

developing in conjunction with the lumber enterprises. Merchants Bank commenced business in this building, constructed in 1850 with the expectation that Burlington's busy commerce would continue for the coming decades at the waterfront to be near the wharves and railroad depots. However, seven years later, the economic vitality of Battery Street began its long decline and the bank, realizing its error, relocated to College Street opposite City Hall Park.

Various wholesale firms occupied the former bank building until 1903 when it was remodeled by the Burlington Freezer Company who converted this building and the one on the corner to the south into a 4,000 square foot freezer building devoted to the cold storage of butter and eggs. In the rear they constructed an ice house holding 400 tons of ice and made agreements with Consumer's Ice Company to fill this house through their subway ice tunnel.

Today the bank structure probably looks pretty much as it did when customers hurried through its doors on business, coins jingled on counters, pens scratched in ledgers. Outside, tied to hitching posts, could be seen the splendid carriages of Burlington's economic leaders.



SHANTY-ON-THE-SHORE

The two blocks of Battery Street between Maple and Main Streets are among the oldest continuously occupied in Burlington. The plots of land on the west side of Battery were originally called "Water Lots" and are smaller than the usual quarter-acre "City Lots" on the east side of the street. Between the north end of the

Stone Store building and the corner of King Street are the Water Lots numbered 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, and 20, sold by Ira Allen to Stephen Keyes. Keyes built his house and a log store here—the first retail store in Burlington—kept by Orange Smith. Sometime between 1797 and 1799 the property passed to Samuel B. Sheldon, who in 1803 sold it to Gideon King, Jr. King and Job Boynton built boats on this site and in 1808 John Winans built here the second successful steamboat in the United States, the *Vermont*.

Gideon King died in 1826 and substantially all of his real estate was sold at public auction in 1829. Isaac Nye then came into possession of this property. Nye's parents brought him to Burlington as a child around the beginning of the 19th century. In the 1820s he began his business career in partnership with a Mr. Densmore on Court House Square and then with Horace Long at the corner of Church and College Streets. When King's extensive real estate holdings came onto the market, Nye, for \$880, bought up four lots on the west side of Battery. Here he built a small wooden store at the corner of Battery and King Streets (Shanty-on-the-Shore), in the back of which he lived, and sometime between 1834 and 1836 extended a large wharf into the lake at the foot of King Street. He built up a large transport and storage business, owning several canal boats and interests in various steamboats. One of his canal boats, the *General Scott*, earned \$3,468.81 in the years between 1848 and 1851.

When the track of the Rutland and Burling-

ton Railroad was extended, in 1850, to connect with the Central Vermont track (north of Main Street), its line passed between the Nye store and Nye's wharf. The company and Nye failed to agree upon damages to be paid by the railroad for its strip of land 40 feet wide. In accordance with a statute then in force, commissioners were appointed by the State Supreme Court to appraise the damages. In May 1851 they awarded \$1,700 to Nye, who, unsatisfied, appealed the case in the September 1851 term of the Chittenden County Court. Nye failed to press the case and it made no progress, he having no concern for the "law's delay", and not needing the money. The Court then ordered that the \$1,700 be deposited in the Merchants Bank, pending the appeal. For its part, the railroad, being in possession of the land, was likewise content with the delay.

Nye, by this time, was reputed to be a very "peculiar fellow." One morning his store was closed and it never opened again. The building remained shuttered until Nye died in 1871. No one ever knew why, and neither rumor nor tradition explained the incident. His stock of goods perished on the shelves; he failed to collect any more wharf rent. Nye was offered \$18,000 for a raft of spars at his dock from which local boys dived and swam, but he refused the offer and allowed the spars to rot. Though a reclusive hermit, Nye seemed to enjoy Burlington funerals. Seated alone in his high-backed old wagon, Nye always brought up the rear of every procession to the graveyard.

Nye's strange life came to an end in April of 1871. Newspaper accounts estimated his age to be about 80 years. According to his wishes, Nye's body was laid out on the counter of his store before being sent to Plattsburgh, New York for burial. Nye's two brothers in Champlain, New York and Lacolle, Quebec, served as his executors. In 1879 one of them pressed for the conclusion of the railroad suit. It had remained on the court docket 27 years; Nye was dead; many of the lawyers were dead; the railroad was bankrupt. Even the Merchant's Bank had ceased to exist—becoming the Merchants National Bank following rechartering in the 1860s. However, the court awarded Nye's estate \$1,000 over the original \$1,700, but declared that the bank should pay no interest on the 27 years of deposit in view of Nye's negligence in asserting his claim.

In October 1879 Nye's property was sold. The Champlain Transportation Company pur-

chased the wharf which included the old store for \$9,000. They moved their steamboat operation from South Wharf to Nye's Wharf and rented the old store to James Wakefield, a sailmaker, who used it for a sail loft until 1911, after which the Champlain Transportation Company remodeled the building as their offices.

GIDEON KING HOUSE
#35 King Street

Five houses are known to have survived from 18th century Burlington. Two of them, the King and Pomeroy Houses, are within a block of each other in today's Waterfront Historic District.

This brick dwelling at #35 King Street was the home of Gideon King, Jr., who lived here from 1798 to 1826. King pioneered Burlington's role in transportation on Lake Champlain. As a young man, he recognized the commercial possibilities in lake commerce and for 36 years he worked more effectively than anyone else to promote Burlington's contacts with the outside world.

Gideon Jr. came to Burlington in 1788 at the age of 14 with his father and three brothers from New Lebanon, New York. Gideon Sr. bought quarter-acre lot #16 on the northeast corner of Battery and King, and there he built a tavern. Gideon Jr. started in the lake shipping business in 1790 at the age of 16 and in partnership with a neighbor—Job Boynton—who lived across King Street on the southeast corner. From 1790 to 1814 they constructed 29 vessels of 30-tons or more with King Jr. owning 11 of them or 40% of the lake's commercial fleet. By his driving tactics, King acquired a practical monopoly of the carrier trade of Burlington—and the title, half-derisive, half-envious, of "Admiral-of-the-Lake." King's sloops and schooners carried into Canada Vermont beef, pork, lumber, pot and pearl ash, maple sugar and flax as well

