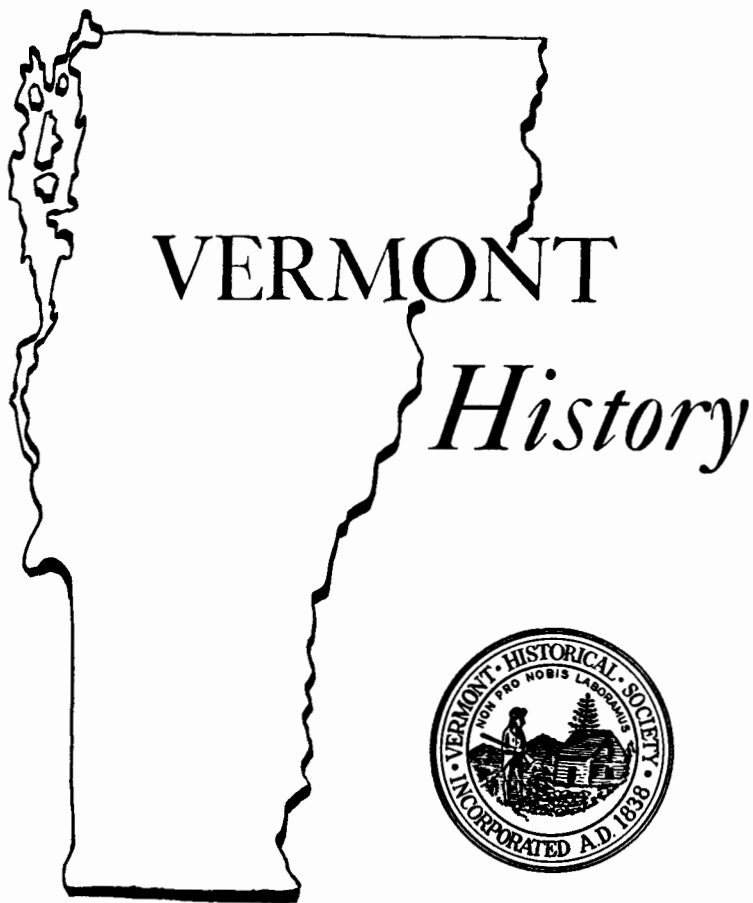
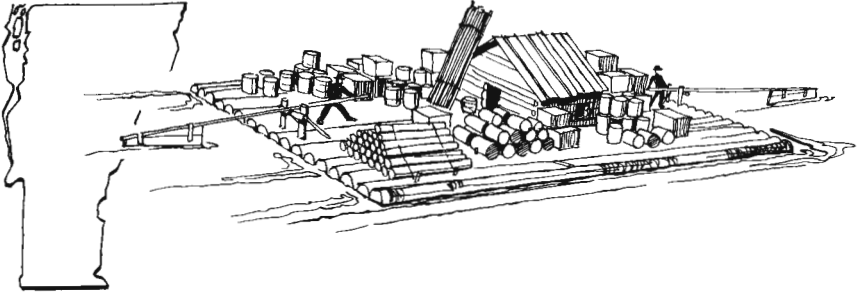


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Guy Catlin's *Journal* "presents one of the fullest statements on the nature of the timber trade when it dominated the Champlain Valley's market economy."

## Floating a Lumber Raft to Quebec City, 1805: The Journal of Guy Catlin of Burlington

By H. N. MULLER

FROM his fine new house on the hill beside the University of Vermont green, Moses Catlin could look out over the bustling town of Burlington to Lake Champlain and to the Adirondack Mountains rising beyond the far shore. He had worked hard to attain this measure of success. Born in 1770, Catlin, as so many of the first generation of Vermonters, came from Litchfield County, Connecticut. Not long after the Revolution he arrived at Burlington, like others attracted to the village near the mouth of the Winooski River on the broad bay that years before Ira Allen had recognized as the natural site for the commercial center of the Champlain Valley. Later, toward the close of the 1790's, Moses was joined by his brother Guy, twelve years his junior. The Catlins worked together and grew and prospered with the town.

