than traveling through French Canada.<sup>42</sup> Colden cited the need to improve river travel through what is now Central

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<sup>40</sup> Cohn, *Seneca Lake Archaeological Survey 2019*, 16

<sup>41</sup> Freshwater Press, *History of the Great Lakes*, 220.

<sup>42</sup> Ford, *The Shore is a Bridge*, 55 – 56 discusses the British fort at Oswego protecting the mouth of the Oswego River and the British interior trade routes adopted from the Iroquois. This source also mentions 18<sup>th</sup> century British shipments up the Mohawk and Oswego with up to 500 bateaux in a single expedition;

New York to allow easy access to Lake Erie by bypassing Lake Ontario. Later Governor Sir Henry Moore, several other state politicians, and General George Washington expressed their support for improving the navigation of the state's inland waterways.<sup>43</sup>

Finally, to improve the efficiency of travel across the state to support westward settlement and tap into the shipping industry of the Great Lakes, the mayor of New York City and future governor DeWitt Clinton and other leaders petitioned for the building of a series of canals across the state. In 1810, the New York State Legislature appointed the Canal Commission to investigate potential canal routes, and in 1817 it authorized the construction of two canals. The Champlain Canal would connect Lake Champlain to the Hudson River, and the Erie Canal would connect Lake Erie to the Hudson River.<sup>44</sup>

The Erie Canal was constructed over the course of nine years, and in 1825 it officially opened (Figure 7).<sup>45</sup> For the first time there was a continuous water route connecting Lake Erie and New York City without the need to portage boats or change vessels. This route



**1828 located in the New York Public Library. It is similar to a sketch originally from *Graham's Magazine*. Note the narrow canal with adjacent towpath (Erie Canal History, and McNamara, R.).**

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Freshwater Press, *History of the Great Lakes*, 220 mentions communication problems between Oswego and New York City via interior routes.

<sup>43</sup> Freshwater Press, *History of the Great Lakes*, 220 – 221.; Whitford, *History of the Canal System*, Ch. 1 – 2 discusses proposed improvements to navigation throughout New York prior to the canal construction.

<sup>44</sup> Cohn, *Seneca Lake Archaeological Survey 2019*, 18.

<sup>45</sup> NYS Canal History; Whitford, *History of the Canal System*, Ch. 2.

greatly reduced the travel time and the difficulty of crossing the state and brought much commercial success to Buffalo, New York City, and the settlements of Central New York. Within 10 years of being constructed the canal traffic was so great that the state authorized the enlargement of the canal to reduce congestion.<sup>46</sup>

Initially the canal was 40 feet wide at the top, 28 feet wide at the bottom, and 4 feet deep (12.2 by 8.5 by 1.2 meters). The 83 locks along its course regulated the water level and allowed boats to be raised or lowered to the next canal section (Figure 8).<sup>47</sup> As canal traffic



**Figure 8: Woodcut of a canal lock at Millport, NY on the Chemung Canal in 1860 with the adjacent railroad (Freshwater Press, 1899).**

increased and new types of boats and styles of shipping were introduced, enlargements and modifications were authorized. The first enlargement project began in 1835, but it was delayed by the panic of 1837.<sup>48</sup> In 1850, the second enlargement was authorized to increase the surface width to 70 feet, bottom width to 56 feet, and depth to 7 feet (21 by 17 by 2 meters). This project also increased the size of the locks to allow larger vessels, now up to 240 tons.<sup>49</sup> Throughout the late 19<sup>th</sup> century canal improvement projects

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<sup>46</sup> Freshwater Press, *History of the Great Lakes*, 224; Whitford, *History of the Canal System* Ch. 3 discusses enlargement projects and legislation around the canal beginning in 1835. A lack of funding and a defensible financial plan led to long term delays; Barton, *Commerce of the Lakes and Erie Canal* discusses import and export finances through the canal in Buffalo, NY during 1851.

<sup>47</sup> Freshwater Press, *History of the Great Lakes*, 222 – 223; Cohn, *Seneca Lake Archaeological Survey 2019*, 16.

<sup>48</sup> Whitford, *History of the Canal System*, Ch. 3.

<sup>49</sup> Freshwater Press, *History of the Great Lakes*, 224.

continued annually to improve transit. Annual reports by the New York State Engineer and Surveyor highlight ongoing and planned improvements to the canal. For instance, from 1886 to 1889 many locks were lengthened to support pairs of coupled boats.<sup>50</sup>

Throughout its existence, the Erie canal saw a multitude of different types of vessels. Boats using the canal were required to meet sizing and design criteria mandated by New York State.<sup>51</sup> These criteria were enforced to ensure boats would fit in the canal and to protect the canal from damage by the boats. Canal boats were towed by horses or mules for the entire length.<sup>52</sup> When reaching lakes or the Hudson River the boats would be towed by sailing craft or steamboats. In the 1870s steamboats were successfully used on the canal after innovative designs were incentivized by the state (Figure 9).<sup>53</sup>

In the early days canal boats of multiple designs were used to transport passengers and freight. Covered packet boats transported passengers and various styles of barges and scows transported cargo.<sup>54</sup> Even log rafts and arks were initially allowed on the canal, though there were concerns that they could cause damage to the canal.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Bogart, *State of New York Annual Report 1889*, 3 – 8; Whitford, *History of the Canal System* Ch. 3 – 5; Williams, *The Barge Canal System* discusses improvements to the canal throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>51</sup> NYS Canal Corporation, *Barge and In-Charge*, 10.

<sup>52</sup> NYS Canal Corporation, *Barge and In-Charge*, 11.

<sup>53</sup> Freshwater Press, *History of the Great Lakes*, 226 – 227.

<sup>54</sup> NYS Canal Corporation, *Barge and In-Charge* pamphlet describes different vessel types and shows photos of later boats.; Cohn, *Seneca Lake Archaeological Survey 2019* shows examples of archaeological examples of canal boats found in Seneca Lake.; Sabick, *Phase 3 Underwater Archaeological Report* discusses canal boats found in Onondaga Lake; Caza, ‘Oneida Lake Wrecks’ shows examples of barges found in Oneida Lake.

<sup>55</sup> Cohn, *Seneca Lake Archaeological Survey 2019*, 64.

One early design innovation was the sailing canal boat. These boats could sail across lakes to the canal and have the mast removed so the boat could be towed. On reaching the Hudson River the mast could be raised again and the boat sailed to New York City. The



**Figure 9: The steam canal boat *David Chapman* on the Erie Canal in Syracuse, NY (NYS Canal Corporation).**

earliest known sailing canal boat from Seneca Lake was the *Mary & Hannah*, which passed through completed portions of the canal from Seneca Lake to New York City in 1823 (Figure 9).<sup>56</sup> As technology improved canal boat materials and designs did as well. Boat length and cargo capacity increased while steam tugs, steam powered barges, and steel hulled boats were introduced by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>56</sup> Cohn, *Seneca Lake Archaeological Survey* 2019, 19; Harvey, 2007: 8 and NYS Canal Corporation, *Barge and In-Charge*: 12

The rapid success of the Erie Canal spurred a period of massive canal development across the state. The people of Central New York who did not live along the canal wished to profit from this new



**Figure 10: Woodcut of the *Mary & Hannah* sailing canal boat in Seneca Lake c. 1823 (Cohn, 2020).**

infrastructure and petitioned for the creation of more canals to connect to their settlements. By 1833, only eight years after the completion of the Erie Canal, four more canals in Central New York connected Lake Ontario, Oneida Lake, Onondaga Lake, Seneca Lake, Cayuga Lake, Keuka Lake, and the region known as the Southern Tier of New York to the Erie Canal (Table 2).<sup>57</sup> By 1857 another three canals were built across the region (Figure 11).<sup>58</sup>

**Table 2: List of Central New York canals and the dates of their completion.**

Erie Canal – 1825	Cayuga & Seneca Canal – 1828	Oswego Canal – 1829
Chemung Canal – 1833	Crooked Lake Canal – 1833	Chenango Canal - 1836
Black River Canal - 1857	Genesee Valley Canal - 1857	

<sup>57</sup> Cohn, *Seneca Lake Archaeological Survey 2019*, 29.

<sup>58</sup> Sadowski, *Maps of the Erie Canal*.

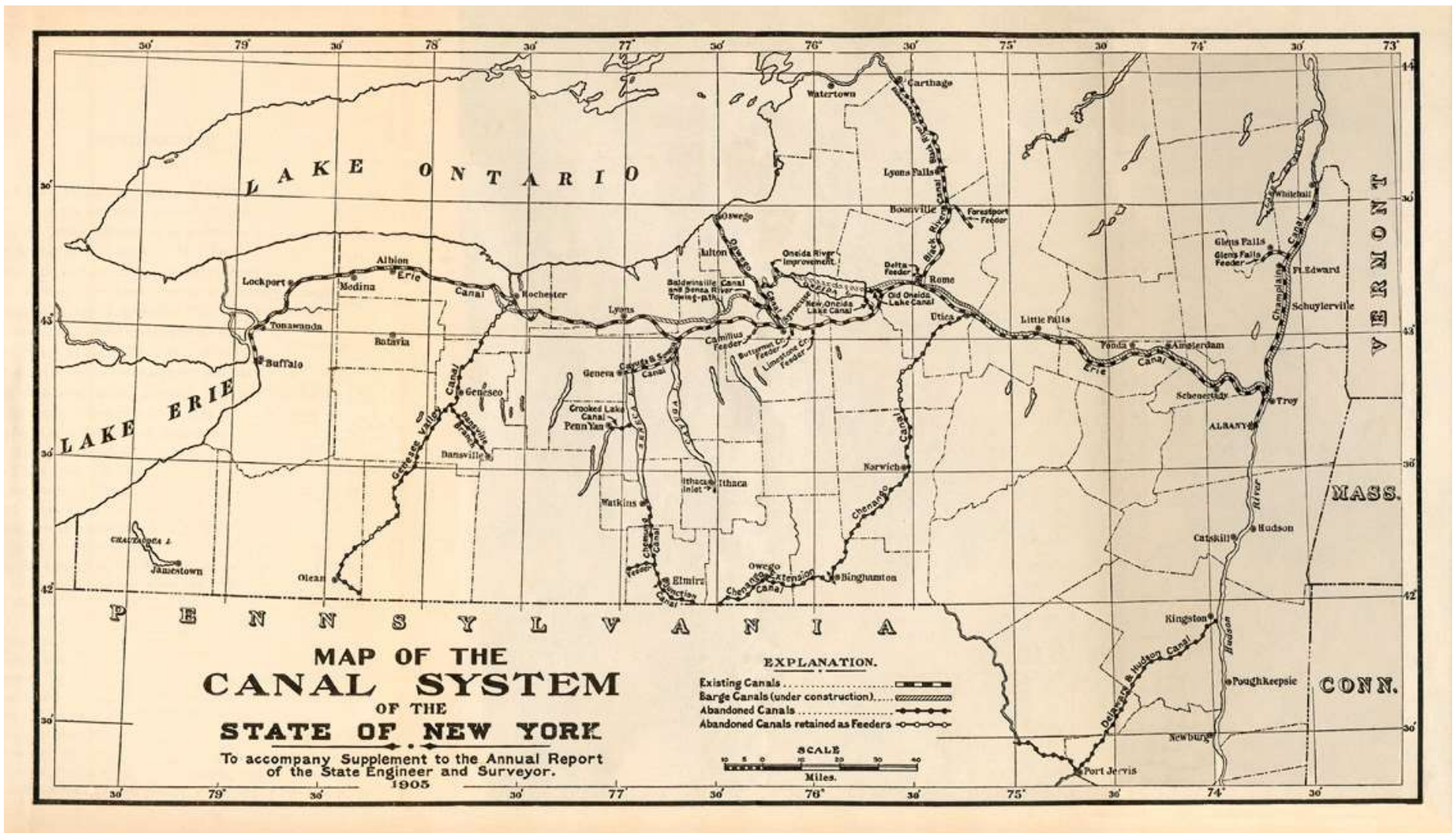


Figure 11: Map of the canal system in New York State c. 1905 (Sadowski, n.d.).



Concurrent with the development of the canal system was the advent of steamboats in the Finger Lakes region. In 1807 Robert Fulton built the first successful steamboat in the Hudson River.<sup>59</sup> Steamboats rapidly spread across the United States for freight and passenger service, with the first one introduced to the Finger Lakes in 1820. Cayuga Lake was the first Finger Lake connected to the Erie Canal after the passage of New York's Seneca Cayuga Canal Act of 1819. The economic opportunity presented by the canal led to the creation of the Cayuga Steamboat Company.<sup>60</sup> On June 1, 1820 the *Enterprise* made its maiden voyage and started a career as a successful passenger steamer and canal boat tug.

Canal connection was one of the dominating factors driving the prevalence and success of steamboats on the lakes in Central New York. Canal connection meant consistent demand for tug service to take barges across the lake to the canals. Passenger service was also better on these lakes due to the larger populations drawn by the industry created around the major transportation hubs. This led to competing steamboat companies and the building of many steamboats. Onondaga Lake and Oneida Lake were connected to the canal system, and like Cayuga Lake used steamboats for passenger and tug services (Figure 12).<sup>61</sup> The only other Finger Lakes to be connected to the canals were Seneca and Keuka. The first steamboat, really a steam-sail hybrid, on Seneca Lake was the *Seneca Chief*, launched May 15, 1828, the same year that the Seneca & Cayuga

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<sup>59</sup> Harvey, *It Started with a Steamboat*, 3 - 4.

<sup>60</sup> Harvey, *It Started with a Steamboat*, 10 - 11.

<sup>61</sup> New York Digital Commons, *The Iron Pier*.

