

## Airport Park

Location: 500 Colchester Point Road



Since the early 1800s, the land located on what is now Colchester Point Road, was owned and farmed by the Porter family. In 1945, Charlie Brink, a Bell Aircraft employee, saw the property as a way to continue his hobby of flying — something he had done since he was 14 years of age. To Charlie “the place offered level land, a barn that would serve as a hangar, and a house that left something to be desired.” Even with these deed restrictions — “the property was not to be used for a hotel, club, tenting, or business purposes and shall not be subdivided for sale or otherwise, and that but one dwelling house shall be built thereon” — he felt he could proceed with his plan.

In 1967, the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association's airport directory described the Champlain Airport as having “two sod runways: 2,000’ Runway 2/20 & 1,475’ Runway 11/29.” It had facilities for minor repairs, one open and one closed hangar, and a small office with the Brink home located on the right side. The airport was available to area residents, as well as several flying clubs, and operated under the name of Vermont Aviation, Inc. “It was a location where tie-downs, hangar space, and maintenance costs better fit the pocketbooks of the clientele. It provided a source of camaraderie and less structure than a bigger field, such as the Burlington Airport,” according to Bruce Lindner, who worked part time at the airport for 14 years.

After Charlie suffered a heart attack limiting his ability to fly, the Brinks offered the property for sale. Because of its location adjacent to the Colchester Bog and other Act 250 environmental restrictions, the land lost its appeal to developers. This enabled the Town of Colchester to purchase it primarily with Bureau of Outdoor Recreation funds in 1983. Airport Park now offers a popular selection of athletic and recreational options for all ages, including ball fields, a playground, walking trails, tennis/pickleball courts, picnic tables, a pavilion, and restrooms. During cold winter months, an outdoor ice skating rink is constructed.

### Sources:

- Airport research provided by Brian and Bruce Lindner. Additional information found in *Chronicles of Colchester* by Inge Schaefer, (The History Press, 2009)
- Also, visit the *Burlington Free Press* article by Inge Schaefer at <https://www.burlingtonfreepress.com/story/news/2016/03/11/colchester-airport/81609042>
- 1961 photo courtesy of Greg Dirmaier

## Colchester Causeway

**Location:** Just off Mills Point Road. Parking is available at Airport Park and at the designated parking lot on Mills Point Road adjacent to the bike path.



It was built in just a year, beginning in 1899. The railbed from Colchester Point to Allen Point in South Hero cost the Rutland Railroad about \$1 million. Some of that money was raised from Dr. William Seward Webb and the New York Central Railroad owned by the Vanderbilt family. On January 7, 1901, the Rutland Island Line began service from Burlington to Alburgh. That run took two hours from Union Station to Alburgh, where it continued on to Montreal and ended in Sorel, Canada. The train did not stop in Colchester, but it left its mark on the community with its railbed now constituting Causeway Park — a bike and walking path offering some of the state's most breathtaking views.

When construction began, 500 men, many of whom were Italian immigrants living in the Barre area, were brought in as laborers. Local residents also found employment and earned money by providing room and board to the imported laborers. Equipment, such as steel rails, plates, and ties, was moved over the ice from Plattsburgh. "Steam drills, hoisting machines, and boiler dump cars were also drawn over this way," a Rutland Railroad log recorded.

During World War I, both the Rutland and Central Vermont Railroads were taken over by the federal government. In 1919, in disrepair, the railroad was returned to the Rutland Railroad. According to an article in the *Burlington Free Press*, "It (the Island Line) struggled along until 1961, when the strikebound Rutland, its passenger and milk traffic a fading memory, called it quits." In 1963, Vermont appropriated \$2.7 million to acquire the tracks. A best-use study was then undertaken resulting in three alternatives for use of the railroad property. None of these alternatives for recreational use of the railroad proved to be acceptable to the state. Sometime later, Colchester bought a right-of-way from the state and talk ensued of converting the railbed to bike and walking trails.