Burlington experienced an economic development typical of many pioneer commercial centers. A nascent shipbuilding industry provided transportation facilities for a group of merchants in business to supply basic commodities and the few luxuries demanded by the largely self-sufficient farming hinterland. In turn they marketed the small agricultural surplus. But lumber and pot- and pearlash, often the by-products of clearing the virgin forest, dominated the market economy. Until the 1820's huge timber rafts went off to Quebec each spring, and the hopes of many settlers to escape the previous year's obligations floated

on Lake Champlain's broad waters and negotiated the treacherous rapids and currents of the Richelieu and St. Lawrence Rivers. At Quebec they dealt with a monopsonistic and often hostile market. With the passing of years the symbols of growing wealth and sophistication in Burlington, brick and frame buildings and homes, gradually replaced older, cruder structures, just as the business of supplying the community of outlying farms surpassed the importance of the timber trade.

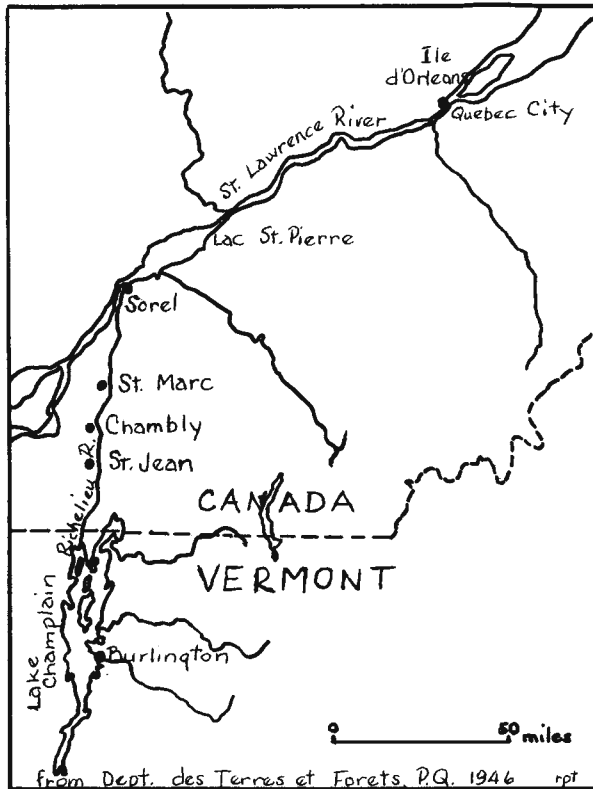
As young men the Catlin brothers worked hard, grasping at every opportunity for a commission. Often they worked as agents for larger concerns such as Benjamin Pell & Son of Albany, Horatio Gates & Company in Montreal and John Jacob Astor in New York, where their brother Lynde acted as a valued agent, advisor, and ally. They were still struggling for success in 1808, when the economic dislocation of the embargo and war years brought hungry markets and inflated prices made to order for traders bold enough to seize them. In 1815 the Catlins emerged from the War of 1812 as prosperous merchants and assumed their position among the leading families of Burlington.<sup>1</sup>

Before they became well-established, the Catlin brothers took an active part in the risky timber trade with Canada. In the spring of 1805 as a young man of twenty-three, Guy Catlin, with some assistance from Moses, took charge of a lumber raft at St. John on the Richelieu River and saw it safely to Quebec, where he negotiated the sale of the lumber. The Catlins acted as agents for Benjamin Pell, the principal owner of the raft. Begun in May, the voyage from St. John required nearly a month, and the entire sequence of events lasted until late September. During his more than four months in Canada, young Catlin wrestled with the hazards of navigation, the vicissitudes of the Quebec market, contentious associates, his brother's severe illness, and his obvious difficulties with the French language. Not all was business; he filled requests for silks, china, sugar and other items for friends in Vermont, went sight-seeing, and visited an Indian village where he found the food tolerable but "not to suit the taste of some English epicures," and the Roman Catholic service and "grande Parade" fascinating.

