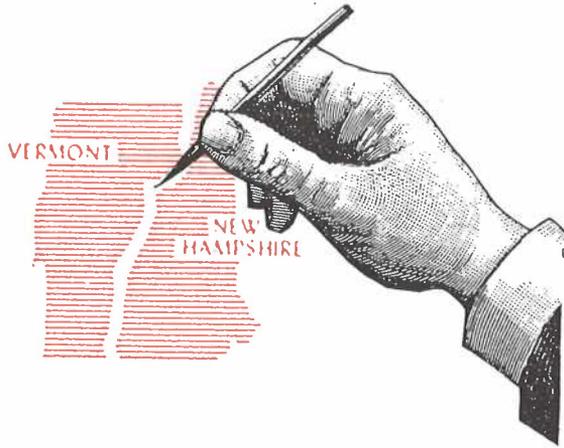


WHERE TO DRAW THE LINE:

THE GREAT CONNECTICUT RIVER BORDER DISPUTE



Drawing a boundary line may not seem so hard, but what do you do when the line is on flowing water? Some time ago there was a controversy between Vermont and the state of New Hampshire over where to draw their boundary line. The boundary is the Connecticut River, which runs between the two states and forms Vermont's eastern border. To make this problem more difficult, state borders must be exact. It is not enough to say that the river divides Vermont and New Hampshire. Where does one state really end and the other begin?

The Connecticut River has its source in a series of lakes northeast of Vermont in Quebec and New Hampshire. It then runs south, winding and twisting for two hundred miles between the two states. On its way, it passes towns, farms, and forests. It flows through rapids, over dams, and under twenty-eight bridges.

The Connecticut River and its shoreline have long been valuable for farming, transportation, and industry. When the first white settlers arrived in

Vermont most land was forested. Land along the river, however, was often free of forest because flooding and the shifting of the river channel kept it open.

Settlers could plant crops or graze animals without having to clear the land. Also, the rising of the river and flooding of the surrounding fields each spring fertilized the soil. Such fields were called bottomland, because they were located in the river valleys. Their rich soil was (and still is) greatly prized by farmers.

The river also powered mills for sawing wood, grinding wheat and corn, and making cloth, furniture, and tools. Much later, it furnished hydroelectric energy to light homes and run factories.

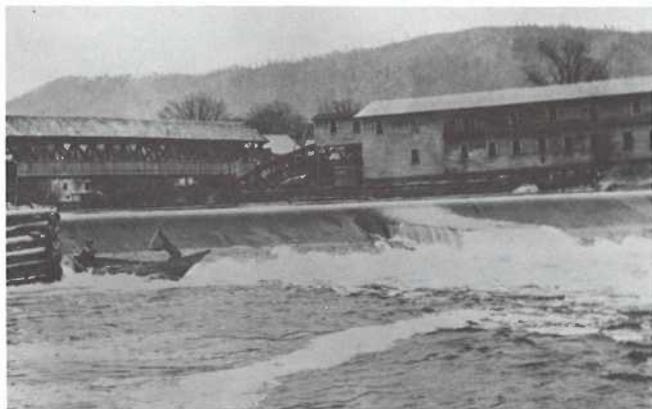
Finally, the river was the easiest way to travel before the coming of the railroads and modern roads. This was especially important if you were moving heavy **bushels** of wheat or **quantities** of lumber over a long distance. During spring log drives, thousands of logs were floated to the mills by daring river drivers.

Vermont and New Hampshire have been **disputing**



The Connecticut River running over a dam in Canaan.

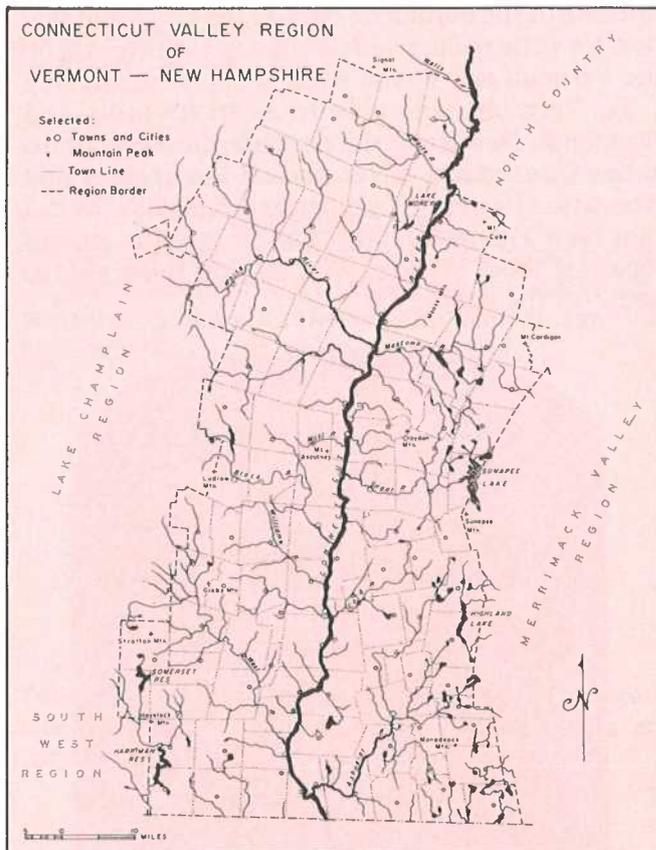
ownership of the river since the 1780s. In fact, Vermont was allowed to enter the Union only on the condition that it give up any claims to the Connecticut. In 1782, the true boundary was decided to be the low water mark on the west (Vermont) side of the river, where the river met the shore.