Canal was completed. On its maiden voyage, *Seneca Chief* was also towing canal boats.<sup>62</sup> Likewise, the first Keuka Lake steamer, called *Keuka*, was put into service in 1835, two years after the completion of the Crooked Lake Canal connecting Keuka to Seneca Lake. As on the other lakes, this steamboat operated passenger, freight, and towing services.<sup>63</sup>

Adoption of steamboats on the smaller finger lakes lagged due to small surrounding populations and a lack of demand for freight services.

The first steamboat on Canandaigua Lake



**Figure 12: Amusement park poster for The Iron Pier showing various sailing craft, multiple passenger steamers, and private steamboats c. 1890 (New York Digital Commons, n.d.).**

was the *Lady of the Lake*, launched in 1827. This boat was not financially successful and quickly discontinued service. It was not until 1855 with the *Joseph Wood* that steamboat services became viable here (Figure 13).<sup>64</sup> Likewise, the first steamboat in Conesus

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<sup>62</sup> Cohn, *Seneca Lake Archaeological Survey 2019*, 24, 28 and Harvey, *It Started with a Steamboat*, 12 - 13.

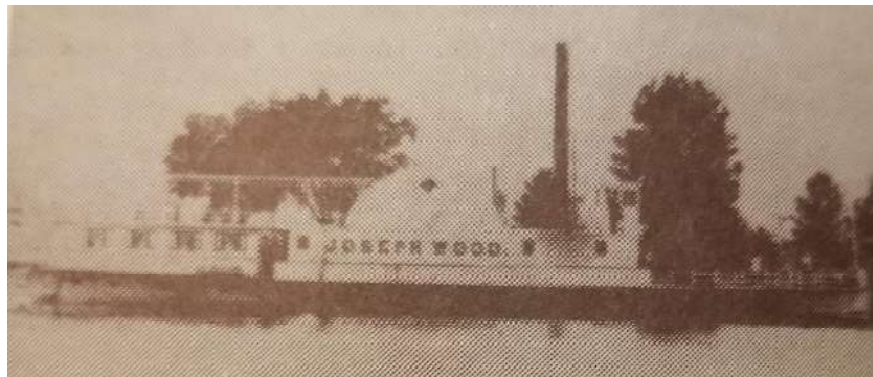
<sup>63</sup> Harvey, *It Started with a Steamboat*, 21 - 23.

<sup>64</sup> Vierhile, *Canandaigua Lake, the Steamboat Era*, 5 - 7; *Canandaigua Lake Steamboats*.

Lake, the *Jessie*, was not launched until 1874 and steamboats weren't seen on Owasco Lake until the late 1860s.<sup>65</sup>

The success of steamboats on these lakes in the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was due to railroads.

With railroads being built across the region, travelers could easily take trips from Rochester,



**Figure 13: Photograph of the *Joseph Wood* steamer in Canandaigua Lake (Vierhile, 1978).**

Syracuse, and Buffalo to visit their cottages on the lake, enjoy a leisurely cruise, or stay at one of the many lakeside hotels. The tourism industry quickly grew and caused rival steamboat companies to form and compete for passenger services. Steamboat companies organized trips to conform with train schedules, and eventually some railroad companies purchased steamboats to supplement their trains.<sup>66</sup> On Canandaigua Lake during the 1870s, captains of the *Canandaigua* and the *Ontario* cut rates and raced to docks to steal passengers.<sup>67</sup> A similar scenario existed during the “steamboat wars” on Keuka Lake between three competing companies from 1873 -1892.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> The Livingston Republican, ‘Steamboat Days at Conesus Lake New York’; Williams, *Postcard History Series: Owasco Lake*, 35.

<sup>66</sup> Cooper, *The Story of the Steamboats on Skaneateles Lake*, 8 discusses railroad company steamboats on Skaneateles Lake; MacAlpine, *Yates County Chronicles*, 54 – 58 describes railroad schedules and steamboat relations on Keuka Lake

<sup>67</sup> Vierhile, *Canandaigua Lake: The Steamboat Era*, 4 – 7.

<sup>68</sup> MacAlpine, *Yates County Chronicles*, 54 – 58.

As steam technology progressed, the sizes and types of steamboats on the lakes evolved. By the 1860s several wealthy lakeside residents owned small private steamers to ferry themselves to and from their vacation homes.<sup>69</sup> Passenger steamboat sizes increased, and new types of engines, paddlewheels, and hulls were designed. In 1820, the first steamboat on Cayuga Lake, the *Enterprise*, was 90 feet long by 30 feet wide amidships (27.4 by 9.14 meters) with a 27 horsepower (20.1 kilowatt) engine; less than three decades later in 1849 the *Ben Loder* was launched on Seneca Lake with a length of 253 feet, a beam of 30 feet (77.1 by 9.14 meters), and a 500 horsepower (372.9 kilowatt) engine.<sup>70</sup> Hull designs and sizes began to be optimized for speed, deck space, or towing capacity, such as the *Otetiani* built in 1883 which could traverse Seneca Lake one hour faster than all previous boats.<sup>71</sup> One of the last steamboats in the lakes, the *Mary Bell* of Keuka Lake, was built with steel hull in 1892 (Figure 14).<sup>72</sup> This was the only steel hulled steamboat used in the region.

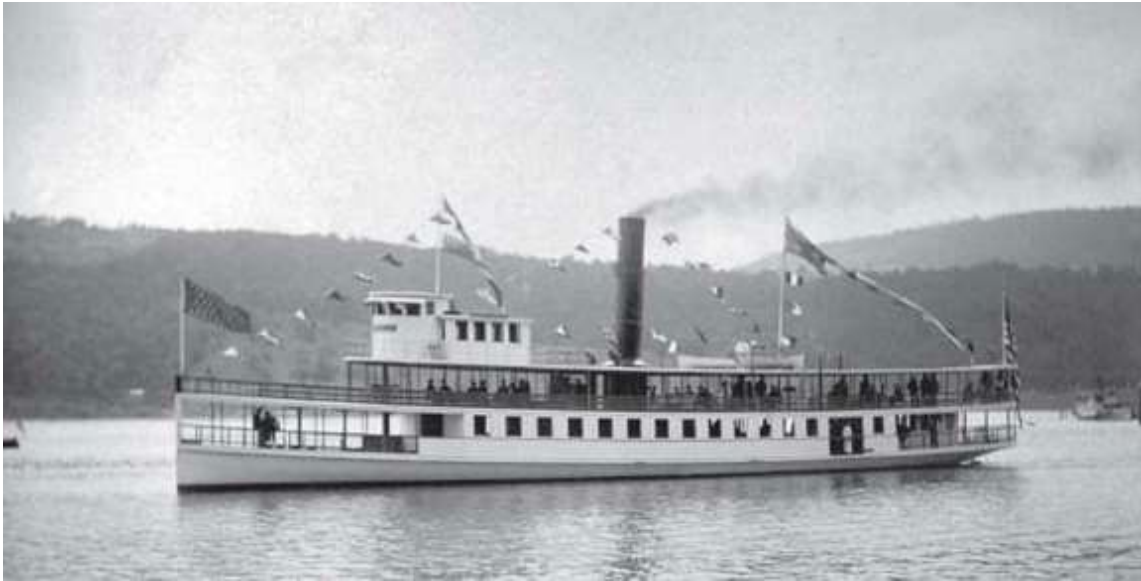
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<sup>69</sup> Williams, *Postcard History Series: Owasco Lake*, 35 – 52 and 67 – 88 shows many private steamboat photos on Owasco Lake; Cooper, *The Story of the Steamboats on Skaneateles Lake*, 10 discusses a private steamboat on Skaneateles Lake; Vierhile, *Canandaigua Lake: The Steamboat Era*, 1, 9 discusses private steamboats on Canandaigua Lake; MacAlpine, *Steamboats on Keuka Lake* shows private steamboats on Keuka Lake.

<sup>70</sup> Harvey, *It Started with a Steamboat*, 11, 32.

<sup>71</sup> Harvey, *It Started with a Steamboat*, 73.

<sup>72</sup> MacAlpine, *Yates County Chronicles*, 54 – 58; MacAlpine, *Steamboats on Keuka Lake*, Ch. 4.



**Figure 14: Photo of the steamer *Mary Bell* outside Hammondsport. The only steel hulled steamboat on Keuka Lake, and one of the last in service on the Finger Lakes (MacAlpine, 2015).**

By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the steamboat era on the Finger Lakes was coming to an end. The continued development of railroads eventually allowed them to bypass the lakes, thus reducing demand for passenger and freight services over water.<sup>73</sup> Gasoline engines also provided a safer and cheaper alternative to steam engines and allowed many people to buy their own personal power boats. Concurrently, the advent of automobiles and modern roads allowed people to travel down the lakes by land with their personal vehicles. In the early 1900s most of the remaining steamboats were fitted with gasoline engines, such as the *Oriana* of Canandaigua Lake in 1910 and the *Mary*

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<sup>73</sup> MacAlpine, *Steamboats on Keuka Lake*, Ch. 4; Harvey, *It Started with a Steamboat* discuss the impact of expanding railroads on freight services.

*Bell* of Keuka Lake in 1915.<sup>74</sup> After 1922 steamboat service in the Finger Lakes ceased to exist.<sup>75</sup>

### Conclusion

Since the first settlement of the Finger Lakes Region by Paleoindians, unique maritime communities developed and evolved in response to the local geography and resources. The earliest nomadic hunter-gatherers followed rivers and lakes through the steep valleys to take advantage of faster travel and freshwater resources. Later Native Americans created seasonal fishing villages and eventually large permanent settlements along the rivers, lakes, and islands. Canoes of many varieties from elm bark to dugout were used across combined networks of waterways and portages for fishing, hunting, trade, and war.

Once Europeans arrived during the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, they exploited the canoes, navigation routes, and methods of the natives while further developing the land to support their own needs. Early explorers used native canoes and guides to reach the interior of the region, and later brought their own boats through the rivers to establish settlements. Forts, towns, and farms appeared along the critical waterways and at portages to protect the few viable trade routes through the area. Once the native populations were decimated or displaced, a large influx of settlers quickly moved across

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<sup>74</sup> MacAlpine, *Steamboats on Keuka Lake*, Ch. 4; Harvey, *It Started with a Steamboat*, 215 - 222 discusses the *Mary Bell*; Vierhile, *Canandaigua Lake: The Steamboat Era*, 13; Canandaigua Lake Steamboats, n.d. discusses the *Oriana*.

<sup>75</sup> MacAlpine, *Steamboats on Keuka Lake*, Ch. 4; Vierhile, *Canandaigua Lake: The Steamboat Era*, 6; Cooper, *The Story of the Steamboats on Skaneateles Lake*, 3 discuss the ends of the last gasoline engine fitted steamboats in Keuka Lake, Canandaigua Lake, and Skaneateles Lake.

the state bringing with them rafts, scows, bateaux, and other familiar watercraft. Shortly after, canals were built to join the many disconnected waterways together for freight and passenger service, and steamboats appeared to improve cross-lake transit.

## CHAPTER II

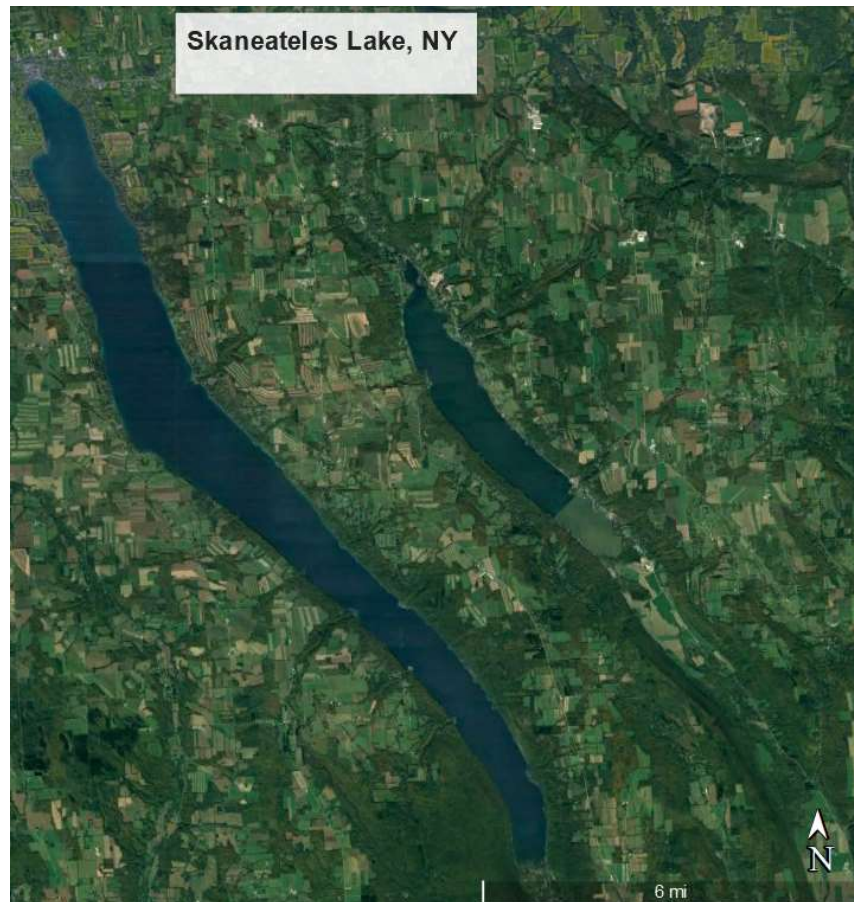
### HISTORY OF THE SETTLEMENT OF SKANEATELES LAKE

#### Geography and Environment

Much of the geography and environment around Skaneateles Lake is comparable to the neighboring Finger Lakes, but there are some key differences which influenced the settlements around it. At 16 miles (25.7 kilometers) long and 1.5 miles (2.4 kilometers) wide, Skaneateles Lake is the fourth largest finger lake, and the third deepest

with a depth of approximately 300 feet (91 meters) (Figure 15).<sup>76</sup> At an elevation of 863 feet (263 meters) above sea level it is also the third highest of the finger lakes.<sup>77</sup>

Although it is only the third highest, it is much higher than



all the other lakes of **Figure 15: Map showing Skaneateles Lake in the west and Otisco Lake in the East (Google Maps, 2022).**

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<sup>76</sup> NYSDEC, 'Finger Lakes Fishing', n.d.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.



similar or larger size, and the highest of the eastern lakes. The third largest lake, Canandaigua, has an elevation of 688 feet (209.7 meters) while the two larger lakes, Seneca and Cayuga, are both lower at 445 feet (135.63 meters) and 381 feet (116.1 meters) respectively. Honeoye and Conesus are the only lakes higher than Skaneateles, but they are the western most lakes over 60 miles (96.6 kilometers) distant and two of the smallest.<sup>78</sup>

When Skaneateles Lake was first settled by Europeans, land travel in Central New York was arduous and dangerous. Few roads existed in this part of the state, and those that did were poorly maintained. A series of turnpikes were constructed in the early 1800s to connect the western parts of the state to Albany and improve travel for the incoming settlers.<sup>79</sup> The conditions were so bad that most settlers only traveled on them in winter when the thick snow created a level path for wagons.<sup>80</sup> Even on the well traversed turnpikes to Albany and Utica it would take two weeks or more to travel with a team of horses.<sup>81</sup> Given the difficulty of land travel at this time, the 16 miles (25.7 kilometers) of lake offered a faster alternative route for north-south travel.

