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Hi! I’m Ollie the Otter!

Becoming Norwich
Rivers & Mills

Funding for this comic book was provided by the Norwich Women’s Club and the Kim King Zea education fund at Norwich Historical Society.
23,000 years ago, glaciers covered New England in ice and snow one and a half miles thick. That's taller than Mount Washington!

As the glaciers melted, waters flowed down what is now the Connecticut River Valley and formed a long, long lake, known as Lake Hitchcock.

Next time you are on the Norwich Green, pretend you're at the bottom of a giant lake!

The bottom of Lake Hitchcock was where the Marion Cross School playground is today.
Settlers built mills with waterwheels here. One of the mills was a sawmill. Waterpower made work faster and more efficient.

The dam held back the water in the mill pond.

The water flowed through a chute under the mill, turning a waterwheel.

The waterwheel turned gears that moved the saw up and down faster than any two men could.

This tub was made right there at the sawmill!
In 1872, Leslie Spencer Patterson opened the Patterson Chair Company on the Ompompanoosuc River.

He built eight tenements to house workers, and a general store with a dance hall.

The factory produced ten train cars loaded with chairs and about 800,000 feet of lumber yearly. That’s 150 miles of lumber—if it were laid end-to-end, it would reach from Norwich to Boston!

Chester Tucker worked at the factory at the tender age of 14. He may also have had the job of driving the wagons of chairs down to the train station.
In the early days, Norwich settlers traveled by canoe, just as the Abenaki had.

A rope ferry operated at the foot of Loveland Road. A rope stretched across the river helping the ferrymaster navigate a straight course.

In 1848 the Connecticut & Passumpsic Rivers Railroad laid the first tracks. The Elizabeth Copper Mine built the station that still stands today at Kendall Station Road. Teams of animals hauled the copper ore from the mine to the railroad.

When automobiles were invented, Route 5 was improved and then paved.

Interstate Highway 91 was built in the 1960s and with it came high-speed travel!
Fun fact!
Route 5 is a Federal highway which uses odd numbers for north-south routes. Route 10 is a NH state highway which uses even numbers for north-south routes. Even/Odd; NH/VT—there’s always something marking the difference!

In 1967, five homes and other buildings were demolished to connect the road to the I-91 interchange.

Today’s Ledyard Bridge is the 3rd bridge in this spot, completed in 2000.
After the Civil War, millions of logs from the northern forests were floated down the Connecticut River.

Men cut trees in the winter and hauled the logs to nearby streams.

Dams on the streams held back the water until it was time to flush the timber downstream to the river.

Wow! That looks dangerous! Don’t forget your spiked boots!

Women who kissed their men good-bye in the spring never knew whether they’d see them alive again.

The men rode the logs in fast, icy water up to 16 hours a day!
Lewiston was always a transportation center with ferries, bridges, roads, and trains.

In the village was a gristmill, store, shoe shop, and many homes on both sides of the road leading up the hill.

The mail arrived by train twice a day. In 1902 you could take 5 trains a day north and 4 south. Dartmouth students arrive by train and then rode a stagecoach up the hill to Hanover.

I'm gonna take the peanut train to the picture show in White River!
Much of Norwich's drinking water comes from a deep well that can provide a million gallons in a day.

Water is pumped 5 miles up to a 500,000-gallon tank on Dutton Hill.

That water is then pumped back down to the village.

Don't waste our water!

The Wilder Dam raised the level of the river by 16 feet, altering much of the shoreline but saving downstream communities from flooding.
Before dams were built, spring thaws and heavy storms caused destruction downstream. The Union Village Dam was one of 16 dams built to control water.

By the 1950s the river was called “New England’s best landscaped sewer.” In those days no one wanted to swim in the Connecticut!

Dams disrupted fish habitats. The Atlantic salmon disappeared.

Sinks, refrigerators, tires, and trash littered the riverbanks. Pollutants from mines, farms, and factories contaminated the water.

The Connecticut River Watershed Council began the big job of cleaning up the river.

For the first time in years, the salmon are back!
More things to do to explore Norwich’s rivers:

Go canoeing on the Connecticut and imagine what it would have been like when it was a wilderness.

Build a dam in a nearby stream and watch what happens to the water upstream and down.

Make a waterwheel and turn potential energy into kinetic energy.

Build a bridge out of paper and see how much weight it can hold.

Contact your local watershed council and get involved in water monitoring.