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THE LAKE CHAMPLAIN MARITIME MUSEUM

VERMONT



The Lake Champlain Maritime Museum is dedicated to preserving the maritime history and heritage of the Champlain Valley. The site includes boat building, artifact conservation, exhibits, videos and replica vessels manned by sailors in period clothing. Many of the exhibits cover the Revolutionary War Period.



The highlight of any visit to the museum is a tour of the full-sized, 54-foot replica of Benedict Arnold's 1776 gunboat, the Philadelphia II. The vessel is rigged, armed and afloat in the museum's North Harbor. Occasionally, they present firing demonstrations using the cannons on board.



Behind the boat shed, they have a working model of an 18th century blacksmith shop. In the shop, you can watch live demonstrations, including the forging of iron fittings for ships such as the Philadelphia II.

In the Revolutionary War building, they have a "Key to Liberty" exhibit. In the building, the complete story of Benedict Arnold's 1776 naval fleet on Lake Champlain is told. It includes ship models, interactive learning stations, historical maps, pictures and videos. One video shows the underwater exploration of a surviving gunboat discovered in 1997 at the bottom of Lake Champlain. The vessel still lies on the bottom of the lake and its exact location remains a secret.



The “Key to Liberty” exhibit is one of the largest exhibits in the country dedicated in, great part, to Benedict Arnold’s 1776 naval fleet. Naval museums at the US Naval War College in Newport, RI and the US Naval Academy in Annapolis, MD hardly mention this part of US naval history. No doubt, if Benedict Arnold had not sold-out to the British at West Point and then spilled American blood by leading British troops near the end of the war, he would be the Navy’s first hero instead of today’s John Paul Jones. What’s fortunate about the existence of the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum is that the heroism displayed by Benedict Arnold’s sailors in 1776 will not be forgotten.



Enroute to Burlington, VT

Vergennes, VT. On October 24, 1778, Major Christopher Carleton led a battalion-sized force south on Lake Champlain from Canada. The force consisted of British regular forces, American loyalists, German mercenaries and Indians totaling approximately 450 men. The purpose of “Carleton’s Raid” was to take prisoners and supplies and destroy buildings or material that could be used to support invasions into Canada. They landed on the east side of Lake Champlain near Crown Point. On November 6th, they moved inland to Otter Creek at Middlebury. They found Middlebury abandoned, but before heading down river toward Vergennes, they torched most of the town. Carleton reached Vergennes on November 8th, found a few inhabitants, and took them prisoner. Carleton also struck other areas west and south of Vergennes. When he returned to Canada on November 12th, he had 39 prisoners and reported the destruction of “4 months provisions for 12,000 men.”

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