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Leslie, *History of Skaneateles*, 10 – 12; Clark, *Onondaga, Or Reminiscences*, vol. 2 mentions the many turnpike projects between military tract townships.

<sup>80</sup> Leslie, *History of Skaneateles*, 10 – 12 and Leslie, *Skaneateles: History of its Earliest Settlement*, 6 -9 describes the road conditions and western exodus during the winter.; Clark, *Onondaga, Or Reminiscences*, vol. 2, 213 describes the difficulty of travel and failed roadway projects in nearby Salina during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>81</sup> Clark, *Onondaga, Or Reminiscences*, vol. 2, 344 – 345 mentions a minimum two-week round trip from Skaneateles to Albany with a horse team to sell wheat.; Winship, “William J. Vredenburg” provides a firsthand account of Dr. Coventry describing the road conditions in 1806 between Utica and Cazenovia and mentions the trip of William J. Vredenburg from Utica to Skaneateles taking three weeks; Leslie, *Skaneateles: History of its Earliest Settlement*, 11 mentions a 43 day journey from Albany for Abraham Cuddeback in 1794.

The high elevation of Skaneateles Lake provided great opportunity for the development of industry along its outlet, Skaneateles Creek. In 1796, one of the first dams was constructed here by Judge Jedediah Sanger and Jesse Kellogg to support their sawmill and gristmill.<sup>82</sup> Shortly after the opening of these mills the newly commissioned Seneca Turnpike was rerouted away from the old Genessee road in the north through Skaneateles Village, now passing by the mills.<sup>83</sup> This change was presumably made due to Sanger's influence as one of the commissioners of the Seneca Turnpike.

With the new road and plenty of elevation to create more dams, industry began to flourish along Skaneateles Creek. Throughout the villages and townships along its length many sawmills, gristmills, distilleries, woolen mills, machine shops and iron foundries opened. The water from this lake was so pure and soft compared to the others that textile manufacturers used the creek for washing their raw materials. In 1849, local chronicler Joshua Clark even claimed that the creek was one of the most important in Onondaga County due to its long, steep slope and that it had the capacity to support triple the industrial production at that time.<sup>84</sup>

In addition to providing a power supply for industries, the high elevation of the lake provided a valuable water source for the Erie Canal. In the 1840s a new dam was

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<sup>82</sup> Leslie, *History of Skaneateles*, 31 – 32, 101, and Leslie, *Skaneateles: History of its Earliest Settlement*, 28, 168 mentions the early dams, but is unclear if Earll or Sanger and Kellogg constructed the first one; Clark, *Onondaga, Or Reminiscences*, vol. 2, 347 states that Sanger created the first gristmill and sawmill here in 1790, although nobody lived here until 1794.

<sup>83</sup> Clark, *Onondaga, Or Reminiscences*, vol. 2, 344 – 345.

<sup>84</sup> Clark, *Onondaga, Or Reminiscences*, vol. 2, 349 – 350 and Leslie, *Skaneateles: History of its Earliest Settlement*, 168 – 175 and 302 - 305 lists the many industries along the creek and describes the value attributed to it by local manufacturers.

constructed at the outlet of Skaneateles Lake to raise the water level four feet (1.2 meters). This new basin served as a reservoir to feed the enlarged Erie Canal during times of drought at the lock in the town of Jordan.<sup>85</sup>

Like the other lakes, the eastern and western shores of Skaneateles are bounded by steep slopes and cliffs which form the valley that was carved out by glaciers during the last ice age. Most of the flat land around the lake is located at the inlet, Grout Brook, in the south and near the outlet, Skaneateles Creek, in the north. The flats around the inlet and outlet were filled with marshes and debris from earlier floods.<sup>86</sup> Other areas of flat land appear at the points protruding into the lake at the terminuses of its many tributaries.

The availability of flat, dry land and running water heavily influenced where people settled. The largest settlement on the lake is the Village of Skaneateles, located at the head of Skaneateles Creek in the north. The only other major town located on the lake shore is Glen Haven in the south. The settlements of Borodino, Spafford, Mandana, and New Hope along the length of the lake were somewhat removed and thus built among the hills. Landings for each were built at nearby points to take advantage of the lake.<sup>87</sup>

Prior to settlement by European colonizers, the land surrounding the lake was filled with old growth forests containing a large variety of hardwood and softwood

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<sup>85</sup> Clark, *Onondaga, Or Reminiscences*, vol. 2, 349.

<sup>86</sup> Leslie, *History of Skaneateles*, 100 – 101.

<sup>87</sup> Copper, *The Story of the Steamboats on Skaneateles Lake*, 2 – 3.

species. The forests were so thick that one of the first settlers, Abraham A. Cuddeback, had to build a raft near the lake's outlet to carry his family and possession to their property on the western shore.<sup>88</sup> The thick forests made logging a lucrative business, and the lake provided the easiest means of transporting timber.

When the lake was dammed the water level rose and flooded the marshy points along the shore, which created dry staging areas to collect lumber. Timber harvested on the lake's slopes was brought to these staging areas and assembled into rafts to be brought to mills along the shore. Commercial boats were used to tow rafts or to ship finished lumber over the lake, and the timber industry became one of the primary employers of boats for many years.<sup>89</sup>

During the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the two most important characteristics that influenced development around the lake were the pristine environment and the exceptional water quality. Skaneateles Lake has long been famous for its idyllic scenery which has attracted many high-profile permanent residents and vacationers. Some families had ties to royalty in Europe, such as the Ludlow's, and many more had ties to the political and social elite of New York, such as the Roosevelts.<sup>90</sup> In his 1849 book, Clark says the Village of Skaneateles is "one of the most lovely and picturesque in western New York".<sup>91</sup> Leslie, in his 1902 book also refers to Skaneateles as "...the home

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<sup>88</sup> Leslie, *History of Skaneateles*, 16.

<sup>89</sup> Cooper, *The Story of the Steamboats on Skaneateles Lake*, 4 discusses the importance of the lumber trade on the lake and identifies steamboats and sailing boats which worked in it; 'Skaneateles Lake Steamboats' mentions the converted steamboats involved in the lumber trade.

<sup>90</sup> Leslie, *Skaneateles: History of its Earliest Settlement*, 314 discusses the Ludlow pedigree and that of other prominent citizens.

<sup>91</sup> Clark, *Onondaga, Or Reminiscences*, vol. 2, 349.

of the opulent, the favorite of tourists, and the haunt of the man of leisure...”.<sup>92</sup> By 1845 there were over 3,800 people living in the village, which was situated to have a perfect view of about half the length of the lake.<sup>93</sup> By this time all the unsightly marshes were flooded and much of the shore near the village was dotted with forest and manicured lawns. The beauty of this lake is what led to its thriving tourism industry which began in the late 1800s and continues to this day.

The water of Skaneateles Lake is unique among the Finger Lakes in its clarity and purity. Due to the lack of nutrients and aquatic plant growth the lake is the cleanest of the Finger Lakes and one of the cleanest in the country.<sup>94</sup> During the 19<sup>th</sup> century local textile manufacturers valued the water for its softness and used it to wash their wool.<sup>95</sup> Later, in 1894 a 20-mile (32.2 kilometer) long pipeline was constructed to connect the City of Syracuse to Skaneateles Lake for its water supply.<sup>96</sup> Today the lake supplies drinking water to many municipalities, and is one of the few water sources in the state clean enough to hold a filtration avoidance waiver.<sup>97</sup> With so little suspended solids in the water, the visibility is usually high and can sometimes exceed 50 feet (15.2 meters). This unique characteristic contributed to its attraction for wealthy residents and tourists.

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<sup>92</sup> Leslie, *Skaneateles: History of its Earliest Settlement*, 302.

<sup>93</sup> Clark, *Onondaga, Or Reminiscences*, vol. 2, 349.

<sup>94</sup> Awald, *City of Syracuse Department of Water: Consumer Confidence Report 2020 Newsletter*, 4.

<sup>95</sup> Clark, *Onondaga, Or Reminiscences*, vol. 2, 349 – 350.

<sup>96</sup> Awald, *City of Syracuse Department of Water: Consumer Confidence Report 2020 Newsletter*, 4.

<sup>97</sup> Awald, *City of Syracuse Department of Water: Consumer Confidence Report 2020 Newsletter*, 4.

## Prehistory

It is not known how long humans have resided along Skaneateles Lake, but it was actively inhabited by Native American communities prior to settlement by Europeans. There was an Indian trail to the north of the lake which the first European settlers used to reach their properties from 1793 – 1800. This trail passed through the center of what would become the Village of Skaneateles and was replaced with the Seneca Turnpike in 1800.<sup>98</sup> The path was likely used to connect the Onondaga and Oneida nations in the east with the Seneca and Cayuga to the west.

By 1794 the lake was still part of the Onondaga nation, but the size of the village is unclear. One account recalls that when Abraham Cuddeback first arrived and settled on the west shore of the lake there was a nearby spring with five ‘wigwams’ occupied by natives.<sup>99</sup> Another mentions “quite a large Indian village on the lake shore” to the southwest of the Village of Skaneateles during the state surveys of the Military Tract in 1791.<sup>100</sup> It is possible that these two accounts describe the same village, but it is unclear if this the village was a permanent or seasonal settlement.

It is likely that the Onondaga habitation sites on this lake were primarily fishing villages. Fishing in the lakes and rivers throughout the Onondaga nation was a common

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<sup>98</sup> Leslie, *History of Skaneateles*, 33 mentions the building of the first bridge by the Seneca Road Company in 1800; Clark, Clark, *Onondaga, Or Reminiscences*, vol. 2, 346 – 348 mentions the turnpike, and the Indian trail.

<sup>99</sup> Leslie, *History of Skaneateles*, 16.

<sup>100</sup> Clark, *Onondaga, Or Reminiscences*, vol. 2, 344.

activity observed by many European settlers, trappers, and traders.<sup>101</sup> At the time, Skaneateles was well stocked with trout and yellow perch. Early accounts mention that the shallows of the lake were darkened by large schools of these fish in the winter. The yellow perch from this lake were some of the most prized in Onondaga county and were later used to replace the stock in other lakes with higher quality fish.<sup>102</sup>

It is likely that the Onondaga used a combination of spear fishing and net fishing techniques here. Stone fishing net weights have been found along river and lake shores throughout Onondaga County, and some early settlers reported watching natives fishing with nets. Spear fishing while standing in the shallows and from canoes was also recorded in multiple locations around the area.<sup>103</sup> The earliest European settlers took to their canoes if deer were seen swimming across the lake and killed them before they made it to shore.<sup>104</sup> The Onondaga natives may have also used this technique.

There have been no archaeological excavations around the lake, but many artifacts were found as the land was cleared. Beauchamp provides a brief account of artifacts found around the lake. He recorded the same five-building village noted by Abraham Cuddeback in 1794. Although there was no settlement located at the Village of Skaneateles, artifacts have been found throughout Skaneateles, Mandana, and on the military lots 20, 22, and 24. On the east shore, near Spafford, there was a small village

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<sup>101</sup> Beauchamp, *Past and Present of Syracuse and Onondaga County*, 43 – 50 describes native fishing techniques, fish species, and prevalent water bodies for Onondaga natives based on firsthand accounts of 18<sup>th</sup> century travelers.

<sup>102</sup> Beauchamp, *Past and Present of Syracuse and Onondaga County*, 47; Clark, *Onondaga, Or Reminiscences*, vol. 2, 346.

<sup>103</sup> Beauchamp, *Past and Present of Syracuse and Onondaga County*, 43 – 50.

<sup>104</sup> Clark, *Onondaga, Or Reminiscences*, vol. 2, 346.

located on lot 68 which produced many artifacts. An additional site on military lot 12 contained many artifacts, but it is unclear if the area was inhabited by the Onondaga when the settlers first came or if it was dated to an earlier period.<sup>105</sup>

### **European Settlement**

European settlement of the central and western parts of New York did not begin in earnest until 1794 due in part to the large Native American population, but primarily because of unresolved property rights. In 1776, as payment for service in the Continental Army, the cash strapped Continental Congress offered 100 acres (40.5 hectares) of bounty lands in Ohio to enlisted soldiers and officers. Due to the lack of enlistment and provision of troops from other states, the State of New York in 1781 passed a law creating two regiments of troops for the protection of the frontier. In addition to the 100 acres (40.5 hectares) of land in Ohio offered by Congress, non-commissioned officers and privates in these regiments were promised 500 acres (202.3 hectares) of gratuity land in New York while commissioned officers received more. Through an agreement with the State of Ohio, the State of New York also offered an additional 100 acres (40.5 hectares) in the state if soldiers formally relinquished their claims to the land in Ohio within three years of the end of the war.<sup>106</sup>

In 1784 commissioners were appointed to assign lands and settle land claims, this was complicated by the fact that much of the land in Central New York was still

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<sup>105</sup> Beauchamp, *Past and Present of Syracuse and Onondaga County*, 65.