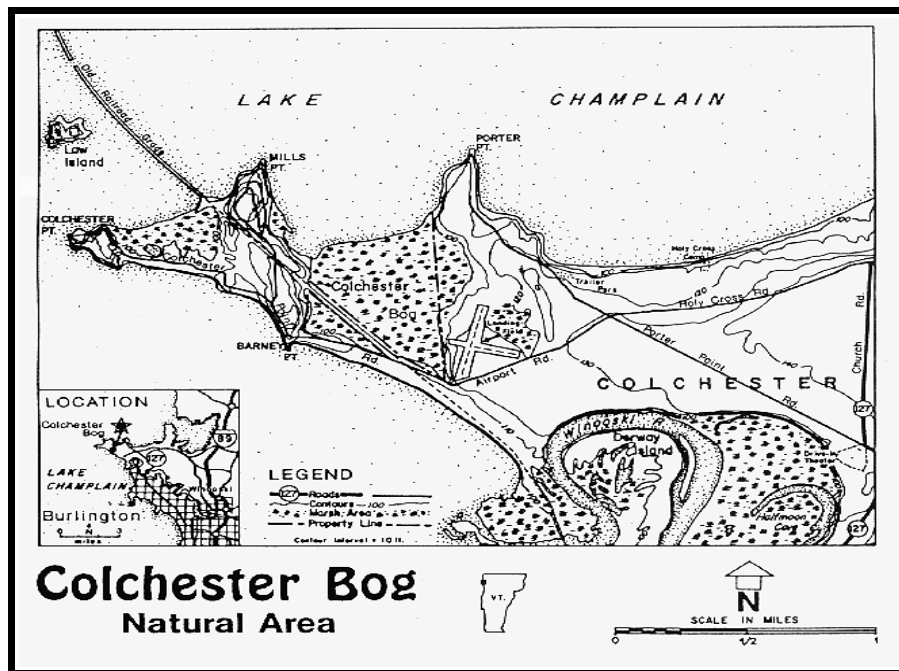
This 3.25-mile, 10-foot-wide gravel path causeway crosses Malletts Bay at the point where the Bay opens into the broad lake. Locally referred to as the "fill," it connects Colchester to South Hero and continues on to Alburgh. It is suitable for walking, running, cycling, and fishing, as well as seasonal duck hunting. Access to the causeway is free of charge, and dogs are allowed.

Source:

Read more about the evolution of the Colchester Causeway and see additional photos at <https://www.burlingtonfreepress.com/story/news/2017/12/02/history-space-colchester-causeway-island-line/108228658> and in *Chronicles of Colchester* by Inge Schaefer (The History Press, 2009).

## Colchester Bog Natural Area

**Location:** Colchester Airport Park, 500 Colchester Point Road. From the parking lot, proceed west between the first two ball fields to the end. Take the path to the right, and follow a short trail through the woods to the boardwalk for the bog.



Colchester Bog began forming about 9,000 years ago, and the accumulated peat now averages almost nine feet in depth with some areas exceeding 19 feet. Unique ecosystems include red maple-black ash swamp, dwarf shrub bog, and alder swamp.

Native Americans of the Abenaki tribe were the first inhabitants here and used sphagnum moss for insulation and diapers. Labrador tea, sheep laurel, and tamarack, also found in the bog, were used to treat illnesses.