Among the remaining Catlin manuscripts, the earliest are a pair of small, pocket-size notebooks begun by Guy in 1805. The first notebook, *Journal for Canada*, written hastily and probably at several different sittings, describes the trip with the raft and the difficulty of finding buyers for the lumber (pages 1-13). The following six pages (14-19)

1. Catlin MSS, Wilbur Collection, Bailey Library, University of Vermont, Burlington, Vermont; and Abby M. Hemenway (ed.), *The Vermont Historical Gazetteer* (Burlington, 1867-1891). I, 593-594.

are given to his observations made during the visit to an Indian village. The remainder of the *Journal* (pages 20-32) consists of random entries, partial accounts of the lumber transactions and purchases for friends, and little reminders for himself, all interspersed among blank pages. Catlin also began the second notebook, *Memorandum*, in 1805 but apparently kept it over a period of several years. Its thirty pages contain a mixture of scattered operating accounts of the 1805 voyage to Quebec, an account with Moses, notes on a Vermont land transaction, self-reminders, and a long list of unidentified sums. With parts of the *Memorandum*, Guy Catlin's brief *Journal for Canada* presents one of the fullest statements on the nature of the timber trade when it dominated the Champlain Valley's market economy. In addition these documents reveal fresh information about an early stage in the Catlins', and Burlington's, commercial operations and interesting insights into life in 1805.



*Of Related Interest:* Steamboating on Lake Champlain in the 1870's is the setting of a new novel by Ralph Nading Hill of Burlington, Vt. Entitled *The Voyages Of Brian Seaworthy: An Historical Adventure On Lake Champlain*, it will be co-published this coming fall by *Vermont Life Magazine* and the Vermont Historical Society.

Journal for Canada<sup>2</sup>

Guy Catlin  
of Burlington  
21st May 1805

Thursday the 23 Day of May 1805 set out from Burlington for Quebec and arrived in St. Johns on Friday in the morning. Went [to] Mr. Pell and took possession of his Raft which went from the River La-Moile the week before. Saturday took Mr. Wood as pilot and Divided the Raft took one half [and] went over the rapids at St. Johns and again Divided to proceed to Chambly.<sup>3</sup> Went with the first part down the river about one and [a] half miles below the rapids. The wind blowing fresh from the West [the raft] was blown on the island<sup>4</sup> an [d] stove one crib of Oak timber, came to anchor and repaired the crib which was broken. Sunday morning at Day Break our cable gave way and [we] found our Raft Drifting Down the river with only seven hand[s] on board. Went as far as St. Marc<sup>5</sup> and ran a fowl of Mr.

2. Only the section of the *Journal* portraying the voyage to Quebec and an isolated account of the timber sales deserve publication. The remainder of the notebooks, with the possible exception of Catlin's undistinguished description of his visit to an Indian village, contain isolated and largely unidentifiable notes. Except where necessary for clarity, Catlin's original text, including spelling, has been faithfully retained. He occasionally made reference to the day of the month in the margin. These notations have been omitted, but the dates of days of the week have been frequently identified in notes to help maintain chronological perspective.

3. The village of Chambly is about nine miles down the Richelieu River from St. John. Four sets of rapids interrupt the river between St. John and Chambly — St. John Rapids, Les Milles Roches, Fryer's Rapids and Chambly Rapids, the most dangerous of the four. Even though the French had blasted out some of the rocks in the 1740's, these rapids continued to vex raftsmen.

4. Only two islands on the Richelieu River fit Catlin's description, Isle Ste. Therese about one and a half miles below St. John Rapids and Grand Isle, a delta-like island at the confluence of L'Acadie River and the Richelieu a mile and a half below Chambly Rapids. To be blown on an island by a wind "blowing fresh from the West," the raft would have had to be west of the island. No channel west of Grand Isle is sufficient for a lumber raft. On the other hand an old towpath and an ample channel wind along the west bank of Isle Ste. Therese, the island upon which Catlin probably ran aground.

5. St. Marc is fourteen miles downriver from Chambly.

Waterman [’s] Raft lying on the West side of the river and an other on the East which made a Bridge across the the [sic] River. While endeavoring to get clear there came an officer on Board and forbid our Doing any thing more [because of] a complaint for Breaking the Sabbath which occasioned a Dispute Between him and me which was settled by one of the hands giving him a severe Glazing.

