

### 3.0 Historical Overview

This section provides a narrative history of the City of Niagara Falls with specific emphasis on the Downtown neighborhood. The overview addresses significant trends and themes associated with the city's historic context. The Downtown neighborhood's period of significance is identified and examined in this chapter. Martin Wachadlo, architectural historian, conducted the background historic research.

### 3.1 Niagara County: Physiology and Geology



**Figure 3-1.** Niagara Falls, Niagara Falls, New York

Niagara County borders the southern shore of Lake Ontario in the extreme northwestern corner of New York State, and occupies part of the Huron and Ontario Plains. The Ontario Plain comprises part of Lake Ontario to the foot of the Niagara Escarpment<sup>1</sup>, and the Huron plain extends from the crest of the escarpment southward beyond the county line. The Niagara Escarpment begins in Watertown, New York, USA and extends westerly along the Manitoulin Island in the Province of Ontario, Canada. The escarpment continues through Wisconsin and Illinois. With geological material measuring 64-ft thick, the stratigraphy at Niagara Falls provides a glimpse into the overall rock types comprising the Niagara Escarpment (Figure 3-1). The top layer is Lockport Dolomite, a hard rock referred to as the "Lower Silurian Group." Below the top layer is Rochester Shale, which is much softer and wears away easily with the effects of erosion. Under the shale are harder strata of limestone and dolostone known as the "Clinton Group." Below the harder strata is Grimsby sandstone. Settlers of the Niagara Frontier used these geological resources in the construction of houses and house foundations.

The natural feature of Niagara Falls, where the Niagara River plunges over a precipice from 170 to 180 feet high, is comprised of two waterfalls - the American Falls and the Horseshoe Falls (Canada), through the center of which runs the International Boundary with Canada. The Falls<sup>2</sup> is located roughly in the center of the 34-mile long river, more specifically a straight, that connects Lake Erie with Lake Ontario. It is estimated that 12,000 years ago when the falls were formed, the edge of the falls was as much as seven miles further down river than it is today. Until the 1950s, when the flow of water began to be controlled, the brink of the falls moved backward an estimated three feet every year because of erosion. When the Niagara River

<sup>1</sup> The geological term "escarpment" is a ridge composed of gently tipped rock strata with a long, gradual slope on one side and a relatively steep cliff on the other side.

<sup>2</sup> The term "Falls" is applied to the natural phenomenon to distinguish it from the City of Niagara Falls, the focus of the current survey.

enters the gorge, it turns direction 90 degrees, and flows north along the western edge of the City of Niagara Falls. The river favors the American side, as it is the shortest route to bypass the Falls. As a result, this inner elbow of turn was followed by the original portage routes, and later by the first hydraulic canals that diverted water from the river to hydropower electric stations.<sup>3</sup> According to Jackson, the greater concentration of settlement on the American side of the river at the Falls can in part be attributed to the change in direction of the river's flow.<sup>4</sup>

The northern section of the Niagara River rushes through narrow banks and protruding rock outcroppings. The series of torrents then encounters the Whirlpool Rapids. Situated three miles below Niagara Falls at the river's narrowest expanse, Whirlpool Rapids formed from a sudden turn in the Niagara River that caused the rapids to impinge against the Canadian shore to create a deep indentation. The water then surges back to the American side in a great whirl, rendered more furious by the uneven bend of the river and the narrow space into which it contracts. From this point, the river gradually widens and becomes calmer as it flows for the remaining seven miles to Lake Ontario.

### 3.2 Prehistoric Presence in the Niagara Frontier

Prehistoric occupation of Western New York probably began soon after deglaciation, when the area became free of ice and Lake Ontario reached its present position at about 11,000 B.P.<sup>5</sup> to 13,000 B.P.<sup>6</sup> However, remnants of Lake Tonawanda, located south of the Niagara Escarpment existed in Lewiston and Niagara until about 6,000 B.P.<sup>7</sup> A former Native American trail approximated the existing alignment of Lewiston Road, which began at Lewiston Height's past Devil's Hole and the Old Custom's House. The route continued south down Main Street at the north end of Niagara Falls to where Main Street branches off at Pierce Avenue, and along Portage Road to near Cedar Avenue. The trail then turned slightly westward and ran near to and west of the former Academy building in a nearly direct line to a strip called the "Frenchman's Landing," a name that had been handed down by Indian, French, British, and American inhabitants.<sup>8</sup> This early portage trail allowed the transfer of goods on land from around The Falls, connecting with Lewiston and the upper river.

According to traditional Native American cosmology, the Falls formed when:

"Hi'non was the Great Good God who killed the monster serpent which had poisoned the springs of the Ongiaras who once lived beside the Niagara. The serpent lived underground and would creep out at night and spread disease. Hi'non killed him with his shafts of lightning. The great serpent came writhing to the surface of the earth and he was twenty arrow flights long. The Red Men rolled his body into the river and, as it floated down it became lodged at the brink of what is now the Horseshoe Falls at

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<sup>3</sup> John H. Jackson, *The Mighty Niagara*. (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2003), p. 43.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> B.P stands for Before Present.

<sup>6</sup> Christopher D. Hohman and Richard Kastl, *Stage 1 Archaeological Survey Whirlpool Rapids Corridor Expansion Project Niagara County, New York*. (Binghamton, NY: Public Archaeology Facility Report Department of Anthropology, SUNY at Binghamton, 1993), p. 28.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, (Parker Calkin and Kathleen Miller, *Late Quaternary Environment and Man in West New York* [Transactions of the New York Academy of Science, 1976]).

<sup>8</sup> Hohman and Kastl, p. 29. (Edward T. Williams, *Niagara County, NY one of the most wonderful regions in the world, a concise record of her progress and people. 1821-1921* [Chicago: J.H. Beers & Co., 1921]).

Niagara; and its body, twisting and turning in death agony, bent back the massive rocks at the precipice so that there was formed the Great Horseshoe as it exists today.”<sup>9</sup>

Several archaeological investigations have been conducted in the City of Niagara Falls and in the Town of Niagara. These studies have identified evidence of both prehistoric occupation and activity in the Niagara Frontier. The first definite occupation in the vicinity of Niagara Falls occurred during the Archaic period (10,000 B.P to 3,500 B.P.). There is scant archaeological material from the earlier part of the Archaic period, as only scattered Early to Middle Archaic projectile points have been reported within Niagara County. A number of Late Archaic sites (6,000 B.P. to 3,500 B.P.) have been recorded in towns to the north and northeast of Niagara Falls. The Woodland Period, beginning about 2,000 B.P., is well represented in this part of New York State.

In the late nineteenth century, W. Beuchamp documented archaeological sites along the Niagara River.<sup>10</sup> Most of the larger previously recorded archaeological sites, such as camps or multiple occupations, are focused on the Niagara River and have identifiable cultural affiliations.<sup>11</sup> Whereas, many of the smaller sites located further inland away from the river represent ephemeral occupations such as artifact find spots and lithic scatters without identifiable cultural affiliations. A few large habitation sites or recurrently occupied camps are known further inland. A small number of sites are recorded along part of the river gorge bounded by steep rock walls. In the downtown area of Niagara Falls, there are two previously recorded prehistoric sites that include a stray find reported along the banks of a small stream that flows into the Niagara River a short distance above Niagara Falls. The other site consists of reported burials on Goat Island. Other findings have been reported by Edward Willis who noted an early Indian village was located near the Niagara River, just above where the Shredded Wheat factory once stood.<sup>12</sup> In 1850, Dexter R. Jerauld noted several skeletons were unearthed west of Fourth street, below the hill, within 200 feet of the water. The identification and cultural affiliation of these reported burials are unknown.<sup>13</sup>

### 3.3 European Exploration of the Niagara Frontier

European interest in the Niagara Falls area began in 1535, when Jacques Cartier<sup>14</sup> was informed of the massive cataract. Earliest descriptions of the Falls were provided by Cartier (1535) and by Samuel de Champlain in 1608. Both of these accounts were based on the work of previous explorers and cartographers who had used Native American descriptions and drawings.<sup>15</sup> The French were the first Europeans to explore the territory surrounding the Falls.

<sup>9</sup> Marjorie F. Williams, *A Brief History of Niagara Falls, New York* (Niagara Falls: The Niagara Falls Public Library, 1972), p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> W. Beuchamp, “Aboriginal Occupation of New York.” *Bulletin of the New York State Museum* (7[32]) (University of the State of New York, Albany, 1900).