<sup>106</sup> Leslie, *History of Skaneateles*, 8 discusses the assignment of military bounty and gratuity lands; Clark, *Onondaga, Or Reminiscences*, vol. 1, 357 – 359 describes in detail the assignment of military lands to soldiers, their locations, and associated legislation; Ford, *The Shore is a Bridge*, 67 discusses concerns over rightful property ownership for early settlers in the Military Tract.



occupied by Native Americans. Many soldiers sold their land rights to speculators, and some soldiers fraudulently sold their land many times over.<sup>107</sup> This created an influential group of landowners fighting legal battles over conflicting claims while pressuring the state to allow them to settle. After the 1788 Treaty of Fort Stanwix, the native title over the land was removed, and in 1790 the Surveyor General, Simeon De Witt, completed his survey and divided out the land plots of the Military Tract. Over the course of the next four years the lands were assigned to claimants and needed to be settled by January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1799 or be reverted to ownership by the State.<sup>108</sup>

All the land around Skaneateles Lake was part of the Military Tract, and thus was not settled until 1794. The first settler was John Thompson, on military lot No. 18, who was closely followed by Abraham Cuddeback and his family.<sup>109</sup> From this time migration to the lands around the lake rapidly increased.<sup>110</sup> The first settlers concentrated on the north shore of the lake around the modern Village of Skaneateles, but five other hamlets were formed at other locations. These were Borodino and Spafford on the east shore, Mandana and New Hope on the west, and Glen Haven in the south.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Clark, *Onondaga, Or Reminiscences*, vol. 1, 359 – 363; Leslie, *History of Skaneateles*, 9 both discuss the widespread fraud involved in issuing lands.

<sup>108</sup> Clark, *Onondaga, Or Reminiscences*, vol. 1, 361 – 363.

<sup>109</sup> Leslie, *History of Skaneateles*, 15 – 17; Leslie, *Skaneateles: History of its Earliest Settlement* 11 – 13 describes the timeline between Thompson and Cuddeback; Clark, *Onondaga, Or Reminiscences*, vol. 2, 343.

<sup>110</sup> Leslie, *History of Skaneateles*, 15 – 30 lists early settlers, their professions, and the lots they settled.

<sup>111</sup> Cooper, *The Story of the Steamboats on Skaneateles Lake*, 3 – 4.

## CHAPTER III

### NAVIGATION ON SKANEATELES LAKE

The pattern of development of maritime activity on Skaneateles Lake was generally influenced by three major conditions. First, the quality of the environment in and around the lake appealed to early settlers and provided important resources. Second, the local and regional geography influenced transportation routes and industrial development. Third, the manner of settlement throughout the Military Tract affected resource demand and the growth of prominent settlements. The combination of these effects can be seen by looking at maritime history of the lake.

#### **Small Crafts and Early Activity**

Prior to 1794 there were no watercraft on Skaneateles Lake besides those built by the Native Americans. Onondagas likely used canoes for fishing, hunting, and cross-lake travel. A bark canoe was removed from the debris at the outlet of the lake by two children around 1796.<sup>112</sup> As the early European explorers and trappers in the northeast learned, canoes were the easiest means of water travel through the state's inland waterways and the early settlers adopted them on the lake. This is noted through accounts of early settlers hunting deer from canoes and skiffs, and from an 1830 sketch of the Village of Skaneateles which shows two men in a canoe.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Leslie, *History of Skaneateles*, 23.

<sup>113</sup> Clark, *Onondaga, Or Reminiscences*, vol. 2, 346; Leslie, *Skaneateles: History of its Earliest Settlement*, 193 shows the sketch originally printed in a Philadelphia magazine in 1830.

The first European craft on the lake was a log raft built by Abraham Cuddeback in 1794. Due to the thick forests and saturated flats along the lakeshore, the easiest way for him to reach his property was by rafting over the lake.<sup>114</sup> Later, in 1797, a second log raft was built to transport timber to the village for the house and tavern of James Porter.<sup>115</sup>

The raft built by James Porter was the start of a long tradition of raft building for timber transportation. With the rapid influx of settlers after the creation of the Military Tract, lumber was in high demand for building homes and other needed infrastructure. The thick forests around Skaneateles Lake and ample locations for sawmills made it an ideal location for logging. The steep shore-side terrain and lack of efficient land transportation made rafting the easiest means of transporting lumber. Trees were chopped down and dragged to staging areas on the lakeshore where they were trimmed, lashed together, and towed to the sawmills.<sup>116</sup>

Logging was a lucrative business at Skaneateles throughout most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the industry employed many sailing boats for towing rafts and transporting timber products. A contemporary account by local historian, Rev. William M. Beauchamp recalls the schooner *Constitution* and the sloop *Union* engaged in the wood trade during the 1830s.<sup>117</sup> Another account from 1866 reports the sinking of the sloop

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<sup>114</sup> Leslie, *History of Skaneateles*, 16.

<sup>115</sup> Clark, *Onondaga, Or Reminiscences*, vol. 2, 346.

<sup>116</sup> Cooper, *The Story of the Steamboats on Skaneateles Lake*, 4. It is possible some rafts were sailed as was observed in Lake Champlain, but historical accounts referencing sailing of rafts have not been found.

<sup>117</sup> Palmer, "Commercial Sailing on the Finger Lakes: Part IV", the original account was provided by William M. Beauchamp.

*George Washington* fully loaded with wood for delivery to Skaneateles.<sup>118</sup> From 1867 – 1875 the scow-built sloop *Onandaga* was also shipping lumber.<sup>119</sup>

These vessels, along with many other sloops and schooners were the workhorses of the lake throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In addition to shipping lumber, small craft carried all types of freight between each of the lakeside settlements and the private docks of cottages among the points. The schooner *Wild Fire* for instance was reported as carrying an assortment of cargo on August 6<sup>th</sup>, 1877 to the Village of Skaneateles. On September 12<sup>th</sup>, 1878, it was loaded with tiles for Gillet’s yard. Business was certainly lucrative since multiple boats were raised and repaired after sinking. This was case with the *Wild Fire* and *George Washington*.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Palmer, “Commercial Sailing on the Finger Lakes: Part IV”, original account was taken from the 12 Jan., 1866 edition of the *Skaneateles Press*.

<sup>119</sup> Palmer, “Commercial Sailing on the Finger Lakes: Part IV”, original account was taken from the 11 Nov., 1867 and 12 Dec., 1874 editions of the *Syracuse Journal*.

<sup>120</sup> Palmer, “Commercial Sailing on the Finger Lakes: Part IV”, original accounts were taken from the 25 Jan., 1866 edition of the *Skaneateles Press* and the 8 Mar., 1878 edition of the *Skaneateles Democrat*.

In addition to commercial sailing boats, private skiffs, rowboats, and yachts have been common since the early 1800s. Some of these boats were used for fishing and travel, but many were pleasure boats used for recreation (Figure 16). The combination of the industrial potential and picturesque beauty of Skaneateles attracted many wealthy residents who could afford their own yachts.



In 1812 William J. Vredenburg, one of the earliest influential residents, hired the shipwright Charles Burnett to construct a yacht for him to entertain guests. This yacht was completed in 1816 and named *The Four Sisters*. It had a length of 42 feet (12.8 meters) and a beam 10 feet (3.0 meters).<sup>121</sup> This was the first of many yachts to come.

**Figure 16: A mid-19th century sketch of Skaneateles Lake showing a boat rental house with rowboats and sailing boats by J.P. Dixon (Skaneateles Historical Society).**

Over time, Skaneateles became a favored location for yacht racing and hosted many regattas.<sup>122</sup> In 1852, the Skaneateles Model Yacht Club formed and hosted annual

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<sup>121</sup> Winship, ‘William J. Vredenberg’ and Leslie, *Skaneateles: History of its Earliest Settlement*, 291 – 292.

<sup>122</sup> *Syracuse Herald-Journal*, 7 Aug., 1850 advertises the accompaniment of the steamboat *Homer* with a yacht race by the Skaneateles Boat Club; Beauchamp, *Past and Present of Syracuse and Onondaga*

races until 1875. This same year members of the club commissioned the building of four new yachts, each 22 – 23.5 feet (6.7 – 7.2 meters) long.<sup>123</sup> The local boat builder, Captain Charles F. Hall, who constructed the *Blue Bell* and *Tempest* yachts, built *Laura* for H.L. Roosevelt in 1856. This yacht was based on a design by George Steers, who designed *America* which won the first America's Cup in 1852.<sup>124</sup> The demand for private boats such as these led to the creation of several small boat building companies including Bowdish Manufacturing and the Skaneateles Boat & Canoe Company.<sup>125</sup>

## Steamboats

### Independence

The first steamboat on Skaneateles was launched on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1831 and named *Independence* in honor of Independence day.<sup>126</sup> As was common with steamboats during this time, the hull of the vessel was first constructed and launched prior to installing the boilers, paddlewheels, and superstructure. The launch date of July 4<sup>th</sup> is when the hull was put in the water, but additional work was still needed before the boat was in working condition. It wasn't until July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1831 when *Independence* made its maiden voyage.<sup>127</sup>

The money to build *Independence* was raised through shares purchased by interested parties in the village, with much of the money being invested by the captain,

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*County*, 426 and Leslie, *Skaneateles: History of its Earliest Settlement*, 293 - 296 discuss regattas and yachting development on the lake.

<sup>123</sup> Unpublished manuscript from the Skaneateles Historical Society, 385 identifies the yachts as the *Tempest*, *Amazon*, *Alida*, and *Blue Bell*.

<sup>124</sup> Unpublished manuscript from the Skaneateles Historical Society, 385.

<sup>125</sup> Plaques at the Skaneateles Historical Society.

<sup>126</sup> Leslie, *History of Skaneateles*, 103; Beauchamp, *Past and Present of Syracuse and Onondaga County*, 426; Cooper, *The Story of the Steamboats on Skaneateles Lake*, 3.

<sup>127</sup> Beauchamp, *Past and Present of Syracuse and Onondaga County*, 426.

Mr. Wells. No certain depictions of *Independence* have been located, but there are several contemporary and secondary accounts describing the boat.

According to local historian, E. Norman Leslie, *Independence* was constructed by a shipwright named Mr. Winchell on the north shore of the lake. Interestingly, the boat was constructed on property that later would be owned by Nicholas Roosevelt who was an associate of Robert Livingston and Robert Fulton, and who is credited with proposing vertical paddlewheels for propelling steamboats.<sup>128</sup> The boat was between about 80 – 100 feet (24.4 – 30.5 meters) long with a counter stern, quarter deck, and a cabin extending partially below deck.<sup>129</sup> Propulsion came from a horizontal engine which was used to power two sidewheels.<sup>130</sup>

It is unclear if *Independence* made regular trips along the lake, but it was used for both freight and passenger transport. A barge was constructed at the same time as *Independence* for freight to be towed behind.<sup>131</sup> Several contemporary accounts recall parties taken aboard for pleasure trips across the lake. On September 7<sup>th</sup>, 1831 a group of 44 ladies, 19 gentlemen, and a band of 20 players from Auburn traveled up the lake.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Winship, “Nicholas Roosevelt” and Leslie, *Skaneateles: History of its Earliest Settlement*, 219 discusses Roosevelt’s contributions to steamboat design and his property on Skaneateles Lake; Leslie, *History of Skaneateles*, 103 identifies the property where the *Independence* was built as belonging to Nicholas’s decedent, H.L. Roosevelt in 1881.

<sup>129</sup> Leslie, *History of Skaneateles*, 103 states the *Independence* was between 80 – 100 feet long while Cooper, *The Story of the Steamboats on Skaneateles Lake*, 3 states that the *Independence* was 80 feet long; Collins, *History: Town of Spafford*, 86 and Palmer, *Short Lines of Central New York*, 45 state the *Independence* was about 100 feet long; *Loyster*, ‘Steaming up the Lake’, 12 mentions the quarterdeck and cabin.

<sup>130</sup> Leslie, *History of Skaneateles*, 103.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> *Loyster*, ‘Steaming up the Lake’, 12; Palmer, “Commercial Sailing on the Finger Lakes: Part IV”, original account was taken from William Beauchamp.

On October 1<sup>st</sup> of the same year another trip was recorded in the *Auburn Free Press* by the editor.<sup>133</sup> On November 21, 1831 Captain Wells sold his interests in the boat to Charles Pardee.<sup>134</sup>

*Independence* was not a financial success and had a short life as a steamboat before being converted to the two masted schooner *Constitution*.<sup>135</sup> Although contemporary accounts refer to the converted sailing boat as a schooner, it is possible that it was sloop rigged like the other sailing boats on this lake. Historian William M. Beauchamp recalled in an article written for the *Skaneateles Democrat* that *Constitution* was actually sloop rigged.<sup>136</sup>

The date the conversion occurred is unknown, but Beauchamp recalled *Independence* being unmoored due to ice and drifting to his family orchard in April of 1832 and Leslie states that the boat was converted after three years of service.<sup>137</sup> As a sailing boat, *Constitution* was much more successful and involved in shipping lumber for many years.<sup>138</sup> In addition to freight, the boat was used for occasional pleasure trips.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> “Commercial Sailing on the Finger Lakes: Part IV”, original account was taken from the editor of the *Auburn Free Press. Skaneateles Columbian*, 4 Oct., 1831, 3.

<sup>134</sup> “Commercial Sailing on the Finger Lakes: Part IV”, original account was taken from William Beauchamp.