Monday prepared for Jumping the Rapid. Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, Friday and Saturday<sup>6</sup> were employed in getting our Raft to Chamble.<sup>7</sup> Monday and Tuesday<sup>8</sup> arranged the Raft for sayling. Took Antwine Mannie<sup>9</sup> as pilot Wednes’y. Sailed for Quebeck Down the River Roshalow as far as St. Mark’s Church. Thursday Continued our course. Friday arrived at Sorel. Wind Nort East. Saturday and Sunday and Monday Lay Wind Bound.<sup>10</sup> Tuesday wind bound at evening Brother Moses came on board. Brought letters from home. Borrowed Fourteen Dollars and Fifty Cents. Wednesday<sup>11</sup> morning at 3 O Clock left Sorrel with a fair wind. Sailed Down the River St. Lawrence into Lake St. Peter in company with ten Rafts, had a pleasant breeze. Thursday and Friday sailed Down the St. Lawrence. Was Driven by Quebec onto the Island of Orleans about twelve miles below the town. While waiting for the tide<sup>12</sup> went to view the hills of Momorosee<sup>13</sup> which are in the town of Boport<sup>14</sup> about Nine Miles from Quebec, as I intend another Visit to them I shall at present forbear making any

6. May 27 through June 1.

7. Catlin divided the raft to help negotiate the rapids. Divided on Saturday, May 25 to jump the St. John Rapids, the raft was reunited and grounded on Isle Ste. Therese. Redivided, the first part of the raft traversed Chambly Rapids and by Sunday, May 26 had drifted as far as St. Marc, where it tangled with two other rafts. The evidence suggests that Catlin went back upstream, perhaps by batteau, to take charge of the second part of the divided raft. Monday, May 26 through Saturday, May 31 he spent guiding the second part to Chambly and beyond to rendezvous with the first part. An undated entry in the *Memorandum* mentions paying a “Capt. Blazil” nine dollars “for carting Battau from Chamblee to St. Johns,” possibly to convey Catlin back to the second part of the raft.

8. Apparently despite “Glazing” an officer and winning a dispute the previous Sunday (May 26), Catlin and his crew observed the sabbath on June 2.

9. “Antwine Mannie” is probably Catlin’s anglicization of the common French Canadian name “Antoine Manet.”

10. A northeast wind would blow directly up the St. Lawrence River, making it impossible to sail a cumbersome raft downriver.

11. June 12.

12. According to George Heriot, *Travels Through the Canadas 1807* (London, 1807), 73, the tide at Quebec usually ran at eighteen feet and as high as twenty-four feet in the spring.

13. Montmorency.

14. Beauport.

remarks. Friday night came to anchor on the flats North of the town. Saturday came to St. Roche.<sup>15</sup>

Sunday, Monday and Tuesday were spent making the necessary preparation for Sale. Wednesday had a conference with Miner concerning the Raft. After a long dispute, and [after] forbidding their Doing any thing with it, came to a compromise. Miner releases to Mr. Pell all his claims. I advance the mony [money] and discharge the hands. Mr. Lyon gives his note for the money payable out of the mony for which the lumber which Mr. Holget sent which was not conveyed to Mr. Pell but to Minor or which Minor left with Mr. Lyon. Lyon is also to [have] the privilege of making all the sales in his power for the time of Six Weeks but is not to receive any money.<sup>16</sup> The same day Lyon sold his staves to Mr. Sims and Birch plank at two pence a foot with five or six hundred pieces of three inches pine plank at 24 Dollars per hundred to Mr. Henry Black.

15. Saturday, June 15. The raft's voyage from St. John to market at Quebec took twenty-two days. The raft required an additional week to be floated from the LaMoille River to St. John. The entire trip from Vermont to Quebec consumed nearly a month. By "St. Roche" Catlin probably refers to the Quebec suburb of St. Roch (or St. Roc) a short way up the St. Charles River (See Joseph Bouchette, *The British Dominions in North America* (London, 1832) I, 241, for an early map of Quebec). The tide floated Catlin's raft from the Isle of Orleans to the flats below Quebec, and it probably next carried the raft as far as St. Roch in the mouth of the St. Charles River, which joins the St. Lawrence between the tidal flats and the city.