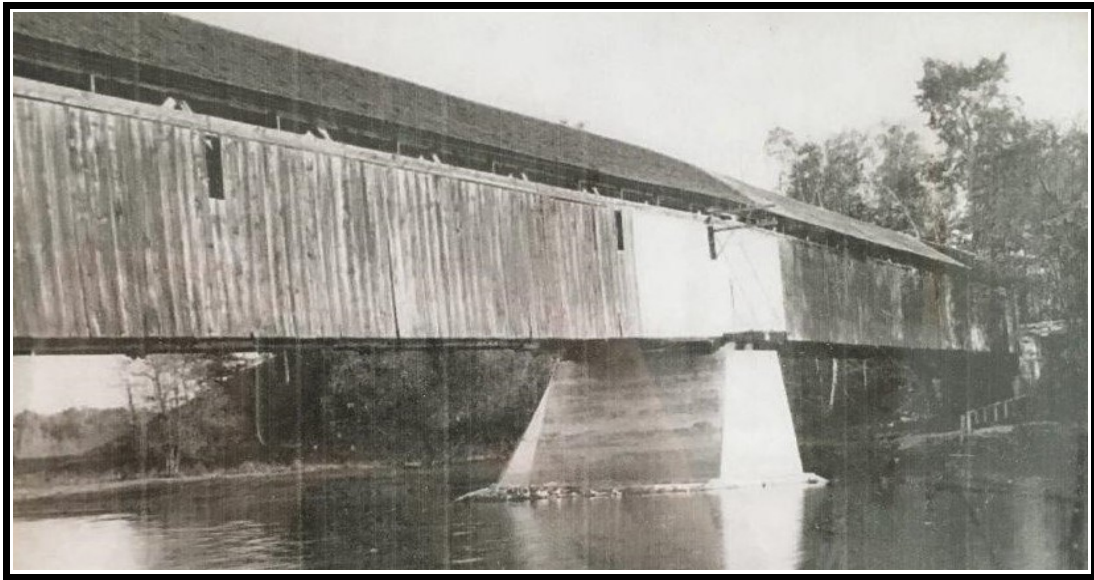
Today, this 180-acre natural area is managed by the University of Vermont's Environmental Program. The bog is made up of open peatland, shrub- and tree-dominated swamps, open water areas, sand dunes, and upland sites.

A boardwalk and floating deck allow visitors to explore the bog without getting soaked or damaging the fragile wetland moss and sedge. Sorry, no pets allowed.

Source:

- <https://researchguides.uvm.edu/colchester-bog/home>

**Heineberg Bridge**  
**Location: Route 127**



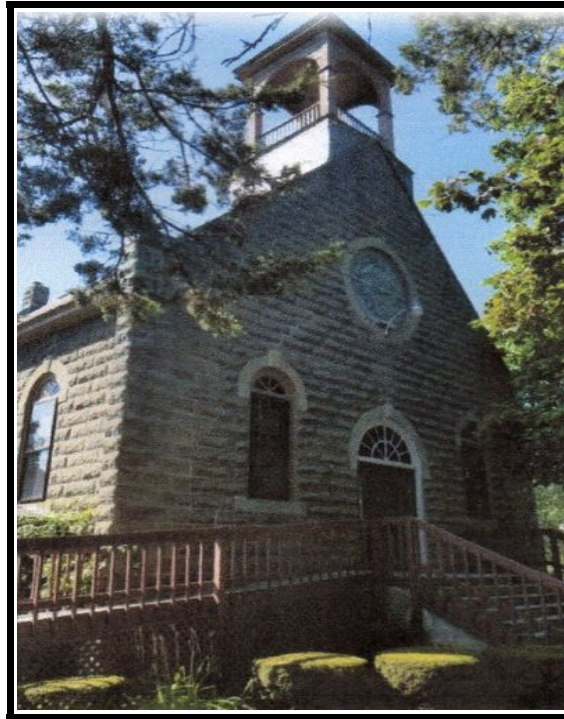
There have been four bridges at this location over the years. The first was built in 1853 and presumably named the Heineberg Bridge because Dr. J.B. Heineberg was instrumental in its construction. He owned a farm off Porter's Point Road and wanted to have a bridge across the Winooski River instead of using the Richardson ferry.

The second bridge was built in 1862 to replace the original bridge that burned down. Then in 1935, the old wooden covered bridge was replaced by a steel bridge nearby. Finally, in the mid-1980s, the steel bridge was replaced by the current concrete bridge as part of the Burlington beltline project.

Source:

- Reid Allen, local historian, from his presentation to the Colchester Historical Society on February 9, 2019

**Holy Cross Church**  
**Location: 416 Church Road**



In 1875, Bishop Louis deGoesbriand asked Monsignor Jerome Cloarec, pastor of St. Joseph's Church in Burlington, to take spiritual care of the Catholic families living in the Malletts Bay area of Colchester. Catholic people from the Bay area had no local church at that time.