<sup>135</sup> “Commercial Sailing on the Finger Lakes: Part IV”, original account was taken from William Beauchamp; Cooper, *The Story of the Steamboats on Skaneateles Lake*, 3; Beauchamp, *Past and Present of Syracuse and Onondaga County*, 426; Leslie, *History of Skaneateles*, 105, Loyster, ‘Steaming up the Lake’, 12; Sedgwick, S., ‘Queen of the Finger Lakes’, 383, ‘Skaneateles Lake Steamboats’, 2.

<sup>136</sup> “Commercial Sailing on the Finger Lakes: Part IV”.

<sup>137</sup> “Commercial Sailing on the Finger Lakes: Part IV”, original account was taken from William Beauchamp; Leslie, *History of Skaneateles*, 105.

<sup>138</sup> Commercial Sailing on the Finger Lakes: Part IV”, Cooper, *The Story of the Steamboats on Skaneateles Lake*, 3; Loyster, ‘Steaming up the Lake’, 12.

<sup>139</sup> Commercial Sailing on the Finger Lakes: Part IV”, original account was taken from William Beauchamp.



### Highland Chief

The second steamboat on this lake was *Highland Chief*, which also began service in 1831. Much less is known about this steamboat compared to *Independence*, and there are contradicting records for the dates of service. John D. Barrow suggests that the boat was launched in 1824, however no records of the boat on Skaneateles Lake appear until 1831.<sup>140</sup> Most sources agree that *Highland Chief* was brought to the lake in 1831 from the Hudson River via the Erie Canal, and then a team of oxen over land.<sup>141</sup> It is possible that Barrow was referring to 1824 as year that the boat was launched in the Hudson River before being brought to Skaneateles Lake.

*Highland Chief* was a much smaller boat than *Independence* with a length of 40 feet (12.2 meters).<sup>142</sup> Like *Independence*, this boat had two sidewheels which were powered by a small steam engine.<sup>143</sup> In a departure from the role of *Independence*, this boat was used primarily for passenger transport.

Captain William Fowler brought *Highland Chief* from the Hudson River and served as its master on Skaneateles Lake.<sup>144</sup> The boat reportedly was unsteady and careened with minor waves.<sup>145</sup> A handbill from August 3, 1831 advertises *Highland*

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<sup>140</sup> 'Skaneateles Lake Steamboats', 1 states that one source claims the boat was launched in 1824; Collins, *History: Town of Spafford*, 85 mentions that Barrow claims the boat was introduced in 1824.

<sup>141</sup> Leslie, *History of Skaneateles*, 104; Collins, *History: Town of Spafford*, 85; Cooper, *The Story of the Steamboats on Skaneateles Lake*, 3.

<sup>142</sup> Leslie, *History of Skaneateles*, 104; Collins, *History: Town of Spafford*, 85; Cooper, *The Story of the Steamboats on Skaneateles Lake*, 3 - 4; 'Skaneateles Lake Steamboats', 1; Palmer, *Short Lines of Central New York*, 45.

<sup>143</sup> Leslie, *History of Skaneateles*, 104; Cooper, *The Story of the Steamboats on Skaneateles Lake*, 3.

<sup>144</sup> Leslie, *History of Skaneateles*, 104 - 105; 'Skaneateles Lake Steamboats', 1; Collins, *History: Town of Spafford*, 85.

<sup>145</sup> Collins, *History: Town of Spafford*, 85.

*Chief* running a regular roundtrip schedule on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday between Skaneateles and Rossville (later called Glen Haven) for \$0.75. This same bill advertises its availability on commission for private trips and events on Monday, Wednesday and Friday each week.<sup>146</sup>

This boat suffered the same fate as *Independence* and was converted to a sailing vessel within three years, however the name of the new vessel is unknown.<sup>147</sup> Like *Constitution*, the boat was probably schooner rigged and used for hauling lumber.

### *Skaneateles*

By 1833 both *Independence* and *Highland Chief* were converted to sailing vessels, and no other steamboats were seen on the lake for the next 15 years. *Skaneateles* was launched on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1848 for both freight and passenger service.<sup>148</sup> Two sources claim that the boat had a length of 75 feet (22.9 meters) and a beam of 18 feet (5.5 meters). Like the earlier steamboats, *Skaneateles* was also a sidewheeler powered by a single horizontal engine.<sup>149</sup>

*Skaneateles* was operated by Captain Hecox and Dr. E.H. Porter running daily trips between Skaneateles and Glen Haven.<sup>150</sup> It was the first steamboat to run daily scheduled trips and market itself as an efficient throughfare between important cities in

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<sup>146</sup> ‘Skaneateles Lake Steamboats’, 1 provides a transcription of the handbill; “Commercial Sailing on the Finger Lakes: Part IV” references the same handbill.

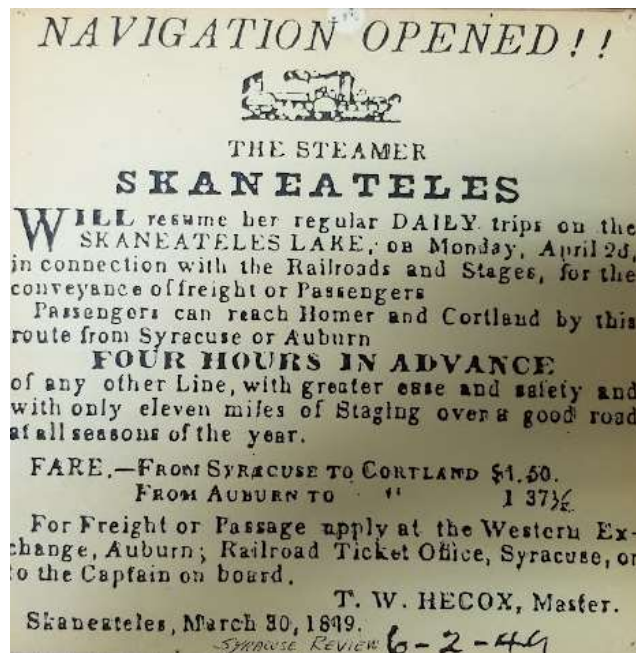
<sup>147</sup> Leslie, *History of Skaneateles*, 104 – 105, Cooper, *The Story of the Steamboats on Skaneateles Lake*, 3; ‘Skaneateles Lake Steamboats’, 1; Palmer, *Short Lines of Central New York*, 45.

<sup>148</sup> Loyster, ‘Steaming up the Lake’, 12; ‘Skaneateles Lake Steamboats’, 2; Cooper, *The Story of the Steamboats on Skaneateles Lake*, 4; Clark, *Onondaga, Or Reminiscences*, vol. 2, 348 – 349.

<sup>149</sup> Palmer, *Short Lines of Central New York*, 45; ‘Skaneateles Lake Steamboats’, 2.

<sup>150</sup> ‘Skaneateles Lake Steamboats’, 2; Clark, *Onondaga, Or Reminiscences*, vol. 2, 348 – 349 recalls Dr. Porter; *Syracuse Review*, 2 Jun., 1849.

the region. An 1849 newspaper advertisement claims that *Skaneateles* offered connection with railroads and stages for passengers to reach Homer and Cortland from Syracuse and Auburn four hours sooner than any other method (Figure 17).<sup>151</sup> Both Syracuse and Auburn are located north of Skaneateles Lake while Homer and Cortland are to the south. Crossing Skaneateles Lake by boat could eliminate over 16 miles (25.7 kilometers) of stagecoach roads on this journey, which would have been an attractive alternative for travelers.



**Figure 17: Advertisement for *Skaneateles* highlighting the speed of a trip on the steamer compared to other transportation methods (Syracuse Review).**

In addition to its use as an intercity transit line, *Skaneateles* benefited by taking passengers to the new Glen Haven Water Cure Sanitarium. The sanitarium was opened in 1847 by Dr. Jackson and Dr. Gleason to provide water cure therapies, which were popular at the time.<sup>152</sup> This institution operated in some capacity as a hotel, and it is possible that steamboat service was restarted to take advantage of potential fares provided by this new business. It is unclear how many years *Skaneateles* operated, but it was ultimately unsuccessful and retired during the early 1850s.

<sup>151</sup> *Syracuse Review*, 2 Jun., 1849, clipping located in the Onondaga Historical Association Archives.

<sup>152</sup> Cooper, *The Story of the Steamboats on Skaneateles Lake*, 5.

### Homer

Much like the first three steamboats, *Homer* proved to be an economic failure after a few years of operation, but it was the first steamboat that was widely advertised. The Skaneateles & Homer Steamboat company was formed in 1849 and the boat launched on May 31<sup>st</sup>, 1849. It was expected to be completed by June 25<sup>th</sup>, 1849.<sup>153</sup> This boat was approximately 112 feet (34.1 meters) long with a beam of 18.5 feet (5.6 meters) and was propelled by sidewheels.<sup>154</sup> These wheels were powered by a 60 horsepower (44.7 kilowatt) engine and were protected by exterior guards which extended the beam to 32 feet (9.8 meters).<sup>155</sup> Both the engine and boilers were locally made by the Seneca Lake Foundry.<sup>156</sup> Making the maiden voyage around July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1849 under Captain Richworth Mason, *Homer* competed with *Skaneateles* during its first year in service.<sup>157</sup>

Like *Skaneateles*, *Homer* transported passengers and freight from Skaneateles to Glen Haven for both the water-cure and travelers commuting north or south.<sup>158</sup> Local newspapers were filled with ads noting when *Homer* began or ended service for the

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<sup>153</sup> *Skaneateles Columbian*, 31 May, 1849; *Auburn Citizen*, 30 Dec., 1976.

<sup>154</sup> Cooper, *The Story of the Steamboats on Skaneateles Lake*, 5; Humphryes, 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, 298; *Skaneateles Columbian*, 31 May, 1849; *Skaneateles Democrat*, 1 Jun. 1849.

<sup>155</sup> *Skaneateles Columbian*, 31 May, 1849; *Skaneateles Press*, 29 Jun, 1849; *Skaneateles Democrat*, 29 Jun 1849.

<sup>156</sup> Palmer, *Short Lines of Central New York*, 45; *Skaneateles Press*, 29 Jun, 1849; *Skaneateles Democrat*, 29 Jun 1849.

<sup>157</sup> Cooper, *The Story of the Steamboats on Skaneateles Lake*, 5; Beauchamp, *Past and Present of Syracuse and Onondaga County*, 426; Humphryes, 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, 298, contemporary newspaper clippings mention Captain Mason; Sources are contradicting regarding the date of the maiden voyage, but it was between June 30<sup>th</sup> and July 4<sup>th</sup> 1849.

<sup>158</sup> *Skaneateles Columbian*, 20 Mar., 1850; *Syracuse Daily Standard*, 10 Jul., 1850; *Cortland Whig*, 30 May, 1850 all emphasize connection with stages at Glen Haven.

season, and when there were changes to the daily schedule.<sup>159</sup> The boat was also used for pleasure trips on special occasions, such as during yacht races with the Skaneateles Boat Club or the Skaneateles Model Yacht Club.<sup>160</sup>

Compared to *Skaneateles*, the amount of business provided to *Homer* by the Glen Haven Water Cure Sanitarium was likely much greater. In 1850, the main building at the water-cure burned down and the facility was sold to Dr. William Thomas who began to market it as a hotel and summer resort.<sup>161</sup> In 1851, after the water-cure changed ownership and *Skaneateles* was out of service, newspaper articles referencing trips to the water-cure appeared. *Homer* was the first steamboat advertised by the hotel. An article written in 1855 for the *Water-Cure Journal* and an 1858 pamphlet show the same sketch



**Figure 18: Sketch of the Glen Haven Water-Cure used on several advertisements during the 1850s featuring *Homer* (Chaplin, 1855).**

<sup>159</sup> *Post-Standard*, 23 Mar., 1850; *Post-Standard*, 21 Apr., 1851; *Post-Standard*, 10 Jun., 1853; *Post-Standard*, 18 Apr., 1854; *Post-Standard*, 28 Apr., 1854; *Skaneateles Democrat*, 27 Apr., 1855; *Post-Standard*, 28 Apr., 1855; *Post-Standard*, 19 Jun., 1856.

<sup>160</sup> *Syracuse Herald-Journal*, 7 Aug., 1850; *Syracuse Daily Standard*, 5 Jun., 1855; *Syracuse Daily Standard*, 22 Jun., 1855; *Syracuse Daily Standard*, 29 Jun., 1855; *Skaneateles Democrat*, 5 Jul., 1855; *Auburn Daily American*, 20 Aug., 1855; *Skaneateles Democrat*, 20 Jun. 1856; *Auburn Daily American*, 4 Jul., 1856; *Skaneateles Columbian*, 4 Sept., 1851; *Skaneateles Democrat*, 18 Jun., 1852; *Auburn Cayuga Chief*, 13 Jul., 1852; *Skaneateles Democrat*, 21 Sept., 1852; *Syracuse Daily Standard*, 11 Jul., 1851; *Auburn Cayuga Chief*, 9 Jul., 1851; *Syracuse Daily Standard*, 30 Aug., 1851.

<sup>161</sup> Cooper, *The Story of the Steamboats on Skaneateles Lake*, 5.

of the Glen Haven Water-Cure with *Homer* prominently featured in front (Figure 22).<sup>162</sup> The boat was also featured in two other paintings from 1849 and 1850 in the same location.<sup>163</sup>

For much of the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Glen Haven Water-Cure, also known as the Glen Haven Hotel, was a lucrative business which heavily utilized later steamboats. Pamphlets and advertisements for the hotel depicted the steamboats and marketed the ride as part of the resort experience. Local newspapers also commonly recounted trips to the facility.<sup>164</sup>

*Homer* was a popular and successful boat for several years as evidenced by contemporary newspaper accounts applauding the captain and the quality of excursions.<sup>165</sup> The boat was accidentally sunk, raised, and repaired several times, which speaks to the profitability of the business.<sup>166</sup> However, by 1855 *Homer* appeared to stop running regular trips to connect with stages at Glen Haven and was relegated to running pleasure trips on commission.<sup>167</sup> It is possible that the demand was not sufficient to run the boat on a regular schedule.