16. The financial arrangements involved in the timber trade with Quebec were extremely complex. Scraps of evidence in Catlin's *Memorandum* help explain the dispute with Miner (or Minor) and the nature of the compromise agreed to. On "Wednesday 19th of June," the day when he and Miner reached their compromise, Catlin noted: "Borrowed of John Murr Esq. [a Quebec merchant who purchased oak timber from Catlin in July, 1805] Two hundred and Sixty Dollars and gave a receipt. The same day loaned to Lewis Lyon two hundred Sixty Dollars and took his promisory Note for Samuel Holget payable out of the first money Received for lumber which said Holget sold to James Miner and which said Miner reconveyed to Mr. Lyon in behalf of Mr. Holget."

While Benjamin Pell owned most of the lumber in the raft, James Miner and Lewis Lyon also had a share. After arriving at Quebec, Catlin, representing Pell, and Miner (and doubtless Lyon as well) argued about the proceeds of the sales. Some of the lumber in the raft originally belonged to Samuel Holget of Milton. Holget sold his lumber to Miner, who in turn conveyed it to Lyon. Miner apparently had not been paid by Lyon and thus claimed control of part of the raft. To resolve the argument, Catlin borrowed \$260 from John Murr and loaned the money to Lyon, who turned it over to Miner, ending Miner's claims to the raft. To secure his loan, Lyon agreed to pay Catlin from the first proceeds of the sale of Holget's lumber.

Lyon eventually settled the debt by combining \$37.50 with credit for "cash advanced while Coming Down [to Quebec] with the Raft," and the returns on lumber that Catlin sold for him.

It appears that in the fashion common to early Champlain Valley settlers, Holget sold timber in the spring to meet obligations incurred during the previous year. On page thirteen of the *Journal* Catlin noted that on "Thursday 26th of Sept. 1805 [he] sent by mail from Quebec to Burlington inland in a letter two notes of hand in favor of Benj. Pell & Son against Samuel Holget of Milton of Vermont after the statement of their account against Holget which were address to W. F. Pall & Co."

Thursday continued with the Raft. No person as yet appears to purchase. Friday morning went as usual to the Raft. Returned at twelve [and] found Moses confined to his bed with a disorder in his bowels which was like to prove fatal.

Saturday and Sunday attended Moses who began to recover. Monday he had so far recovered as to allow me to go to the Raft in the morning. Tuesday and Wednesday attended as usual to the Raft with out finding any one to ask the price of timber.

Thus I continued from Day to Day without finding any one to purchase until Tuesday the 8 of July.<sup>17</sup> Sold to John Chamberlian one Crib of pine timber Containing about 4000 feet for two pence three farthing per cubic foot. Also agreed with him for an other Crib Containing about the same quantity at the same price which he could not pay for.

Saturday [July] 20 agreed with Mr. Murr for the oak timber at 1/1 per foot.

Several pages (23-27) toward the end of Catlin's *Journal* contain incomplete details on the composition and disposition of the raft. The lumber, exclusive of Lyon's sales, brought at least \$1225, a sizeable sum at a time when men considered 2s/9d (about fifty-five cents) the top price in Canada for a gallon of rum.

Sold to John Chamberlian 1 Crib of pine timber Containing 4111 feet at two pence 3 farthings, to Mr. Brihant [Bryant?] 8 sticks of rough Pine for \$18.90, to Adam Pearson 1836 feet of square pine 10825 feet of three inch plank at \$20.

To John Stewart 2357 feet of square pine at /4d, to Mr. Murr 1597 feet of square oak at /13d, to Goudy 2278 feet of Culls<sup>18</sup> at /3½d -- out of the above sums 804 feet of square pine, 450 feet of good oak tim[ber], 782 feet of Culls were the property of Mr. Lyon. The pine sold to John Stewart, the merchantable Oak to Mr. Murr, the Culls to Goudy, to Mr. De Lerion [?] peace [s] of plank at 9 dollars per 100.

17. In 1805 July 8 fell on a Monday. Catlin apparently forgot the date in the tedious wait for a buyer. Chamberlian made his purchase on either Monday, July 8 or Tuesday, July 9.

18. Noah Webster (ed.), *Webster's Universal Dictionary of The English Language* (New York, 1916), 410, defines "cull" as "anything selected from others; something inferior picked out and set aside; applied especially to a timber, plank, or other pieces of wood, of poor grade." According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford, 1961), II, 1243, the term "cull" as applied to timber is plural and distinctly an American usage, first noted in Webster's 1864 edition.