<sup>11</sup> Peter Hoeman and James Hartner. Archaeological Reconnaissance Survey PIN 5410.46.121/BIN 1068229 Replacement of the Robert Moses Parkway (NY Route 957A) Bridge over the Sewage Treatment Plant Service Road, City of Niagara Falls, Niagara County, New York. Reports of the Archaeological Survey, Volume 32, Number 11 (Buffalo: Department of Anthropology, SUNY at Buffalo, 2000).

<sup>12</sup> Edward T. Williams *Niagara County, NY, one of the most wonderful regions in the world, a concise record of her progress and people 1821-1921*, (Chicago: H. Beers and Co., 1921).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Jacques Cartier (1491-1557) was an explorer of the St. Lawrence River to present day Montreal. Cartier's exploration was the basis for France's claim to Canada. Their original intent was to search for the Northwest Passage to the Orient.

<sup>15</sup> Jackson, p. 93.

Champlain, who realized the great trade potential of the birch bark canoe, made the earliest planned move into the interior of mainland America when he sent Etienne Brule to live with the Huron Indians to learn their language and trade routes. Alexander Stewart's paper "French Pioneers in the Eastern Great Lakes Area, 1609-1791" discussed the early travels around the Great Lakes.<sup>16</sup> However, Stewart noted Brule was captured in 1616 and escorted across the Neutral country to an Erie village. Brule finally arrived at the eastern end of Lake Superior in 1618 during his quest for a Northwest Passage to the Far East. After Brule's discovery, the Great Lakes became vital to the economy of North America. The fur trade soon developed into the dominant industry in the region, which the French controlled from 1600 to 1760. The fur trade industry attracted many would-be entrepreneurs who flocked to the areas surrounding the lakes. The Huron and Ottawa tribes were the major suppliers of furs to traders who conveyed them to consumers in Europe. When the wide-brimmed felt hat came into fashion in the late 16th century in Europe, the demand for beaver (*Castor canadensis*) pelts soared.

In the Niagara Frontier, the Neutrals, or as Father Le Junne referred to them, the Attiwandarons, had several villages located east of Fort Niagara and west of the Genesee River. In 1626, Father Dallon, another missionary, visited the Neutrals and the Wenroes (a small Iroquoian nation who lived among the Neutrals). The French applied the name Neutral to a number of allied groups of Northern Iroquoian speakers who lived between the Huron and Five Nations Iroquois who had remained neutral in hostilities between the two. Their villages were mostly located in Ontario between the Grand and Niagara Rivers. Stewart described their homeland as west of the Genesee River with their other village located 20 miles from the Genesee River. The establishment of Neutral villages on the Niagara River was probably related to the shift of the Erie people to the southwest part of the state in the early 1640s.<sup>17</sup> In 1650-1651, the Iroquois attacked several Neutral villages, which resulted in the breakdown of much of the Neutral organization. Thereafter the land became Iroquois territory, though they never actively settled in the region. The remainder of the Neutrals relocated to Michigan and elsewhere, where they joined other tribes.<sup>18</sup>

Another significant development in the history of Native Americans and European relations in the Niagara Frontier occurred in 1712 with the migration of the Tuscarora Indians from their North Carolina homeland to New York State. According to a number of historical sources on the Tuscarora Indian territory, the group migrated north to seek the protection of the powerful Iroquois. They became the sixth member of the Iroquois Confederacy and first settled near Oneida Lake. British agents then influenced the Tuscarora to move to their present location, a reservation eight miles northeast of Niagara Falls.<sup>19</sup>

### 3.4 European Occupation of the Niagara Frontier

French explorer René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle (1643-1687) left Montreal in July, 1669 in search of a water passage to the East through North America. He crossed Lake Ontario, Lake Erie, and other places in the interior of North America. The Niagara Frontier quickly became an important military stronghold for the French. To secure their trade monopoly, the French established a trading post at Fort Niagara in 1678. The "French Castle" at Fort Niagara, built in 1726) is the oldest building in the eastern interior of North America.

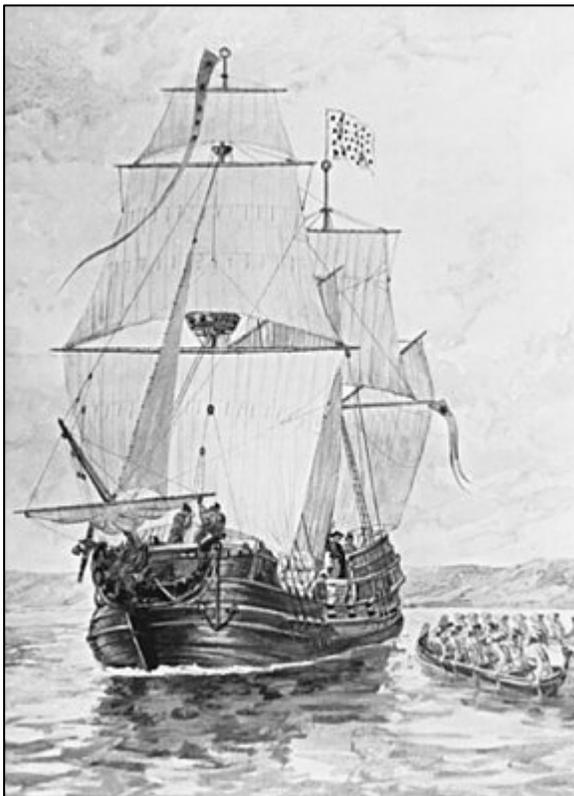
<sup>16</sup> Hohman and Kastl, p. 30. (Alexander M. Stewart, *French Pioneers in the Eastern Great Lakes Area 1609-1791*).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, (Bruce Trigger, *Handbook of North American Indians*, Vol. 15, [Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1978]).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Hohman and Kastl, p. 30.

On September 18<sup>th</sup>, 1678, La Salle inaugurated his return expedition by sending forward from Fort Frontenac<sup>20</sup> a detachment of his followers in a brigantine under the command of Pierre de St-Paul, Sieur de la Motte-Lussière, a French military officer. The detachment was directed to establish a post on the Niagara River to secure their trade monopoly and to make preparations for building a ship for the navigation of the Great Lakes. This detachment arrived at the Niagara River December 6<sup>th</sup>, and on January 20, 1679, La Salle reached the outpost and took command. The French located their outpost on Cayuga Creek where they constructed the Griffon, the first sailing vessel on the Great Lakes above Niagara Falls. During his return trip, LaSalle explored the area that would develop into the City of Niagara Falls. Lasalle was the first European to use the portage trail, which was a trail to carry goods on land around the Falls and to connect Lewiston with the upper river. Originally a Native American trade route, the portage trail played a vital role in the history of Fort Niagara as it allowed the French to maintain their stronghold on the Niagara frontier.<sup>21</sup>



**Figure 3-2.** In 1679, *Le Griffon* crossed the length of Lake Erie and turned north into the Detroit River, Lake St. Clair, St. Clair River, and Lake Huron.

The construction of the Griffon marked the beginning of shipping on the upper Great Lakes (Figure 3-2). Christened *Le Griffon* for the heraldic device of the Comte de Frontenac, governor general of New France, the ship's crew numbered 34 and included both La Salle and the Jesuit diarist Father Louis Hennepin (1626-1705). On August 7, 1679, the Griffon sailed into Lake Erie carrying La Salle and his men westward on the first leg of their expedition down the Mississippi River. In three days *Le Griffon* crossed the length of Lake Erie. On the return journey to Niagara, laden with furs, the ship mysteriously disappeared without a trace and thus has been dubbed "the Ghost Ship of the Great Lakes."