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<sup>162</sup> Chaplin, *Glen Haven Water-Cure*, 1; 'The Glen Haven Water Cure', 138 original sketch by E. Held.

<sup>163</sup> Painting by an unknown artist featuring *Homer* and the Glen Haven Water Cure is in the collections of the Onondaga Historical Association.

<sup>164</sup> *Skaneateles Democrat*, 20 Jun., 1851; *Syracuse Daily Standard*, 30, Aug. 1851; *Auburn Cayuga Chief*, 13 Jul., 1852; *Skaneateles Democrat*, 18 Jun., 1852; *Skaneateles Democrat*, 7 Oct., 1853; *Skaneateles Democrat*, 20 Sept., 1855; *Skaneateles Democrat*, 13 Jun., 1859; *Syracuse Daily Standard*, Jul., 1852.

<sup>165</sup> *Auburn Cayuga Chief*, 9 Jul., 1851; *Syracuse Daily Standard*, 10 Aug., 1850; *Marcellus Weekly Observer*, 9 Jul., 1849; *Syracuse Daily Standard*, 10 Aug., 1850.

<sup>166</sup> *Rochester Daily Democrat*, 10 Oct., 1849; *Skaneateles Press*, 13 Jan., 1850; *Skaneateles Columbian*, 20 Mar., 1850.

<sup>167</sup> *Syracuse Daily Standard*, 5 Jun., 1855; *Syracuse Daily Standard*, 22 Jun., 1855; *Syracuse Daily Standard*, 29 Jun., 1855; *Skaneateles Democrat*, 5 Jul., 1855; *Skaneateles Democrat*, 22 Feb., 1856.

In April of 1856, *Homer* sank at the dock and the water froze so three feet of ice was in the hold. Over the course of the month the ice was removed, the ship raised, and repairs made.<sup>168</sup> In the fall of this year *Homer* was run aground on the north shore of the lake under a full head of steam where it remained.<sup>169</sup> The engine was sold in November, but there were discussions of repairing the boat up until 1864 when it was partially demolished.<sup>170</sup> The remaining hull was again partially demolished in 1870.<sup>171</sup>

### *Ben Porter*

*Ben Porter* was the fifth commercial steamboat on Skaneateles Lake and made its maiden voyage on August 11, 1866.<sup>172</sup> The boat was named in honor of the local U.S. Navy Lieutenant Benjamin H. Porter, who died in the Civil War, and whose portrait could be found in the pilot house.<sup>173</sup> It was constructed by C.F. Hall, who was a well-respected yacht builder in Skaneateles.<sup>174</sup>

In contrast to the earlier steamboats, much more is known about the construction of *Ben Porter*. In mid-May 1866 the hull of the 45 feet long (13.72 meters) boat was

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<sup>168</sup> *Skaneateles Democrat*, 11 Apr., 1856; *Skaneateles Democrat*, 25 Apr., 1856; *Skaneateles Democrat*, 9 May, 1856.

<sup>169</sup> *Skaneateles Democrat*, 25 Jun., 1857 references running aground in the prior fall; *Auburn Daily Bulletin*, 22 Dec., 1870; *Skaneateles Press*, 24 Dec., 1970 reference running aground but are unclear on the year; Humphries, 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, 298 recalls seeing the hull in the water as a child.

<sup>170</sup> *Syracuse Daily Standard*, 30 Nov., 1856 mentions selling the engine; *Skaneateles Democrat*, 9 Dec., 1858, *Auburn American*, 14 Jan., 1859, *Syracuse Daily Standard*, 13 Jan., 1859, *Skaneateles Democrat*, 13 Jun 1859, and *Skaneateles Democrat*, 5 May 1864 discuss attempts to return *Homer* to service.

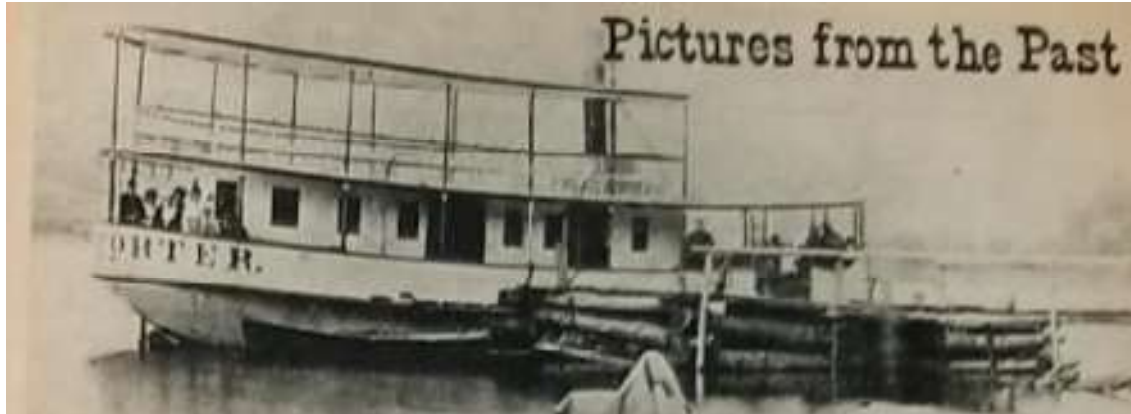
<sup>171</sup> *Auburn Daily Bulletin*, 22 Dec., 1870 mentions removal of the last of the hull.

<sup>172</sup> Battle, 'Steamboats', 10; *Syracuse Journal*, 13 Aug., 1866 recounts the trail voyage from the prior Saturday.

<sup>173</sup> *Skaneateles Lake Steamboats*, 4; *Syracuse Journal*, 15 May, 1866; Palmer, *Short Lines of Central New York*, 45; *Skaneateles Press*, 18 Jul., 1966.

<sup>174</sup> 'Skaneateles Lake Steamboats', 4; *Syracuse Journal*, 15 May, 1866; Palmer, *Short Lines of Central New York*, 45.

being finished ashore. The cabin was lightly built and unpainted, with only oil and varnish being used to enhance the color.<sup>175</sup> In July 1866 boiler and engine were installed, and the carpenters were putting the finishing touches on the superstructure.<sup>176</sup>



**Figure 19: *Ben Porter* as a steamboat (Onondaga Historical Association).**

The boat was powered by a new style of double reversible oscillating engine.<sup>177</sup> This boat was the first of the Skaneateles steamboats to be photographed, so more details of the superstructure design are available. Figure 19 shows the earliest photo of the steamer *Ben Porter*. This photo shows the propeller, smokestack, cabin, and two covered decks.<sup>178</sup>

The launching of *Ben Porter* marked pivotal changes in both the construction and operation of steamboats on Skaneateles Lake. All four of the earlier steamboats were propelled by sidewheels, but *Ben Porter* was a propeller driven boat.<sup>179</sup> This was made possible by the new double reversible oscillating engine, which was used in lieu of the

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<sup>175</sup> *Syracuse Journal*, 15 May, 1866.

<sup>176</sup> 'Skaneateles Lake Steamboats', 4 originally from the *Skaneateles Democrat*.

<sup>177</sup> *Syracuse Journal*, 13 Aug, 1866.

<sup>178</sup> The image was modified from one found in the archives of the Onondaga Historical Association.

<sup>179</sup> *Syracuse Journal*, 11 Aug, 1875; *Syracuse Journal*, 19 Aug, 1875; 'Skaneateles Lake Steamboats', 4; Cooper, *The Story of the Steamboats on Skaneateles Lake*, 6; *Short Lines of Central New York*, 45; Battle, 'Steamboats', 10



horizontal engines used on the earlier steamboats. By removing sidewheels, the boat was lighter, smaller, and cheaper to construct than the prior designs.

Like *Homer*, *Ben Porter* was owned by a stock company composed of multiple proprietors. The two principal proprietors for the first few years were the captain, W.R. Bailey, and Charles Isbell, the designer and owner of the patent for the steamer's engine.<sup>180</sup> The steamboat was well received on its maiden voyage and it enjoyed several years of good service ferrying freight and passengers between Skaneateles, Glen Haven, and other landings along the lake on a regular schedule.<sup>181</sup> In 1869 stock in the boat was auctioned off and it began new service under George Lewis.<sup>182</sup> In 1870, the steamboat was purchased by its final owners, the Skaneateles Railroad.<sup>183</sup>

It seems fitting that an article in the August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1866 edition of *Syracuse Journal*, advertising the launch of the *Ben Porter* was immediately followed by another article stating that the Skaneateles Railroad project would move forward. The first Skaneateles Railroad was constructed in 1840 and featured wooden rails and horse drawn cars.<sup>184</sup> Due to financial problems and a locomotive explosion the railroad failed in August 1850. By 1866, the growing population and industry along Skaneateles Creek led to the railroad being re-opened and by 1869 there were over 35,500 people riding it each year.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> *Syracuse Journal*, 15 May, 1866; *Syracuse Journal*, 13 Aug., 1866.

<sup>181</sup> *Syracuse Journal*, 13 Aug., 1866; *Syracuse Journal*, 3 Jun., 1867; *Syracuse Journal*, 30 Jun., 1868; *Syracuse Journal*, 7 Aug., 1867.

<sup>182</sup> *Syracuse Journal*, 15 Jun., 1869; *Syracuse Journal*, 28 Jun., 1869.

<sup>183</sup> Palmer, *Short Lines of Central New York*, 45.

<sup>184</sup> Palmer, *Short Lines of Central New York*, 26.

<sup>185</sup> Palmer, *Short Lines of Central New York*, 28.

By 1870 Skaneateles Lake had a reputation as an idyllic retreat and popular vacation spot. Traffic along the public landings was increasing, and more cottages with private docks were being built. In response to the growing business, and to encourage use of trains by vacationers, the Skaneateles Railroad purchased *Ben Porter* on May 12<sup>th</sup>, 1870 and began running the boat between Syracuse and Glen Haven in conjunction with the train schedules. The schedules were organized by Skaneateles Railroad superintendent J. McNamara and included advertisements of the train schedules, the Glen Haven Hotel, and free luggage transfers between the train and boat.<sup>186</sup> The venture was so successful that the Skaneateles Railroad decided to decommission *Ben Porter* and move the engine and boilers to their new, larger steamboat *Glen Haven* in June 1876.<sup>187</sup>

Just like *Independence* and *Highland Chief*, the hull of *Ben Porter* was sold and converted into a two masted schooner in 1876.<sup>188</sup> The maiden voyage as a sailing vessel was in 1877, and it carried a variety of cargo including stone and lumber with multiple owners until being bought by Captain George Collins in 1880.<sup>189</sup> During its life as a schooner, *Ben Porter* was photographed several times, including photos of it alongside

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<sup>186</sup> Palmer, *Short Lines of Central New York*, 45; *Syracuse Journal*, 29 Jun., 1875; *Syracuse Journal*, 23 Aug., 1872; *Syracuse Journal*, 7 Jul., 1873; *Syracuse Journal*, 10 Sept. 1873; *Syracuse Journal*, 2 Jul., 1873; *Syracuse Journal*, 5 Aug., 1873.

<sup>187</sup> Palmer, *Short Lines of Central New York*, 45; Cooper, *The Story of the Steamboats on Skaneateles Lake*, 8; 'Skaneateles Lake Steamboats', 4.

<sup>188</sup> 'Skaneateles Lake Steamboats', 4; Cooper, *The Story of the Steamboats on Skaneateles Lake*, 8.

<sup>189</sup> 'Skaneateles Lake Steamboats', 4 mentions prior owners and a cargo of stone; Cooper, *The Story of the Steamboats on Skaneateles Lake*, 8 and *Skaneateles Press*, 28 Sept., 1977 mentions the lumber trade.

its successor, *Glen Haven*.<sup>190</sup> One of the clearest images of the schooner, a painting by the celebrated local artist John D. Barrow (1824 -1906), is currently displayed at his gallery in the Village of Skaneateles (Figure 20). Landscapes around Skaneateles Lake were a common theme of Barrow's artwork, with several of his paintings representing boats.<sup>191</sup> From this painting it can be seen that the cabin was removed, and two masts and a bowsprit were added. Sometime in the early 1880s, the boat was scuttled along Willow Point to be used as a dock.<sup>192</sup>



**Figure 20: Painting of *Ben Porter* as a two masted schooner by John D. Barrow (John D. Barrow Art Gallery).**

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<sup>190</sup> Photographs are in the Onondaga Historical Association archives and the Skaneateles Historical Society archives.

<sup>191</sup> *Skaneateles Press*, 28 Sept., 1977 mentions another painting by Barrow in the First Trust Bank and Deposit Co. which shows the *Ben Porter*, in a storm off Carpenter's Point.

<sup>192</sup> 'Skaneateles Lake Steamboats', 5; Humphries, 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, 298.

### Glen Haven

*Glen Haven* was the longest serving and most successful of all the steamboats on the lake. Built in 1876, the 80 feet (24.4 meters) long and 16 feet (4.9 meters) beam boat was propellor driven and commissioned by the Skaneateles Railroad to replace *Ben Porter*. It used the machinery from the earlier ship.<sup>193</sup> Designed to carry 300 – 350 passengers, *Glen Haven* was constructed by George H. Notter of Buffalo, NY.<sup>194</sup> The boat was launched on June 28<sup>th</sup>, 1876 and its first recorded trip was under the command of Captain E. B. Coe on July 10<sup>th</sup>, 1876.<sup>195</sup>

*Glen Haven* was twice as large as the predecessor, *Ben Porter*, and it was quickly a success. For the next 40 years the boat ran regularly scheduled trips between Skaneateles and Glen Haven with stops at other public and private landings all along the lake.<sup>196</sup> With regular steamboat service secured, wealthy families with lakeside homes built private steamboat docks to take advantage of passenger service and mail delivery, which had been possible via steamboats since *Homer* was active.<sup>197</sup> The Skaneateles Railroad, and its successor the Auburn & Syracuse Electric Railroad, maintained a steam powered pile driving barge to aid in constructing and repairing steamboat docks. By

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<sup>193</sup> *Skaneateles Press*, 28 Sept., 1977; Palmer, *Short Lines of Central New York*, 45; Cooper, *The Story of the Steamboats on Skaneateles Lake*, 8.