July 20th 1805:

By Cash Paid of John Chamberlian . . . . .	\$ 188.42
By Cash Paid of Mr. Brihant . . . . .	18.90
By " " " A. Pearson . . . . .	369.08
By " " " J. Stewart . . . . .	170.46
By " " " Murr . . . . .	343.90
By " " " Goudy . . . . .	28.56
Due from Goudy . . . . .	<u>104.34</u>

[\\$1223.66]<sup>19</sup>

Guy Catlin concluded his stay in Quebec late in the summer of 1805 and embarked on the long return journey up the St. Lawrence and Richelieu Rivers to Lake Champlain and his home in Burlington, where the tangled accounts of the raft would be settled. With his purchases in Canada for friends and customers back in Vermont, the dreary cycle of debts incurred against the following year's timber sales had begun for another season. The next spring would see a new fleet of awkward timber rafts set out into Lake Champlain on the perilous voyage to market at Quebec.

Though a young man, Guy Catlin, along with his brother Moses, already had had wide experience in the trade with Canada. During the long, idle hours of his homeward voyage, young Catlin had ample time to reflect upon the risks of entrusting both the economy of the Champlain Valley and his own fortunes to the annual vicissitudes and uncertain future of the timber trade.

Within a decade of the summer of 1805 the rafting era had neared its end, the result of a combination of events including the interruption of the timber trade during the War of 1812, the serious depletion of the Champlain regions forest resources, a Canadian tariff in 1816, and the rapid development of the native Canadian forest industry. By 1825, the flow of the trade had begun to reverse, with small amounts of Ca-

19. Quotations of prices and values in different currencies presents a vexing problem in any analysis of the trade between Canada and the Champlain Valley in the early nineteenth century. Rates of exchange or equivalent values can seldom be located. Catlin, however, lists his selling prices in pounds sterling and then translates the cash received into United States dollars. Presumably, the product of multiplying the selling price by the amount of timber each purchaser bought equals the value of cash received. Following this procedure for the purchases made by Chamberlian, Stewart, Murr and Goudy the value of the pound equals \$4.84, \$4.32, \$3.97, and \$3.20 respectively, while the value of the shilling ranges between twenty-four and sixteen cents. Although too fragmentary and inconsistent to posit a definitive conclusion, Catlin's accounts nevertheless provide an important indicator of the rate of exchange between pounds at Quebec and United States dollars in 1805.

nadian timber being transported southward through the Richelieu River into Lake Champlain.

In that space of twenty years, Moses and Guy Catlin had wisely broadened and expanded their commercial operations. Together they were among the pioneer investors in the erection of modern, large-scale mills and factories at Winooski Falls. Two short decades after Guy Catlin's voyage, the economy of the Champlain Valley had undergone vast changes from the days when the timber trade with Canada made up the backbone of its commerce.

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At the time the Vermont legislature was discussing adoption of the 19th amendment to the Constitution of the United States which gave women the vote, Senator George Aiken's father happened to be a member of the House. Mr. Aiken, who favored the extension of suffrage to women, was being interrogated by a member who opposed this move. The colloquy went something like this:

"Mr. Aiken you say you favor this amendment."

"Yes, I do."

"You realize, Mr. Aiken, that if we give women the vote we'll have to give them all the other privileges of full citizenship."

"Yes, I do."

"You realize, Mr. Aiken, that this will include jury duty."

"Yes, I do."

"Well, Mr. Aiken, suppose in a criminal case that runs on for four, five or six days your wife was the only woman on the jury and had to be closely confined with those men during all this period. How would you like that, Mr. Aiken?"

"Well," said Mr. Aiken, after carefully studying the big chandelier in the center of the hall, "I think it would all depend on who we had for a hired girl at the time."

— from *What The Old-Timer Said* (to the Feller from Down-Country and Even To His Neighbor — When He Had It Coming) by Allen R. Foley (President, Vermont Historical Society and Professor Emeritus of History, Dartmouth College), to be published on June 1, 1971, at \$1.95 per copy by the Stephen Greene Press of Brattleboro. This anecdote printed here with permission of the Stephen Greene Press.