Father Hennepin, a Belgian, made his initial journey to the area in 1678 with La Salle. Hennepin was the first European to depict a firsthand account of the Falls. During the winter, Hennepin went to Fort Frontenac but returned to the Niagara outpost shortly before July 30, 1679. He was accompanied by two other Récollet Fathers, Gabriel de la Ribourde and Zénobe Mambéré, who, in common with Hennepin, had been directed by the superior of their order to accompany the expedition. Hennepin was an acute observer, and his books contain the most minute and accurate descriptions of the characteristics, arts, and customs of the

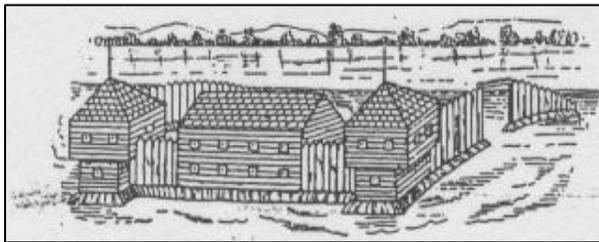
indigenous people of North America. After he returned to France in 1683, Father Hennepin published "A Description of Louisiana", an account of his travels, which was later exposed as

<sup>20</sup> Fort Frontenac was located in what is today Kingston, Ontario.

<sup>21</sup> Frank H. Severance, *An Old Frontier of France*, (New York: Dodd, Mead, & Co., 1917), p. 404.

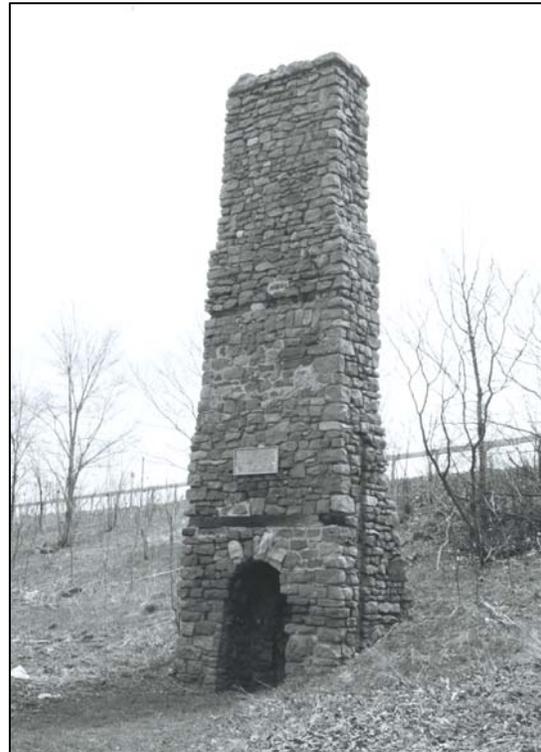
plagiarism of La Salle's own accounts. For offering La Salle's narrative as his own and for claiming to have discovered the mouth of the Mississippi, Hennepin was exiled from France.

The French remained the principal occupiers of the Niagara Frontier into the second half of the eighteenth century. In 1745, the French constructed a small blockhouse and storehouse in at a location known as "Frenchman's Landing." In 1751, the upper end of the portage from Fort Niagara was moved a few hundred yards south and Fort Little Niagara or Fort du Portage was constructed (Figure 3-3). A dependency of Fort Niagara, the fort had a long central, two-story log house, with connecting log blockhouses at either end with palisades extending from each block house to the water's edge. Little Fort Niagara was destroyed when abandoned in 1759 at the approach of the English. The British found only a stone chimney intact at the site of the former French barracks that had stood west of fort. Known as the old stone chimney, the structure is the only remaining vestige of the original French fort (Figure 3-4). With the exception of the lower story of the castle at Fort Niagara, the chimney is the oldest structure in Western New York and the only relic of all the commercial and military activity that, under both French and English rule, has been so prominent at the upper end of the portage.



**Figure 3-3.** Fort Little Niagara. Burned in 1759. This sketch was drafted from the recollections of Albert H. Porter (1801-1888) of early descriptions of the fort.

**Figure 3-4.** Old stone chimney from Little Fort Niagara. The chimney was attached to fort's barracks. Over the years, the chimney has been reconstructed and twice relocated. It presently stands at the rear of a commercial lot at 951 Buffalo Avenue, below the Robert Moses Parkway.

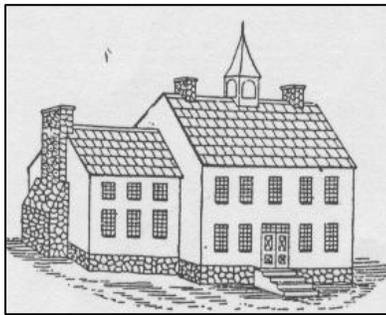


The British built their first house at Fort Schlosser in 1760 (Figure 3-5). According to historical accounts, the framework of the main part of this house had "...been got [sic] at Fort Niagara by the French, and prior to the siege, for a new chapel. It is uncertain where it had ever been set up by them or not, but probably not. So the British transported over the portage and set it up..."<sup>22</sup> The British used the building as a messhouse and, between the main block and the

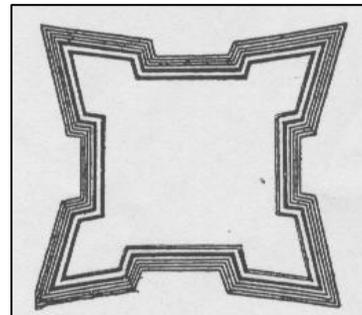
<sup>22</sup> Peter A. Porter, "Is it Col. Schlosser's Skeleton?," *The Illustrated Express* (9/10/1899).

chimney, they built a lower building for use as a kitchen and into this the old chimney, with its large fireplace and old iron crane opened directly. The English also placed an old belfry, prepared by the French for their chapel, on top of the house. Completed in 1760, the house was subsequently known as the Steadman house (Figure 3-5), who occupied the building after he escaped from the Devil's Hole massacre in 1763. Steadman claimed all of the land lying between his flight from Devil's Hole to Fort Schlosser, which he believed he was entitled to because of his miraculous survival from the massacre. The State ultimately rejected Steadman's claim.

In 1761, with the necessity for greater defensive protection, the British rebuilt the outpost as Fort Schlosser (Figure 3-6). The location for the fort was a few rods up stream from the old chimney at a location along the river that was deeper and the current less swift. John Joseph Schlosser, a German who had served in the British Army at the siege of Fort Niagara, oversaw the construction of the fortification. Upon completion of the fort, Schlosser was promoted to colonel and the structure he built was named after him.



**Figure 3-5.** The Steadman House, built in 1760 and burned in 1813.



**Figure 3-6.** Plan of Fort Schlosser, built by the British in 1761.

In 1759, the French turned over Fort Niagara to the British. At that time, the British appropriated the fur trade industry of the Great Lakes, which they dominated from 1760 to 1816. Niagara Falls is considered part of the Mile Strip, which encompassed a narrow belt of land one mile from the eastern shore of the Niagara River from Lake Erie to Lake Ontario. The Iroquois in 1764 ceded the rights to the Mile Strip to the British as reparations for the killing of British citizens and soldiers during "Devil's Hole Massacre" on September 14, 1763.<sup>23</sup> After the Revolutionary War, the British continued to occupy the area in an effort to secure repayment of war debts. The British ultimately ceded the land to the United States Government in 1796 as a provision of the Jay Treaty.<sup>24</sup>

In the late eighteenth century, Massachusetts and New York had an ongoing dispute over the region now known as Western New York. Massachusetts claimed the area on the basis of two colonial charters, while New York' based their claim on treaties it had signed with the Native

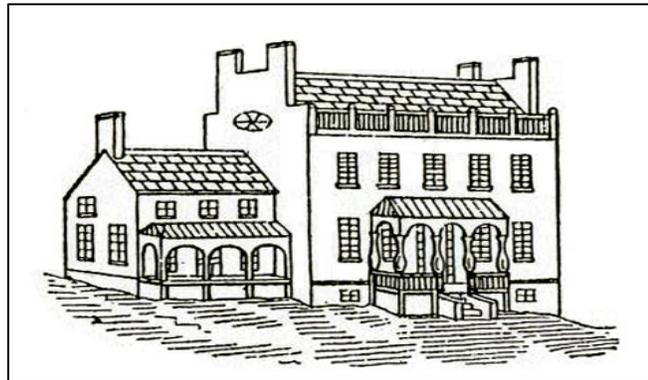
<sup>23</sup> Edward Dean Adams, *Niagara Power: History of the Niagara Falls Power Company Vol. I* (Niagara Falls: Niagara Falls Power Company, 1927), p. 57.

<sup>24</sup> The Jay Treaty of 1794 was ratified in June 1795. The treaty eliminated British control of western posts within two years, established America's claim for damages from British ship seizures, and provided America a limited right to trade in the West Indies.