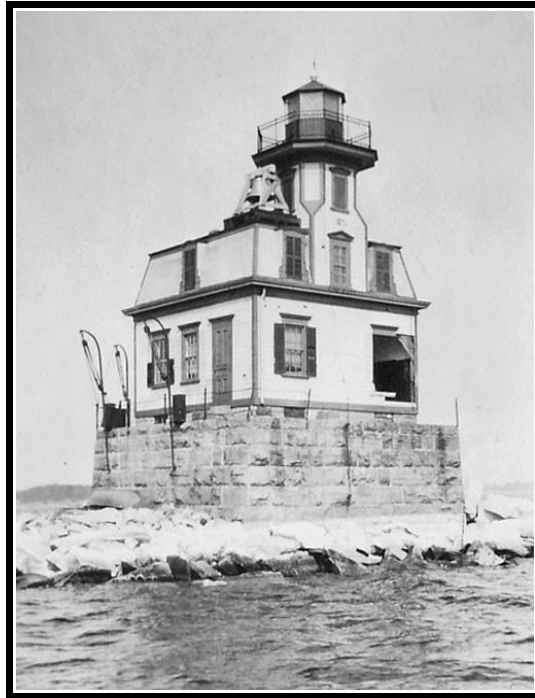
Under Monsignor Cloarec's direction, in 1914, the stone church was constructed on land donated by Mr. and Mrs. Richard Lacroix. It was named Holy Cross Chapel, a mission of St. Joseph's Parish in Burlington. In 1945, Holy Cross Mission was assigned to the relatively new parish of St. Mark on North Avenue in Burlington and remained a mission of St. Mark's Parish until June 25, 1950, when Holy Cross ceased to be a mission and received the full status of a parish. The first pastor was Father Joseph Joy, a native of Brooklyn, New York. It was during Father Joy's time that the rectory was constructed.

In the following years, the number of families moving to the Malletts Bay area grew by sizable numbers, and it soon became evident that the old building was not large enough to accommodate the ever-increasing numbers attending Mass on Sundays. In 1966, under the direction of Reverend William P. Hammond, the present Holy Cross Church was built. It was designed to hold 600 people. The original church building is known as Cloarec Hall (pictured) and is used for parish social and town functions.

Source: <https://holycrossvt.org>

## Colchester Reef Lighthouse

**Location:** Today, this relocated and restored lighthouse serves as a welcoming sanctuary near the center of the Shelburne Museum's campus. The Colchester Reef, where the lighthouse was once situated, is located approximately a mile offshore from Colchester Point and roughly seven miles northwest of Burlington.



In 1869, when lumber transportation was at its peak on Lake Champlain, the U.S. Lighthouse Board recommended the construction of a lighthouse on Colchester Reef, southwest of South Hero Island, to mark a group of three dangerous shoals.

The lighthouse, designed by Albert R. Dow, an engineer graduate from the University of Vermont, was constructed by Luther Whitney in 1870-1871 at a cost of \$24,500 – the most expensive light built on Lake Champlain. The lighthouse served as the home and workplace of 11 successive keepers and their families. At least one baby was born there. The first floor was divided into a living room and kitchen and the second floor into four bedrooms. Coal stoves provided heat, while large pumps retrieved water from the lake. The keepers used Hogback Island, the nearby island to the north, as farmland.

The photograph above was taken in 1923 when the southwest corner of the lighthouse was split open by the pressure of tons of ice. Huge ice chunks protruded through the opening and flooded the kitchen floor. But within a few minutes, the wind reversed, the ice slid back, and all that was left of the near disaster was a gaping hole in the kitchen wall.

In 1933, the lighthouse was decommissioned and was abandoned for several years. But, in 1952, thanks to the efforts of Electra Havemeyer Webb, the lighthouse was dismantled from its site on the lake and reconstructed at Shelburne Museum.

Sources:

- <https://shelburnemuseum.org/collection/lighthouse>

- <http://www.newenglandlighthouses.net/colchester-reef-light-history.html>

## Colchester Log Schoolhouse

Location: 500 Colchester Point Road, Airport Park



Historic research led to the discovery that this 24- x 28-foot log structure was originally one of the earliest schoolhouses in Colchester, built circa 1815. In August of 2000, the MacDonald family was building their new home on Spaulding East Shore Drive and looking to remove the existing camp. They found the camp was, indeed, this log structure and contacted a preservationist, as well as the Colchester Historical Society. A committee was formed to save and renovate the schoolhouse, and it found a permanent site for the building at Airport Park.