Lumberjacks John Call and Jack Knight run the Guildhall Dam during a log drive in 1909. When New Hampshire taxed buildings like the one in the background, Vermonters complained.

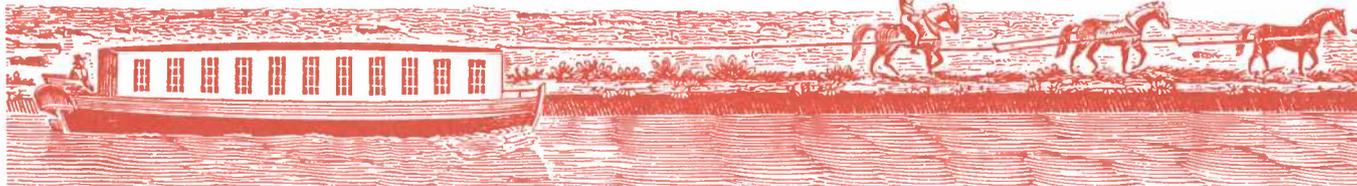
This decision seemed to settle the question of where the boundary line ran, but in 1909 the argument **flared** again. New Hampshire began taxing property on the Vermont side of the river, well above the low water mark. It wanted the taxes from this valuable strip of land and ordered people living there to pay up.

When one farmer was told that his land was really in New Hampshire and not in Vermont, he joked, "Thank goodness! I didn't think I could stand another Vermont winter." For many people, however, who lived along the shoreline and so had to pay taxes to both states, this was no laughing matter.



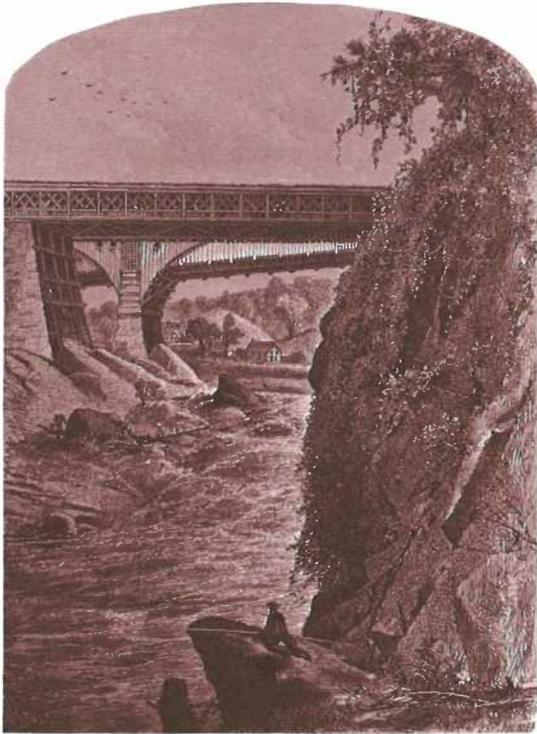
Connecticut River, disputed borderline

The Vermont state legislature felt the matter serious enough to fight in court. The legal dispute lasted many years and ended up in the United States Supreme Court. Finally, in 1934, the highest court in the land decided that Vermont owned the western shoreline down to the low water mark. It agreed with the original



drawing of the borderline back in the 1780s and said that New Hampshire had no right to tax property on the Vermont side of the river.

So Vermont was able to keep its mills and farmlands. New Hampshire became the owner of the entire Connecticut River and all the bridges that crossed it. Of course, Vermonters delighted in the fact that New Hampshire also had to pay the cost of repairing those bridges. Who do you think got the better of the argument?



VOCABULARY

bushel - a measurement for grain and vegetables,
4 pecks, 32 quarts, or 2150 cubic inches

quantities - large amounts

disputing - arguing about

flare - to break out