Americans. The dispute was resolved by granting Massachusetts preemption rights over the territory excluding the Mile Strip, and granting New York the jurisdiction to govern the area.<sup>25</sup> Robert Morris purchased the four large pieces of land that comprised western New York from Massachusetts in May of 1791. He sold the land to the Holland Land Company, who began surveying the purchase in 1798. On April 6, 1803, the New York State Legislature passed a bill directing that all unappropriated lands, including the Mile Strip, be sold at auction in February of 1805.

### 3.5 Euro-American Settlement of the Niagara Frontier

The first permanent Euro-American settlers of the Niagara frontier were John Steadman and his brothers, William and Phillip, who arrived in Niagara in 1759. Judge Augustus Porter<sup>26</sup> who first visited the area in 1795 and 1796 en route to survey the “Western Reserve” in what is now the state of Ohio. At that time, he and his family realized the potential of the Niagara frontier. Augustus and his younger brother, Peter B. Porter,<sup>27</sup> returned to Niagara in 1805 and purchased Lots 39 through 44 of the Mile Strip Reserve. After the purchase, Judge Augustus Porter laid out the settlement of Manchester. He was the principal landholder in the area around the Falls and of the Islands near the precipice. In 1808, Augustus Porter constructed the first house in the village (Figure 3-7), which was destroyed during the War of 1812. After the war, he constructed a new residence on the same site (Figure 3-8). His brother General Peter Buell Porter, also had a large estate at the Falls. Judge Porter received many notable visitors such as President James Monroe, Henry Clay, General Lafayette, Sarah Bernhardt, Red Jacket, and John Jacob Astor.



**Figures 3-7, 3-8.** Augustus Porter constructed the first house (1808) in the Village of Niagara Falls (Manchester). At right is the second house Porter constructed on the same site. An historic marker commemorates the site of Judge Porter’s house on the south side of Buffalo Avenue east of First Street.

<sup>25</sup> Elizabeth Martha Campbell, *A History of the Mile Strip* (Masters Thesis: State University College at Buffalo, 1962), p. 10.

<sup>26</sup> Judge Augustus Porter was born in Salisbury, Ct., Jan. 18, 1769; died at Niagara Falls, June, 1849.

<sup>27</sup> General Peter Buell Porter was born in Salisbury, Ct., on August 14, 1773; died at Niagara Falls on March 20, 1844.

General Peter B. Porter attended Yale University and settled at the pioneer community of Canandaigua, NY to begin his law practice. He became involved in both commercial trading and politics. In 1797, he was chosen Clerk of Ontario County, a region then embracing all Western New York. Porter turned into a strong supporter of President Madison upon being elected to the U.S. Congress. He served as quartermaster general of New York militia, May–October 1812. Porter was awarded a congressional gold medal for his efforts in the War of 1812. After the war, he returned briefly to Congress and ultimately withdrew from public affairs. Porter retired and died in Niagara Falls.

In the early 1800s, with the population expanding from east to west, most of the pioneers entered the county via Ridge road and settled along or near the roadway. Few roads crossed the territory during this period. Pioneers of the Niagara Frontier constructed log houses and farmed the land. Sawmills were built early in the history of the county. These were small, easy to build, and were located on streams and near timber. The production of lumber was a very profitable enterprise through the mid-nineteenth century. This period also marked the "American Era" (1816 to 1850) of the fur trade industry.

### 3.6 The First Village in Niagara Falls: Manchester

The Porter brothers formed the firm of Porter, Barton, and Company with Benjamin Barton and Joseph Annin to make a bid to lease the rights for the portage trail. An anonymous 1805 map of Niagara Falls and Vicinity shows that there were two portage trails (Figure 3-9). One began along the Niagara River near the old French landing and continued northward along the current route of Tenth Street.<sup>28</sup> The other portage road shown on the map began near Fort Schlosser and approximately followed the current route of Portage Road (NY 104). The Porter's bid was accepted and they controlled traffic along the portage trail from 1805 until 1822. The original 12-year lease was extended an additional four years in recognition of the interrupted traffic along the trail during the War of 1812.<sup>29</sup> During these years the portage trail was used primarily to transport salt in barrels by ox cart or horse and wagon from Oswego on Lake Ontario to Buffalo. The portage road established the first link between New York and Buffalo, Cleveland and Pittsburgh.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to being pioneer settlers of Niagara Falls, Augustus and Peter B. Porter were important for their vision they held for the energy potential of the Falls. Augustus anticipated a great industrial future for the Falls, and named the village Manchester after Manchester, England, an industrial center similar to how he envisioned the area becoming. In 1805 Augustus Porter constructed a sawmill and a blacksmith shop, in 1807 he built a gristmill, the first to be erected on the American side of the Falls, and in 1809 he built a ropewalk and a tannery.<sup>31</sup> These early industrial endeavors established by the Porters formed the basis for later industrial development of the Niagara Falls Area.

The Falls also became a honeymoon destination in the village's history. The first woman to choose the falls as a honeymoon destination was Theodosia Burr, daughter of future US Vice

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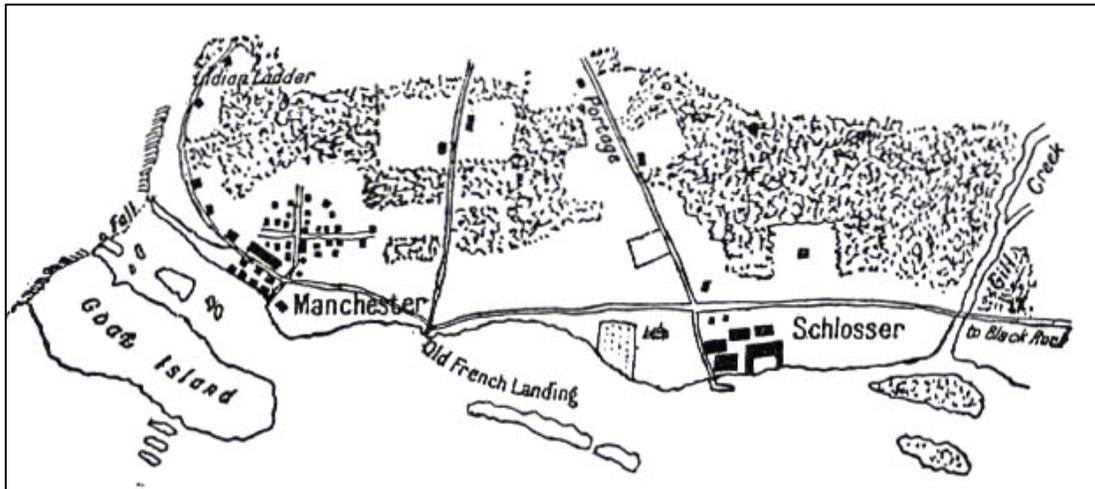
<sup>28</sup> John H. Conlin, *Assessment of Historical and Archaeological Resources – East Falls Redevelopment Area* (1991), p. 8). This early Indian trail was mentioned previously in Section 3.2.

<sup>29</sup> Edward Dean Adams, pp. 63-64.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.42-43.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

President Aaron Burr. In 1801, she arranged a travelling outfit of nine packhorses and a palace of servants and set off for the frontier lands of Niagara Falls. Three years later Napoleon Bonaparte's brother, Jerome Bonaparte, followed suit, and a honeymooning tradition was born.



**Figure 3-9.** A ca. 1810 sketch map of Manchester and Ft. Schlosser. The village of Niagara Falls was originally given the name Grand Niagara, which was subsequently changed to Manchester. In 1813, the British burned the original settlement. Note the location of Ft. Schlosser.

### 3.7 The Hamlet of Niagara Falls

The events of the War of 1812 disrupted, and ultimately destroyed Porter's nascent industrial village. In 1813, the British burned the Village of Manchester, destroying almost all of its structures. Peter B. Porter became a general in the United States Army during the war, and was in charge of commanding the American forces in the region. The war ended with the signing of the Treaty of Ghent in 1814. A provision of the treaty was the definition of a border between the United States and England. This border was surveyed by Peter B. Porter and Anthony Barcklay in 1819.<sup>32</sup> Several veterans of the War of 1812 were buried in Oakwood Cemetery,<sup>33</sup> which is still in use today.

