



The quarry at King's Bay. This small quarry supplied stone used during the earliest stages of construction. Photo courtesy of Doug and Roger Harwood.

Among the first tasks to be undertaken was the erection of cofferdams and driving of piles for the “grillage of timbers”. This was to be completed well before stone arrived from the quarries. Also needed early on was a substantial wharf for unloading of stone and supplies. This first summer was a busy one; for the first time the sounds of a steam pile driver were heard on Lake Champlain, materials were arriving regularly by boat and team.

Two pile drivers were employed at the site; one of six horsepower requiring an engineer and three laborers to operate it, and a second, larger eight horsepower unit requiring a crew of five. These units were expensive- Brevet Lt. Col. (then Lieutenant) James L. Mason reported that “The original cost of engines was \$4388.71; –the consumption of oil and rope, together with the repairs applied to them, has amounted to \$1982.21;–making the total expended on the engines \$6370.92...”. A total of 4383 piles were driven into the lake bed in 1844-1846. Most were spruce, hemlock and tamarack but a few were beech and ash. Each pile was 29-32 feet long and roughly 9” at the point and 15” at the butt in diameter. Each of these piles was to support an astonishing 34,125 pounds, “in addition to its own weight and that of the grillage.” Mason was even able to break down the “total cost of piles and driving, – \$17017.67 or \$3.88 pr. pile.”⁷