<sup>194</sup> Humphryes, 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, 298 was an acquaintance of George Notter, and claims the boat was designed for 350 people, in agreement with Cooper, *The Story of the Steamboats on Skaneateles Lake*, 8, and Loyster, 'Steaming Up the Lake', 13; *Syracuse Journal*, 10 Jul., 1876 states that the ship had a capacity of 300 people.

<sup>195</sup> Humphryes, 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, 298; *Syracuse Journal*, 10 Jul., 1876; Loyster, 'Steaming Up the Lake', 13.

<sup>196</sup> Cooper, *The Story of the Steamboats on Skaneateles Lake*, 8; 'Skaneateles Lake Steamboats', 5.

<sup>197</sup> Cooper, *The Story of the Steamboats on Skaneateles Lake*, 8 – 10.

1904 steamboat tickets listed 17 docks in addition to those at Skaneateles and Glen Haven.<sup>198</sup>

As with *Ben Porter* the Skaneateles Railroad ran the steamboat schedules in line with the train, and actively advertised the connection between the two.<sup>199</sup> The boat became an icon on the lake and its success paved the way for the last two steamboats. *Glen Haven* was widely photographed and depicted on postcards and local artwork, which provides plenty of detail on its design and construction. Figure 21 shows a photo of the *Glen Haven* at its dock at the Village of Skaneateles.<sup>200</sup> The boat was constructed



**Figure 21: Photograph of the steamboat *Glen Haven* at dock in the Village of Skaneateles (Onondaga Historical Association).**

of Norway spruce and painted white above the waterline. The lower deck had a cabin over the aft two thirds, and a covered open deck towards the bow. The bow of the upper deck was uncovered forward of the pilot house and mailroom, and the after part of the

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<sup>198</sup> Cooper, *The Story of the Steamboats on Skaneateles Lake*, 10; Winship, ‘The Trolley’ mentions merger of the Skaneateles Railroad and Auburn City Railroad in 1902.

<sup>199</sup> *Syracuse Journal*, 10 Jul., 1876; *Syracuse Journal*, 22 Jul., 1878; *Syracuse Journal*, 7 Jul., 1877.

<sup>200</sup> The photo is in the Onondaga Historical Association archives.

deck was open and covered by an awning. During the early 1900s the boat was fitted with a spotlight and electric lighting to host spotlight excursions and after-dark parties.<sup>201</sup>

Steamboats continued to be successful during the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. With railroads now connecting nearby Syracuse to the lake, special large group excursions chartered the steamboats to the Glen Haven Hotel and its picnic/park locations at Ten Mile Point and Pine Grove. But the advent of gasoline powered engines and automobiles allowed more people to own private powered boats and drive to further recreational destinations.<sup>202</sup> In 1911, the Glen Haven Hotel closed and in 1914 *Glen Haven* ceased operations.<sup>203</sup>

During the summer of 1915 the Skaneateles Navigation Company was formed by several residents who did not want steamboat service to end, and they operated *Glen Haven* for the season at the original rate of 25 cents per ride. This model was not sustainable, and the boat was left to rot at its dock in the Village of Skaneateles at the end of the summer.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Cooper, *The Story of the Steamboats on Skaneateles Lake*, 10; 'Moonlight Excursion' advertisement from July 22, 1880 shows that lake night steamboat trips were popular.

<sup>202</sup> Beauchamp, *Past and Present of Syracuse and Onondaga County*, 426 was published in 1908 and recalls that the remaining steamboats had ample business, but many more powered boats were on the lake; Cooper, *The Story of the Steamboats on Skaneateles Lake*, 8 - 13 cites automobiles as a major reason for steamboat decline and discusses recreational locations on the lake.

<sup>203</sup> Cooper, *The Story of the Steamboats on Skaneateles Lake*, 13; Humphries, 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, 298; Skaneateles Lake Steamboats', 5.

<sup>204</sup> *Skaneateles Observer*, 11 Jun., 1915; Cooper, *The Story of the Steamboats on Skaneateles Lake*, 13.

In 1917 *Glen Haven* sank at its dock. It was subsequently raised, and its machinery was removed and sold for scrap and the hull was towed to One Mile point where it was salvaged by Henry Evans and used to build a barn.<sup>205</sup>

### *Ossahinta*

After seeing the success of *Glen Haven* and the potential profit of steamboat operations on Skaneateles Lake, Samuel Allen and William Grime started a rival steamboat company. The two commissioned the Geneva based boatbuilder Alonzo Springstead to construct the *Ossahinta*, which was designed by the Skaneateles-based Bowdish Boat Company.<sup>206</sup> The boat was a 68 feet (20.7 meters) long by 11 feet 3 inch (3.4 meters) beam, propeller driven steamboat powered by a 30 horsepower (22.3 kilowatt) single cylinder vertical engine with a Clyde pattern boiler.<sup>207</sup> Unlike the earlier steamboats, *Ossahinta* only had one deck with a cabin extending most of its length, and with a capacity of 150 people it was intended primarily for passenger and mail service (Figure 22).<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> ‘Skaneateles Lake Steamboats’, 5; Humphries, 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, 298; Loyster, ‘Steaming Up the Lake’,13; undated newspaper clipping from the Onondaga Historical Association archives.

<sup>206</sup> Cooper, *The Story of the Steamboats on Skaneateles Lake*, 13; *Skaneateles Free Press*, 2 Jul., 1887; Loyster, ‘Steaming Up the Lake’,13.

<sup>207</sup> *Skaneateles Free Press*, 2 Jul., 1887; Loyster, ‘Steaming Up the Lake’,13.

<sup>208</sup> *Skaneateles Free Press*, 2 Jul., 1887 cites the intended use for ‘pleasure traffic’; Loyster, ‘Steaming Up the Lake’,13 recalls use for private parties; Humphries, 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, 298.

*Ossahinta* was launched on June 28, 1887 but did not begin service for several more weeks until the engine and boiler were installed.<sup>209</sup> In addition to hosting private parties, *Ossahinta* made multiple daily trips up the lake



**Figure 22: Photograph of the steamboat *Ossahinta* with crew at the dock in the Village of Skaneateles (Winship, 'The Voyages of the *Ossahinta*').**

on the weekends to take advantage of passengers heading the Glen Haven Hotel and other recreational locations. These trips were charged at the same rate as the rival *Glen Haven*.<sup>210</sup> Competition between *Glen Haven* and *Ossahinta* was likely not friendly and may have involved the spreading of rumors over the quality of the boats and the character of their crews.<sup>211</sup>

During the 1890s, *Ossahinta* was captained by George Cady and offered chartered trips \$12 round trip, or \$20 for the entire day. Many of these groups involved large parties, some of which would bring a keg of beer or other drinks. Occasionally the boat hosted higher class groups such as the New York State Chess Association and a class from Cornell University seeking to measure the width and depth of the lake.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> *Skaneateles Free Press*, 2 Jul., 1887; Loyster, 'Steaming Up the Lake', 13; 'Skaneateles Lake Steamboats', 7.

<sup>210</sup> 'Skaneateles Lake Steamboats', 7 originally from an advertisement posted by the owners.

<sup>211</sup> *Skaneateles Lake Steamboats*, 7 and Cooper, *The Story of the Steamboats on Skaneateles Lake*, 9 refer to an advertisement by *Ossahinta* owners dispelling rumors of their ship and crew.

<sup>212</sup> Winship, 'The Voyages of the *Ossahinta*' describes recorded ventures of *Ossahinta* from several local newspapers; Cooper, *The Story of the Steamboats on Skaneateles Lake*, 9 also refers to the rowdy patrons.



In 1905, George Cady sold *Ossahinta* to the Auburn and Syracuse Electric Railroad, which then gave the railroad a monopoly over all steamboat traffic on the lake. After several years of operation alongside the other steamboats, *Ossahinta* was brought up to dry dock at Ten Mile Point in October 1909 for repairs which were never made. In 1912 the *Auburn Citizen* reported plans to dismantle the boat and use the engine in the nearby pavilion, however these plans too failed.<sup>213</sup> Sometime after 1914 the machinery was removed from the boat and the hull was dragged back into the water where the boat was burned and sunk near Ten Mile Point.<sup>214</sup>

#### *City of Syracuse*

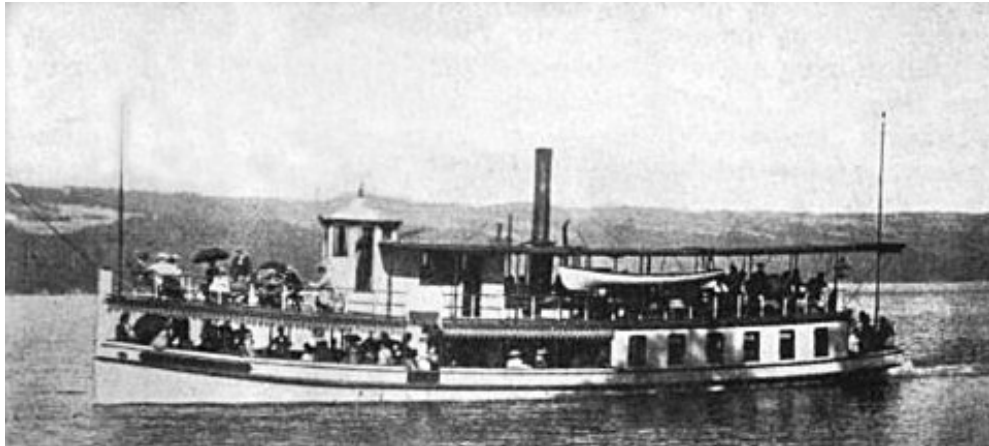
*City of Syracuse* was the last and the largest steamboat to be built on Skaneateles Lake. With the long-term success of *Glen Haven*, and the desire for more business on the lake, the Skaneateles Railroad commissioned *City of Syracuse* and hired Alonzo Springstead to build it. The 112 feet (34.1 meters) long by 21 feet (6.4 meters) beam propeller driven steamboat was launched on July 6<sup>th</sup>, 1901. The boat had a capacity of

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<sup>213</sup> Winship, 'The Voyages of the *Ossahinta*' originally from the *Auburn Citizen*, 4 May, 1912.

<sup>214</sup> Personal experience diving on the wreck; Winship, 'The Voyages of the *Ossahinta*'; Loyster, 'Steaming Up the Lake', 13; Battle, 'Steamboats', 11.

500 people and ran regular trips up the lake alongside *Glen haven* and later *Ossahinta* (Figure 23).<sup>215</sup>



**Figure 23: Photograph of the steamboat *City of Syracuse* (Onondaga Historical Association).**

Like *Glen Haven*, *City of Syracuse* was popular among vacationers heading to the Glen Haven Hotel and was chartered for moonlight tours in the evenings. Eventually it was outfitted with electric lights and a spotlight to host parties after dark. The boat had two decks with the after half of the lower deck holding a cabin while the fore half was open and covered. The upper deck contained the pilot house, mailroom, and snack bar amidships with an open covered deck astern.<sup>216</sup> While operating with both *Glen Haven* and *Ossahinta* the three boats were represented in postcards and photographed together extensively (Figure 24).<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> Cooper, *The Story of the Steamboats on Skaneateles Lake*, 11; Palmer, *Short Lines of Central New York*, 45.

<sup>216</sup> Loyster, 'Steaming Up the Lake', 13; Battle, 'Steamboats', 11; Cooper, *The Story of the Steamboats on Skaneateles Lake*, 11; Palmer, *Short Lines of Central New York*, 45.

<sup>217</sup> Winship, 'The Voyages of the *Ossahinta*'.

The pressure of the automobile and the closing of the Glen Haven Hotel in 1911 reduced the profitability of steamboat operations and led to *City of Syracuse* being



**Figure 24: Postcard from Skaneateles Lake featuring *Ossahinta* in front, *Glen Haven* to the right, and *City of Syracuse* to the left (Winship, 'The Voyages of the *Ossahinta*').**

removed from service in 1914. The Skaneateles Navigation Company operated the boat during the summer of 1915 before leaving it to rot at the dock at the end of the season.<sup>218</sup>

In 1917, *City of Syracuse* was raised so the machinery could be scrapped; the hull floated to the end of the pier and sunk.<sup>219</sup> In 1920 the remaining skeleton of the ship was partially salvaged by Abe Cooper and the remainder was blown up with dynamite on

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<sup>218</sup> *Skaneateles Observer*, 11 Jun., 1915; Cooper, *The Story of the Steamboats on Skaneateles Lake*, 13.

<sup>219</sup> Cooper, *The Story of the Steamboats on Skaneateles Lake*, 1; Battle, 'Steamboats', 11; *Skaneateles Observer*, 4 May, 1917.

November 19, 1920.<sup>220</sup> Parts of the hull are still visible today in the water at the end of the village pier.

### Conclusion

Steamboat service on Skaneateles Lake began in 1831 and ended in 1915. Over this time there were eight commercial steamboats all varying in size, construction, and fate. Initially, steamboats struggled economically and operation of the first four ended in financial ruin. It wasn't until the 1860s when steamboats became successful ventures.

The reason these early steamboats were failures is a combination of high operating costs and a lack of demand for services. Beyond requiring a larger crew than sailing boats of similar size, steamboats were more expensive to build and required maintenance of the boilers, engines, and pipes in addition to the hull. Rather than using wind for propulsion, the steamboats captains would also need to collect or purchase wood to power the boilers. These increased expenses resulted in higher fees to use a steamboat compared to a sailing boat.