After the War of 1812, Porter rebuilt the gristmill and sawmill across from the end of Goat Island. By the end of 1816, the store established by Judge Deveaux had been rebuilt and James Field had reopened his tavern. That same year, Augustus Porter purchased Goat Island to preserve it from future industrial development.<sup>34</sup> This purchase laid the foundation for the tourist industry at the Falls. The Falls became part of the American Grand Tour, which included excursions to mineral springs, natural wonders and mountainous scenery that appealed to those in search of

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p.16.

<sup>33</sup> Oakwood Cemetery is located on the east side of Portage Road, north of Pine Avenue.

<sup>34</sup> William Pool, *Landmarks of Niagara County, New York* (Syracuse, NY: D. Mason Company, 1897), p.179-192.

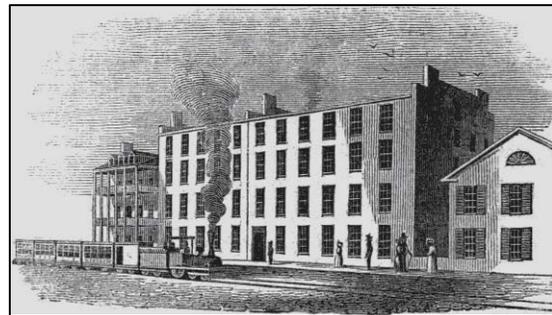
health, relaxation, new knowledge, thrills and adventure. Today, the original village is part of the New York State Reservation.

The opening of the Erie Canal in 1825 reduced the prominence of the portage road as a trade route, but intensified the popularity of the Falls as a tourist attraction. Before the construction of the canal, the Falls was remote and difficult to travel to. A trip from Albany required nine uncomfortable days by wagon on unimproved roads. The canal allowed for a comfortable journey by horse-drawn boat that terminated at the City of Buffalo, from which travelers could reach the Falls via a ferry down the Niagara River. A luxury reserved for members of the upper classes of society, affordable travel would not be available to the masses until a generation later with the establishment of the railroad network.

General Parkhurst Whitney, one of the more prominent initial settlers of Niagara Falls, moved to the small hamlet in 1810 and he is best known as the founder of both the Eagle Hotel (or Tavern) and the Cataract House.<sup>35</sup> These two early hotels established the beginning of the first-class hotel industry in Niagara Falls. General Whitney opened the Eagle Tavern in a log cabin when he returned to the Falls after the War of 1812. To meet the demand of his flourishing business he constructed a large frame house known as the Old Eagle on Main Street, which stood a few feet from the Buffalo & Niagara Falls Railroad (Figure 3-10). A large gilded eagle presided over the tavern entrance. The new space soon proved inadequate to accommodate the overflow of guests so Whitney purchased a building on the corner of Main and Riverway, which became the famous Cataract House (Figure 3-11). Whitney operated both establishments for a while until he decided to sell the Eagle and focus his interests on the Cataract House.



**Figure 3-10.** Eagle Hotel (Tavern)



**Figure 3-11.** Cataract House began operation in 1825.

In 1835 Benjamin Rathburn, the new proprietor of the Eagle, added a four story brick addition. The Eagle eventually became the International hotel. The Cataract House was one of the best known and longest operating hotels at the Falls. The hotel's list of some its esteemed guests include Abraham Lincoln, Grover Cleveland, and Franklin D. Roosevelt. After 120 years of operation, the Cataract House burned in 1945. An 1844 map of the village of Niagara Falls documented the locations of hotels and other prominent establishments in the area centered on the Falls (Figure 3-11).

<sup>35</sup> Theodora Vinal, *Niagara Portage From Past to Present* (Buffalo: Henry Smith, Publishers, 1955), p.40.

### 3.8 Early to Mid-nineteenth Century Tourist Industry at Niagara Falls

“NIAGARA FALLS is a most enjoyable place of resort. The hotels are excellent, and the prices not at all exorbitant.”

- Mark Twain<sup>36</sup>

Beginning in the early nineteenth century, images of the Falls and accounts by famous visitors permeated popular culture of the United States. Niagara Falls became a fashionable and desirable tourist destination after the completion of the Erie Canal in 1825. Early tourism in the Falls spawned the first service industry economy in the United States, which in the case of Niagara Falls initially catered to visitors from the upper classes of America. Images of the Falls were conveyed in many forms such as lithographs and other reproductions, as the subject of plays and novels, and from celebrity tourists. A host of visitors that included literary luminaries, as well as less famous travel writers, poets and diarists published their impressions of Niagara Falls. Descriptive writings of the great cataract appeared in countless guidebooks and gift books of the period. In response to increased tourism generated by the railroad and popular image, commercial development occurred in the immediate vicinity of the Falls. Grand hotels with tiered wraparound balconies were constructed on both sides of the Falls. In the 1840s, Niagara Falls hosted some 40,000 visitors per year (Figure 3-12). The Falls became especially popular for the Southern United States aristocracy who came north to escape summer heat. Atlantic steamship service also enabled access for Europeans to visit the Falls.

By the mid-nineteenth century, with the establishment of railroad access to the Falls, the great cataract became more accessible to a larger demographic. By the end of the Civil War, the Falls had lost its upper-class aura and no longer remained a destination of the Grand Northern tour.<sup>37</sup> From 1830 to 1860, the tourist-service industry supported the city's economy with establishment of hotels, curiosity shops, taverns and other side-show attractions. Though the Falls became less fashionable with society elite, it attracted even more visitors in the late nineteenth century.

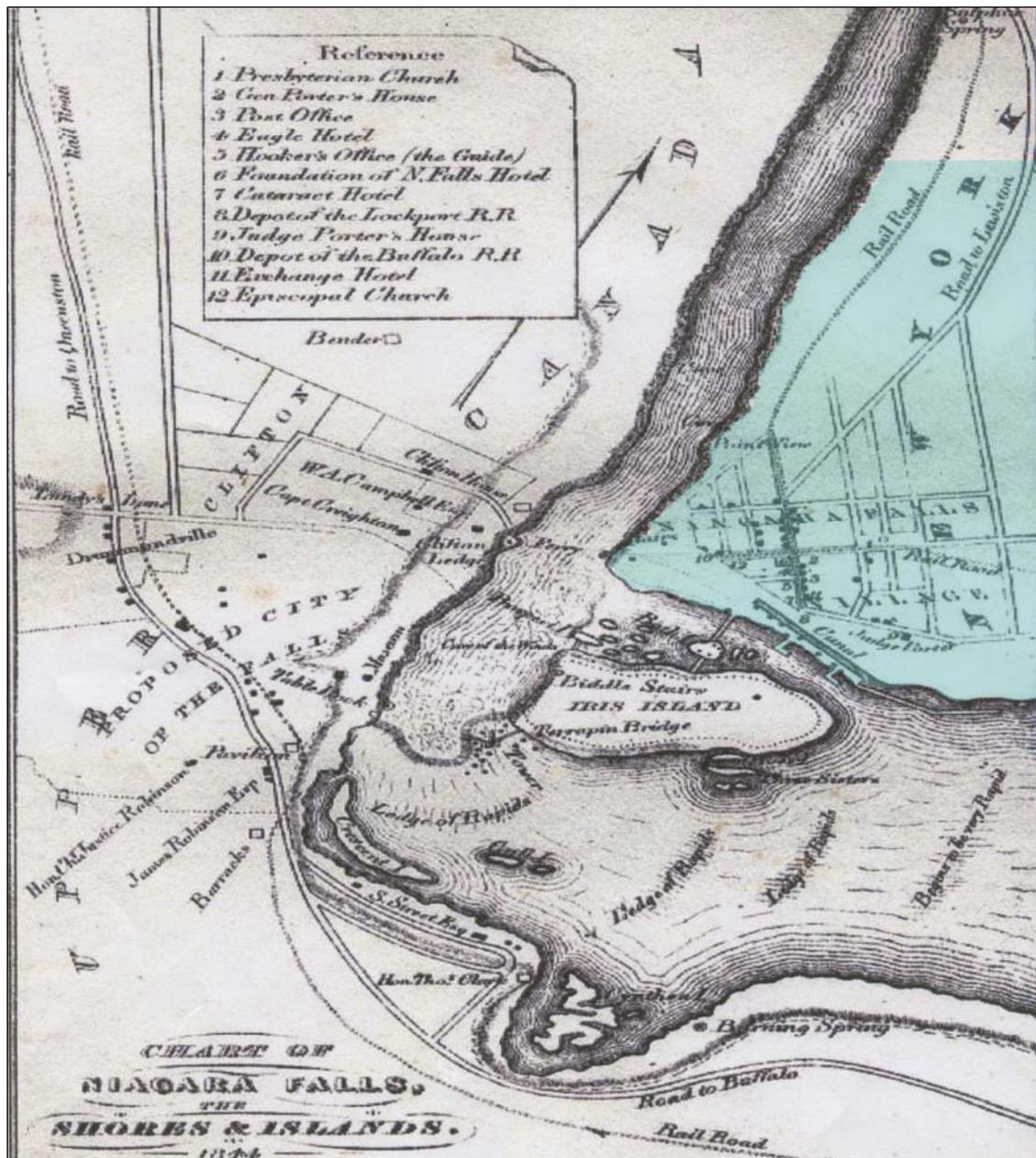
Historically, the Falls itself has been the attraction with entrepreneurs capitalizing on the natural wonder by offering visitors different methods to experience the natural wonder. Beginning with the city's nascent tourist industry, entrepreneurs also created a supplemental tourist-related recreation industry that offered diversions such as entertainment, museums, and parks. Buildings to support these endeavors were constructed in the area abutting the Falls. These tourist-related businesses quickly transformed the small village appearance of Niagara Falls. During the nineteenth century, myriad viewing towers, souvenir shops, photographer booths, “twopenny-halfpenny” museums, pagodas, tea-gardens and other such curiosities were constructed near the brink of the Falls. When the New York State Reservation acquired the land around the Falls, these establishments were removed. Tourist-related business had to relocate to the downtown business district.