Today, the Colchester Log Schoolhouse functions as a visitor information center, interpretive venue for schools, and a museum for displaying Colchester history. Students of all ages are encouraged to visit this historic site to step back in time to the days of early school education.

This little museum is also a wonderful volunteer and educational opportunity. Hours are very flexible. To volunteer and to find out more, please contact Carol Reichard at 802-497-3036.

Open weekends, Memorial Day – Labor Day  
10 a.m. - 2 p.m.

Free parking and admission; donations are always appreciated.

Sources:

- <https://colchestervt.gov/477/Log-Schoolhouse-Restoration>

- Brochure, *Colchester Log Schoolhouse*, a publication of the Colchester Historical Society

**St. Andrew's Episcopal Church**  
**Location: 1063 Prim Road**



St. Andrew's Episcopal Church was founded in 1975 by two local families – the Merrihews and the Chicoines. Without a building of its own at first, the initial group of approximately 25 people began meeting in spaces provided by Hazelett Strip-Casting Corporation, Cloarec Hall at Holy Cross Church, and a childcare space in Creek Farm Plaza. The families worked together to apply for a loan from the Episcopal Diocese to purchase the land on Prim Road and for the design and construction of the church building.

In addition to the loan, parishioners conducted fundraising events. Cathie Merrihew, one of the original founders, related an entertaining story about one event they held in October. They decided to sell autumn mums and lined both sides of the road with the beautiful mums to attract buyers. It was cold, she said, and her young family stayed overnight on the church land in their little pop-up camper. Cathie said those times were rough, but also fun, as they all worked together toward the goal of establishing their church building.

The building was erected in 1984. Inside, a cross is featured over the altar and is made of Lake Champlain driftwood in honor of St. Andrew who was a fisherman. Toddy Hagens, then the Sunday School teacher, worked with her students to find the wood on the shoreline, and they assembled the cross on the floor of her living room.

An addition in 2004 doubled the size of the building. The new area filled the need for office space and a conference room.

St. Andrew's Episcopal Church is family friendly and has become one of the largest local contributors to the Colchester Food Shelf. Visit <https://www.standrewsvt.org> and its Facebook page for more information about St. Andrew's Episcopal Church. The phone number is 802-658-0533.

**Sources:**

- Cathie Merrihew, co-founder of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church
- Photos and information from St. Andrew's Episcopal Church website and Facebook page

**Sunset Drive-In**  
**Location: 155 Porters Point Road**



*During the COVID-19 health pandemic of 2020-2021, the Sunset Drive-In remained open for several weeks in the winter so customers could enjoy movies in the safety and comfort of their own vehicles. Many indoor movie theaters were closed during the pandemic, although some reopened with limited entry permitted.*

Colchester's Sunset Drive-in celebrated its 70th anniversary in 2019. It has been owned and operated by the Handy family during that entire time period.

There were, in years past, two other drive-in theaters in Colchester. One was located on Bay Road and was known as the Malletts Bay Drive-in, now the location of a residential neighborhood. The other, known as the Mountain View Drive-in, was located on Route 7, just north of Winooski and before I-89's Exit 16. Today, it is the site of two fast-food restaurants.

The Sunset Drive-in is one of only three drive-in theaters remaining in Vermont (the other two are in Bethel and Fairlee) and features “movies under the stars” on four screens. The site also features a snack bar, playground, and mini-putt.

Visit [https://sunsetdrivein.com/sunset\\_low.pdf](https://sunsetdrivein.com/sunset_low.pdf) for an interesting article published in a 2008 issue of the *Lake Champlain Weekly*.

Sources:

- <https://sunsetdrivein.com>
- [https://www.colchestersun.com/news/sunset-drive-in-celebrates-70-years/article\\_ed60bc44-b9b8-58c5-9208-0f0ce80c60f7.html](https://www.colchestersun.com/news/sunset-drive-in-celebrates-70-years/article_ed60bc44-b9b8-58c5-9208-0f0ce80c60f7.html)