*Independence, Highland Chief, Skaneateles, and Homer* were all sidewheel steamboats which failed within 1 – 7 years. Contemporary newspaper articles highlight accidents and repairs made on these boats throughout their lifetime, costs that needed to be offset with profits. Between 1831 and 1856, when these boats were active, the tourism industry was relatively small and much of the business was hauling freight and ferrying passengers to stages in the north and south. In 1831 round trips aboard *Highland*

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<sup>220</sup> *Skaneateles Free Press*, 26 Nov., 1920.

*Chief* cost 75 cents while in 1848, trips from Syracuse to Cortland with transit aboard *Skaneateles* cost \$1.50. With the cheaper competition posed by sailing freighters at this time, the higher fees charged by steamboats likely discouraged patrons. It is no surprise that both *Independence* and *Highland Chief* were both converted to sailing vessels after a few years.

*Ben Porter*, *Glen Haven*, *Ossahinta*, and *City of Syracuse* were all propeller driven steamboats which operated successfully for 10 – 40 years each. *Ben Porter* served for the shortest time, but that was only because the boat was retired so its engine could be used in the larger *Glen Haven* to support more business. These later steamboats were less complex than the sidewheel steamers and relied primarily on the tourism industry provided by the Glen Haven Water-Cure/Glen Haven Hotel. Business was also supported by the fact that all the boats were owned by and operated in conjunction with the Skaneateles Railroad, which guaranteed a supply of patrons. Trips on these boats were also much cheaper than the earlier four with round trip fares of only 25 cents per passenger.

From 1866 – 1915, steamboats operated a successful business on Skaneateles Lake due to lower operating costs and sufficient demand created by tourist destinations and railroad connection. However, the advent of the automobile and gasoline powered engines caused the demand for public transport and steamboat services to drop. By 1915 steamboat service was once again not economical and ceased to exist.

## CHAPTER IV

### SUBMERGED ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

There have been no formal archaeological excavations or surveys within Skaneateles Lake, but there are several submerged archaeological sites associated with the maritime history of the lake. Some of these sites are easily visible from the surface on a clear day, while others are deeper and only accessible to divers.

The most noticeable sites are the remnants of steamboat docks scattered around the lake. Remnants of their pilings can be seen near the pier in the Village of Skaneateles and other private docks and village landings. Many of the private piers were built in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century after regular steamboat service was established, while the public landings were improved. In 1928, the remainder of the decrepit dock in the village was removed, and the other docks had a similar fate.<sup>221</sup> The pilings consisted of locally harvested large diameter trees that were sharpened and driven into the lakebed.<sup>222</sup>

The sunken remains of several watercraft are scattered about the lake, and historical accounts indicate that several more may be ashore. This chapter identifies confirmed and suspected archaeological sites as well as some artifacts recovered from them.

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<sup>221</sup> Miscellaneous, undated newspaper clipping from the Onondaga Historical Association archives.

<sup>222</sup> Cooper, *The Story of the Steamboats on Skaneateles Lake*, 13 discusses the building and improvement of steamboat piers; Battle, 'Steamboats', 10 – 11.

### **The “Log Jam”**

The “Log Jam” is a submerged archaeological site located on the west shore of the lake which is a popular destination for local SCUBA divers. The site consists of a large pile of cut logs along a submerged rock wall. The logs are on a flat portion of lakebed in approximately 70 feet (21.3 meters) of water with this highest point of the feature submerged about 50 feet (15.2 meters). All the branches were removed from the logs, and they appear to be cut in near uniform length. Based on preliminary counts by recreational divers, there are over 40 logs and many of them have similar diameters. Measurements of nine representative logs showed diameters from 8.25 – 11.5 inches (21 – 29 centimeters). There is also a small length of chain attached to at least one of the logs.<sup>223</sup>

No historical accounts have been located which indicate how this site was created. Since the logs were near uniform in size and appear to have been deposited at the same time, it is possible that this is the remains of a log raft. Given the history of logging in the region and accounts of log rafts being towed to mills around the lake, it appears likely that this site is one of those rafts.

### **Unknown Barge**

In 1976 a team of local divers consisting of Mark Stamey, Raymond Dietz, Jim Gallagher, Gary Comstock, Dick Ruzekowics, and Paul Falk located the partially buried remains of a wreck located off the waterfront in the Village of Skaneateles. The boat was

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<sup>223</sup> Personal communication with local SCUBA divers, and personal experience diving on the site.

estimated to 40 feet (12.2 meters) long with an 8 feet (2.4 meters) beam and 4 feet (1.2 meters) width at the bow and stern. The boat was a scow design with a larger vertical stern rudder.

The wreck was partially excavated by the divers in the spring of 1976, and it contained intrusive bottles from the 1890s, indicating that it sank earlier. Based on the descriptions provided, the boat was likely a sailing barge used to transport goods across the lake.<sup>224</sup>

### ***Homer***

The steamboat *Homer* ran aground on the north shore of Skaneateles Lake in the fall of 1856, where it remained for several years. Throughout the 1850s and 1860s, there were attempts to return the boat to service, but by 1864 the cabin was removed and only the sunken hull remained. In December 1870 there were plans to demolish part of the hull so that it would be submerged at low water levels. Humphryes, in 1931, recalls seeing the remains of the hull as a child. There are no additional records stating how much of the hull was removed, so it is possible that a portion still remains.<sup>225</sup>

### ***Ben Porter***

After conversion to a two masted schooner, *Ben Porter* was used for several years until sometime in the early 1880s, when the boat was scuttled along Willow Point to be used as a dock. Humphryes, in 1931, mentions that at that time the remains of the

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<sup>224</sup> *Skaneateles Press*, 5 May, 1976; *Skaneateles Press*, 12 May, 1976.

<sup>225</sup> *Skaneateles Democrat*, 9 Dec., 1858, *Auburn American*, 14 Jan., 1859, *Syracuse Daily Standard*, 13 Jan., 1859, *Skaneateles Democrat*, 13 Jun 1859, and *Skaneateles Democrat*, 5 May 1864 discuss attempts to return *Homer* to service. *Auburn Daily Bulletin*, 22 Dec., 1870 mentions removal of the last of the hull.



hull could be seen in the gravel from the surface of the lake on a clear day. Several attempts to locate the site have been made by local divers in past decade, but the boat was not visible from the surface, and did not appear in sonar scans.<sup>226</sup>

### ***Glen Haven***

*Glen Haven* was partially salvaged at the dock at the Village of Skaneateles in 1917 and 1920 before being towed to One Mile Point and broken up.<sup>227</sup> The pilot house, anchor, and a brass eagle ornament were salvaged while the wood was used to construct a barn.<sup>228</sup> The pilot house was placed in the yard of Henry Evans on West Lake Road. Prior to 1955 the pilot house was sold, and its location lost. The eagle ornament was last known to decorate the mantle of a local resident.<sup>229</sup> The anchor is currently on display at the Skaneateles Historical Society.

### ***Ossahinta***

Sometime after 1914 *Ossahinta* was floated off Ten Mile Point, set ablaze, and sunk.<sup>230</sup> Currently the remains of its hull rest on a slope near one of the points just north of Ten Mile Point in 35 – 65 feet (10.67 – 19.81 meters) of water. The site is devoid of plant life, but the timbers are infested with zebra mussels.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> ‘Skaneateles Lake Steamboats’, 5; Humphryes, 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, 298; personal communication with local divers and personal attempt to locate the site.

<sup>227</sup> ‘Skaneateles Lake Steamboats’, 5; Humphryes, 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, 298; Loyster, ‘Steaming Up the Lake’, 13; undated newspaper clipping from the Onondaga Historical Association archives.

<sup>228</sup> Humphryes, 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, 298; undated newspaper clipping from the Onondaga Historical Association archives.

<sup>229</sup> Noted photographs at the Onondaga Historical Association archives.

<sup>230</sup> Personal experience diving on the wreck; Winship, ‘The Voyages of the *Ossahinta*’; Loyster, ‘Steaming Up the Lake’, 13; Battle, ‘Steamboats’, 11.

<sup>231</sup> Personal experience diving on the site.

The boat was re-discovered by local SCUBA divers in August 1958. Several artifacts were removed from the wreck, including planks and frames, but the location of these artifacts is now unknown. Since the discovery, the site has become another popular destination for SCUBA divers.<sup>232</sup>

### *City of Syracuse*

*City of Syracuse* was partially salvaged and then demolished with dynamite at the end of the steamboat pier at the Village of Skaneateles in 1920.<sup>233</sup> The



**Figure 25: Aerial photo of the remains of *City of Syracuse* taken in 2017 (Skaneateles Historical Society).**

remains of the hull lie submerged in approximately 15 feet (4.57 meters) of water near the modern pier amongst miscellaneous building debris and the remains of the old steamboat pier removed in 1928 (Figure 25). This is a popular tourist site since it is

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<sup>232</sup> *Skaneateles Press*, 22 Aug 1958; undated newspaper clipping in the Onondaga Historical Association archives.

<sup>233</sup> *Skaneateles Free Press*, 26 Nov., 1920.

visible from the pier and boats on clear days. The site is also cleared of modern debris irregularly by volunteer divers from the Auburn Skin Divers Association.<sup>234</sup>

Prior to scuttling the ship, several parts were salvaged. The wheel and pilot house from *City of Syracuse* were taken to the Simonds residence on East Lake Road and placed over a well. The pilot house acted as a pump house, and the wheel was rigged to draw water.<sup>235</sup> The pilot house was torn down prior to 1955.<sup>236</sup>

In 2021, a barometer was mailed to the Skaneateles Historical Society with a letter claiming it came from the pilot house of *City of Syracuse*. However, there is no proof of the item's provenance.<sup>237</sup> In July, 1972 the rudder from *City of Syracuse* was removed from the wreck by local divers. Several photos show the removal of the rudder, but its current location is unknown.

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<sup>234</sup> Personal communications with officers from the Auburn Skin Divers Association.

<sup>235</sup> *Syracuse Post-Standard*, 21 May, 1933.

<sup>236</sup> Letter from Wester Baker to the Onondaga Historical Association, 16 May 1955.

<sup>237</sup> Personal communication with GERALYN HUBA of the Skaneateles Historical Society.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The development of maritime activity on Skaneateles Lake was influenced primarily by the availability of natural resources, the exceptional environmental quality, regional geography, and the method of European settlement in Central New York. The combination of these factors led to the growth in prominence of other nearby settlements and affected use of the lake over time. If any of these conditions were changed, maritime activity on Skaneateles Lake may have developed much differently.

Prior to the colonization of Central New York by Europeans in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the area was occupied by Native Americans for close to 12,000 years. Their communities initially migrated amongst the lakes and rivers, and by the Late Archaic Period (3,500 B.C. – 1,500 B.C.) there were settlements close to the navigable waterways. Once Europeans began to enter the region, the largest settlements were amongst the interconnected lakes and rivers at lower elevations.

Since Skaneateles is located at 863 feet (263.04 meters) elevation, it is much higher than the other nearby waterways and more difficult to access. This would have made trade and communication with other groups difficult and discouraged the creation of a large settlement. When Europeans first colonized the lake in 1794, there was only evidence of a small fishing village harvesting the perch which the lake was well known for.

After the Revolutionary War the continued presence of Native Americans and lack of clarity concerning land rights in Central New York prevented widespread

settlement of the area. Once a series of treaties were made with the Iroquois and the land was surveyed by New York State, the Military Lots were designated and assigned to landowners. Settlers quickly flooded into the area to lay claim to their lands before they reverted to state ownership.

Prominent communities developed in areas with useful natural resources and access to convenient transportation routes. These include villages and townships near navigable rivers, such as the Seneca and Mohawk rivers, and the lower elevation lakes, like Onondaga, Oneida, Cayuga, and Seneca. These settlements saw much maritime traffic from merchants and settlers while maritime activity on the smaller and higher lakes was more limited. By 1825 the Erie Canal was completed, which increased the waterborne traffic and spurred improvements to the canal system across the state throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The high elevation of Skaneateles Lake and distance from the Erie Canal discouraged any plans to connect it to the canal system, which slowed the development of maritime industries there. Villages were located around the lake in the few areas not encumbered by steep slopes, and landings were made to connect each by water. The thick forests and steep streams also made logging a lucrative industry and led to many sawmills in the area. The lake provided the easiest means to transport lumber and goods, so rafts and sailing freighters were put into service.

Sailing boats were successful on the lake throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As the beauty of the area attracted more wealthy residents, private pleasure yachts became

popular. The first recorded yacht was the *Four Sisters*, completed in 1816. By the 1850s yacht racing and regattas were a common activity

Steamboats were not economical in Skaneateles until the 1860s. However other lakes with larger settlements and connections to the canal system, like Seneca and Cayuga, had several steamboats by the late 1830s. From 1831 - 1856, the first four Skaneateles Lake steamboats, *Independence*, *Highland Chief*, *Skaneateles*, and *Homer*, suffered from limited demand as well as higher operating costs compared to sailing boats.

By 1866, when *Ben Porter* was entered service, the lake was surrounded by wealthy residents, it had developed a reputation as an idyllic vacation destination, and was connected to the Skaneateles Railroad. The Glen Haven Water-Cure and public recreation locations attracted more visitors while the railroad provided a steady stream of patrons. In 1870, the Skaneateles Railroad purchased *Ben Porter* to run the steamboat as a supplement to the railroad service. The constant demand and patronage generated by lower fare prices compared to the earlier steamboats made passenger steamboat services profitable. From 1870 – 1914 the railroad operated four steamboats, *Ben Porter*, *Glen Haven*, *Ossahinta*, and *City of Syracuse* until competition from the automobile slashed steamboats profits.

To understand how maritime activity evolved on Skaneateles Lake it is necessary to analyze it in the context of the entire region. The availability of resources, local geography, environmental quality, and settlement patterns all affected the use and improvement of waterways throughout Central New York. The variety of conditions at

each lake led to the success of different industries and the development of separate, unique maritime heritages.

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