The Falls also hosted the bold feats of daredevils who wished to conquer the Falls by either riding over it in a barrel, or such vessel, or by tight walk roping above the gorge. Staged spectacles were considered major events, which attracted hoards of visitors to both sides of the Falls. The greatest nineteenth century tightrope walker, Jean Francois Gravelet – alias Charles Blondin (1824–1897) of France, made the earliest crossing of the Niagara Falls on a hemp rope

<sup>36</sup> “Niagara” from “Sketches New and Old”, Copyright 1903, Samuel Clemens.

<sup>37</sup> Karen Dubinsky. *The Second Greatest Disappointment Honeymooning and Tourism at Niagara Falls* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1999) p. 41.

335 m (1,100 ft) long and 47.75 m (160 ft) above the Falls on June 30, 1859. He later received world acclaim for cooking and eating an omelette (complete with stove and neatly set table) on a high wire stretched over Niagara Falls. The Falls has a long history of daredevils. In 1901, Annie Edson Taylor, a school teacher, became the first person to go over Horseshoe Falls in a barrel and survive. Taylor, along with a few other daredevils, capitalized on their celebrity by becoming part of the local attraction scene. Incidentally, a section of Oakwood Cemetery known as “Stranger Rest” contains the graves of local legends and daredevils.



**Figure 3-12.** Niagara Falls 1844: “Chart of Niagara Falls the Shores and Islands 1844” from *The Picturesque Tourist: Being a Guide Through Northern and Eastern States* edited by Orville L. Holley, 1844. The shaded area represents the boundaries of the Downtown neighborhood. At that time, Goat Island was called Iris Island.

One example of a recreational for-profit park was “White’s Pleasure Grounds,” which occupied a spot on the upper bank of the Niagara River. Berry Hill White, an early pioneer of Niagara City and one of the first to enter the Cave of the Winds, owned the park. White’s park occupied a wide area between the railroad tracks and the river, where the bank curves out into the gorge. The exact location of this curve varies on older maps, however, it appears to have been roughly centered at the end of Cedar Avenue<sup>38</sup> The Pleasure Grounds opened in 1855 with “...wooden structures with comfortable seats from which a very fine view of the Falls and Suspension Bridge is obtained.”<sup>39</sup> In 1859, noted funambulist “Blondin the Great” made his initial crossing over the Niagara Gorge on a tightrope anchored at the Pleasure Grounds. White attempted to sell the 2.5-acre park property in April of 1882, along with the adjoining 2¼-acres on the east side of the tracks, known as the Catlin Place. In the late nineteenth century, an Italian Palace was built on the site of the former Pleasure Grounds.<sup>40</sup> A switchyard and car barn for the Great Gorge Route later occupied the “White’s Pleasure Grounds.”

After the Civil War, the natural hydraulic power potential of the cataract became the focus of general industrial development. The Falls now hosted a combination of service and manufacturing industries. Background research of Niagara Falls city directories conducted for archaeological investigations in the area just north of the Falls, surrounding the current Rainbow Bridge Toll Plaza, have revealed the gradual transformation of hotels and boarding houses from seasonal visitors to more semi-permanent boarding residents with predominantly middle class occupations.<sup>41</sup> There was an increase of non-familial boarding, with a shift from professional to “middling” class boarders, such as a surgeon, custom officer, miller and butcher to occupations reflecting blue collar and emerging clerical working classes, including laborers, clerks and stenographers.<sup>42</sup> A majority of residents in this section of the village were engaged in service-related industry as servants, cooks, and hotel clerks.<sup>43</sup> Wurst and Hohman’s findings also demonstrated the diversity of residents in race, class and gender in this section of Niagara Falls during the nineteenth century.<sup>44</sup> The establishment of the manufacturing industry between 1880 and 1900, contributed to a shift from middle-class occupants to unskilled working class boarders. Wurst and Hohman noted by 1900, day laborers and masons typically occupied boarding houses near the Falls.<sup>45</sup>

### 3.9 Hydropower and Porter’s Hydraulic Canal

Initial prosperity of Niagara Falls resulted from the large number of people engaged in the construction of the Erie Canal who settled in the area. This prosperity continued with the immense facilities the canal offered for communication and transportation of goods to markets. The 1836 Parsons map of Niagara Falls documented the early road network of the emergent village. By the 1850s, the Erie Canal had lost much of its passenger business due to the influence of the railroad, and became reliant on freight transport. Freight tonnage reached its peak in 1880. However, increasing problems with traffic on the canal along with neglect of its maintenance led to its decline in the early twentieth century.

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<sup>38</sup> Hoeman and Hartner, 17.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Lou Ann Wurst and Christopher D. Hohman. *Stage 2 Assessment of Research Potential Rainbow Plaza Renovation Project, City of Niagara Falls, Niagara County, NY (89PR1219)*. (Public Archaeology Facility Report, Department of Anthropology SUNY Binghamton, September 14, 1994), p. 11.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

At the same time, the Porter brothers endeavored to promote the development of the Falls into an industrial center. The Porters issued an “Invitation to Eastern Capitalists and Manufacturers” to solicit capital to develop for industrial use the power provided by the upper river, though to no avail as the call did not generate outside interest. In 1847 the Porters tried to interest capitalists for the construction of a hydraulic canal by proposing to donate land along the canal to any person who would fund the construction of the canal.

Interest in the proposed canal remained stagnant until 1852, two years after the death of Augustus Porter, when Cale S. Woodhull of New York and Walter Bryant and associates of Boston entered a contract with Porter’s heirs.<sup>46</sup> The Woodhull Project of 1852-1853 required the acquisition of lands necessary for the intake to the canal on the upper river, the canal and terminal basin. In 1853, the enterprise became incorporated under the title of Niagara Falls Hydraulic Company. Stephen M. Allen, an engineer from Boston and friend of the Porter family, commenced with excavations for the canal.

Construction of the Hydraulic Canal began on May 1, 1853. The Niagara Falls Hydraulic Company designed canal 70-feet in width and 10-feet in depth, which entered upon the Niagara River about a half of a mile above the rapids (Figure 3-13). Extending 4,500-feet to a point on the bluff, about a quarter of a mile below the falls, the canal led to its terminus in a basin from which the waters discharged over a perpendicular bank about 210-feet high.<sup>47</sup> Excavations continued for approximately 16 months when operations were halted due to insufficient funds. The company was unsuccessful because the construction costs grossly exceeded their original estimates. In 1856, the name of the company changed to Niagara Falls Power Company, more commonly referred to as the “Day Company,” after the vice-president Horace H. Day.<sup>48</sup> A map of the Villages of Niagara Falls and Niagara City from 1856 documented the canal’s finalized plan. The entrance and river portions of the canal were completed in 1857, three years prior to Day’s takeover. On July 4, 1857, water first passed through the canal. The celebration included three steamers in procession entering Port Day, the mouth of the canal. Over the next 17 years, Day’s company carried out intermittent excavations of the canal with the reported completion of a one mile cut through limestone with a capacity of about 27,00 horse-power. Blasting limestone for the canal proved to be the largest construction expense. Increasing construction costs coupled with a lack of capital led to the company’s foreclosure, and its entire property was sold at auction on May 1 1877, for \$71,000 dollars to Jakob F. Schoellkopf, and associates of Buffalo. His company acquired the inlet from the Niagara River, the unfinished canal with its riparian-rights and approximately 45-acres of land on the cliff.<sup>49</sup>

### 3.10 Development of the Railroad Infrastructure

Introduction of the railroad enabled the expansion of the Niagara Frontier, by providing an additional and more efficient mode of transportation for crops, industrial material and people. Members of New York State Legislature initially were reluctant to build railroads that would compete with the Erie Canal. As a result, the first railroad in New York, the Mohawk & Hudson, served as an adjunct to the canal.<sup>50</sup> Additional railroads emerged in New York during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. While there were rails coming into Buffalo, no lines

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<sup>46</sup> Adams, p. 69.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p.75.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>50</sup> Edward T. Dun, *A History of Railroads in Western New York* (Buffalo: Canisius College Press, 2000), p. 3.

connected Buffalo to Niagara Falls until 1836 when the Black Rock line was extended north.<sup>51</sup> Constructed by Buffalo and Niagara Falls Rail Road, which had been incorporated in 1834, the line had a regular schedule of trains operating between Buffalo and Niagara Falls by November 5<sup>th</sup> 1836.<sup>52</sup>

As early as 1833, Asher Torrance and Governor Washington Hunt decided to create the Lockport and Niagara Falls Railroad (L&NF). Organized in 1834, the line provided a short connection between Niagara Falls and the Erie Canal for visitors to the Falls.<sup>53</sup> Workman of Canadian, Scotch and Irish descent finished construction of the rail line in 1837.<sup>54</sup> The Lockport line ran through Pekin and the Tuscarora Indian Reservation on its way to the Falls where it terminated at a station on the corner of Falls and Prospect streets. Known as the “strap”, the railroad track consisted of oak mudsills laid lengthwise on the road. The ties rested across them, and upon the ties, there were four-by-six inch oak timbers that had spiked bands or straps of iron. In 1841, the legislature authorized L&NF to increase its capitalization in order to finance an extension to Rochester. The company’s efforts were not successful and, in 1850, the legislature ordered L&NF to sell its property and franchise. A reorganized company, the Rochester, Lockport and Niagara Falls Railroad (RL&NF) formed.<sup>55</sup> At that time, the L&NF tracks were abandoned and removed. The new road and other lines running through central and western New York were consolidated to form the New York Central Railroad (NYC RR).

In 1852, the Niagara Falls & Lake Ontario Railroad incorporated to build a line from Niagara Falls to Youngstown.<sup>56</sup> The line was remarkable for the significant amount of rock cutting required in its construction, and for its unique position partly located on a narrow shelf in the cliff that towers above the rapid waters of the Niagara between the Devil’s Hole and Lewiston. The railroad routed a train over the line to Youngstown in 1855, and shortly after, the company abandoned the northernmost section of the line. Lewiston became the terminal where connections were made with Toronto-bound lake steamers. After the work on the railway suspended, the constructed portion of the road was leased by New York Central Railroad.

Railroads commonly entered into merges and changed names. In 1854 the New York Central acquired the Buffalo and Niagara Falls Rail Road.<sup>57</sup> Contemporaneous with NYC Railroad, the Canandaigua and Niagara Falls Railroad opened to the Falls in 1853 and to Suspension Bridge in 1854. Three years later James Brown and other parties purchased the line and changed the name to Niagara Bridge and Canandaigua Railroad. NYC RR leased this line for 99 years.

By the 1850s, the widespread development of the railroad in New York State caused the Erie Canal to lose much of its passenger business. The canal had to rely on freight transport. Freight tonnage reached its peak in 1880. However, increasing problems with traffic on the canal along with neglect of its maintenance led to a decline in the early twentieth century.

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

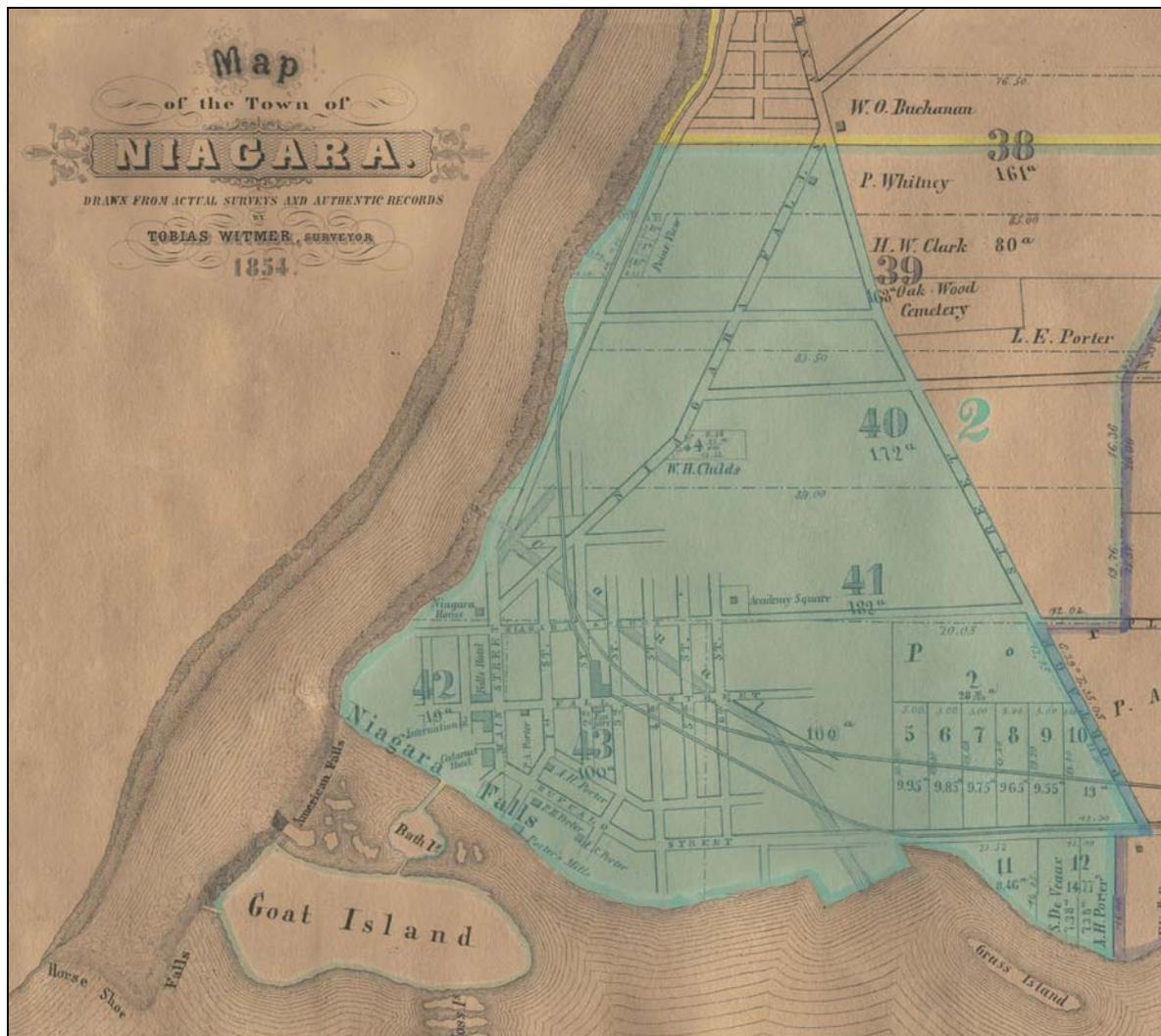
<sup>53</sup> *Buffalo Illustrated Express*, 1893, as quoted in Yates 1950: p.29.

<sup>54</sup> Dun, p. 12.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p.13.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p.14.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p.25.



**Figure 3-13.** An 1854 Map of the Town of Niagara showing the path of the Hydraulic Canal. Note the canal and railroad lines bisect the village. (Tobias Witmer, 1854).

Railroad construction continued to thrive into the late nineteenth century. In the spring of 1870, the Lake Ontario Railroad Company was organized. Because of slow construction and mounting costs, the line dissolved in 1874 and was taken over by the Rome Watertown and Ogdensburg Company. The new company completed the work within two years and soon after extended the line into the village of Suspension Bridge. Ultimately, NYC RR would also lease this line. In 1876, the Lockport and Buffalo Railroad Company organized and the NYC RR resisted the crossing of its track by the new line. However, the courts ruled in favor of the Lockport and Buffalo Company. Construction of the line began in the following year. This railroad later became the Erie Railroad and remained in operation until 1877. The impact of the railroad network on the village of Niagara Falls is evident in an 1875 map, which documented the path of railroad lines through the center of the village (Figure 3-14).

The end of the nineteenth century signaled the introduction of the electric railroad, which began operation in Suspension Bridge and Niagara Falls in 1892. In that year, the Niagara Falls and Suspension Bridge Street Railway Company operated a horse-car line through and between the two villages on Falls, Second, Ontario and Main streets, and Lewiston Avenue since 1882, was electrified. Some of the first electric trolley cars in the country were operated over the route between the two villages.

A major development in the transportation history of the nineteenth century occurred in 1894 with the establishment of the Niagara Falls, Whirlpool and Northern Railroad, which had almost twelve miles of track extending from the city line to Devil's Hole in the Town of Lewiston. This marked the beginning of the great International Railway System that operated all of the electric cars on the immediate Niagara Frontier, except the Niagara Gorge Railway and the Niagara, St Catharine's and Toronto line. Later, the International Traction Company formed a trolley merger that included all of the electric railroads in Buffalo, the Tonawandas, Niagara Falls and Lockport, together with a line to Olcott Beach and the Niagara Falls Park and River Railway. In 1902, the International Railway Company organized as the successor of about 25 street railway (of the electric system) and bridge companies. With its line from Buffalo to Niagara Falls, and its belt line around the Gorge, the company offered one of the most beautiful trips in the world.

In 1886, the Niagara Falls and Whirlpool Company attempted to construct another railroad within the Niagara gorge, though on a less ambitious scale. The company proposed to build a railroad commencing at a point near the foot of the inclined railway which extends from Prospect Park to near the easterly margin of Niagara River, such point of beginning being a short distance below the foot of the American Falls on the American side of the Niagara River, and running thence, by the most direct and feasible route, along the easterly margin and near the water's edge of said Niagara River, about 400-ft below and northerly from the foot or outlet of the portion of the Niagara River commonly known as the Whirlpool. However, when the company went to condemn the property, it was forced into court because the proposed route did not connect with a highway on either end of the railway, and therefore was considered not for public use. To avoid the legal obstacle that the original company encountered, Captain John M. Brinker organized the Niagara Falls and Lewiston Railroad Company, which would connect with a highway in Niagara Falls and Lewiston. The name of the company later changed to the Niagara Gorge Railway Company. It was a tremendous feat to build the Gorge road. A gradual descent from the City of Niagara Falls into the Gorge had to be excavated through rock, and rock excavation was necessary at many points along the route in order to lay the double tracks at or near the foot of the cliffs along the river. The company finally succeeded and its operation began in 1895, at a cost of over \$800,000.<sup>58</sup>

By the 1890s, Niagara Falls stood out as a popular tourist destination with an unprecedented amount of rail service due to both its location and bridges allowing travel across the Niagara Gorge. Construction of new railroad lines continued in the last decade of the nineteenth century. In 1899, Captain J.M. Brinker purchased the Niagara Falls and Whirlpool Company, an organization that had attempted to create a scenic steam railway along the gorge, but failed when they were not given a right-of-way. Brinker succeeded in securing right-of-way for the road bed, and the electrified Great Gorge Route. The railroad's maiden trip embarked on July 18, 1895.<sup>59</sup> The Great Gorge route began at the Tower Hotel and extended to Spruce Street, where it descended through a cut underneath the NYC RR and commenced along the side of

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<sup>58</sup> E.T. Williams, 1921.

<sup>59</sup> William Irwin. *The New Niagara: Tourism, Technology, and the Landscape of Niagara Falls 1776-1917*. (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), p. 55.

the Gorge. The Great Gorge Route was not a success at first, and Brinker and his partner sold the company in 1898, with it becoming the property of the Niagara Falls and Lewiston Rail Road in May of 1899. Renamed the Niagara Gorge Railway, the line ran from May 1<sup>st</sup> to March 1<sup>st</sup> annually. Operation in March and April proved too risky, as these months were prone to frequent rockslides caused by spring thaw.

The complex network of railroads in the Niagara Frontier also contributed to the economic prosperity of the region, which was also tied to the agricultural success of its farmers. By 1845, Niagara County was one of the leading wheat producing counties in the nation. The establishment of the railroad infrastructure opened a broader trade network for the region. In the mid-nineteenth century there was increased demand for winter apples, which led to a rapid rise in the number of apple orchards through 1878. A number of fruits helped to transform the county into the Niagara Fruit Belt, a fruit basket for the rest of the nation. Beginning around 1900, vegetable crops for canning factories gradually began to supersede grain crops. By 1961, vegetable crops rated next to the fruit crops in regional importance.

### 3.11 Niagara Falls Neighborhood Development

The City of Niagara Falls formed its current configuration from an amalgamation of small villages. The original hamlet of Niagara Falls gradually expanded by annexing neighboring hamlets, beginning in the late nineteenth century with the incorporation of the village of Clarksville. After the official incorporation of city in 1892, at which time included the annexing of the village of Suspension Bridge, additional neighborhoods formed within the city limits. Working-class neighborhoods such as Highland and Hyde Park developed around the new industrial centers of the City. Areas between the existing villages of the city rapidly developed in the early twentieth century. The City of Niagara Falls reached its current size in 1927, when it annexed the village of LaSalle.

#### 3.11.1 Clarksville

Named for Henry Wells Clark, this small nineteenth century village occupied the area between the villages of Niagara Falls and Suspension Bridge (Figure 3-14), and included the northern section of the Downtown neighborhood. Clark, along with a handful of farmers, resided in this rural area that centered on the current Main Street. Clark arrived in Niagara Falls (then Manchester) in 1823 area and planted the roots for the hamlet on land north of Pine Avenue, up to the present-day area of Chilton Avenue and Orchard Parkway with its western boundary at the river and eastern boundary between 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> streets. Orin Dunlop cites a much smaller area that included the streets presently named Ashland and Elmwood avenues.<sup>60</sup> The Childs farm with its farmhouse stood at the site of the present Main Post Office, on the corner of Main Street and Pine Avenue. Though according to Dunlap, Clark's homestead stood at the corner of Elm and Main streets.<sup>61</sup> The other house in the early period of the hamlet was the old Walker house that once stood on the east side of Main near Elmwood Avenue.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Tom Yots. "History Takes Visitors Down Unique Road." *Niagara Gazette*. (October 18, 2003).

<sup>61</sup> Orrin E. Dunlap. *The Romance of Niagara Bridges, 1899*.

<sup>62</sup> Urban Design Group. *Historical Inventory of Niagara Falls, New York*. (Buffalo: Urban Design Group SUNY at Buffalo, 1991), 32.

He became a prominent citizen and served three terms as supervisor of the Town of Niagara between 1827 and 1861. Clark was president of the village of Niagara Falls in the early 1860s. Originally engaged in paper manufacturing, Clark helped build and run two different paper mills in the area. In 1850, he and a partner operated a sawmill in Lasalle. As early as the late 1830s, he began working for the Buffalo and Niagara Falls Rail Road and was the Niagara Falls agent for almost forty years.

In the period after the Civil War, the rural landscape of Clarksville changed from rustic simplicity of small farms to grand estates. In the 1870s, residential development increased along the road connecting the village of Niagara Falls and Clarksville. The Village of Niagara Falls annexed the Hamlet of Clarksville in 1887, which extended the boundaries of the Village almost to Suspension Bridge. In 1895, the Niagara Falls Armory, a significant defensive building, was constructed by the government next to the Walker property. In the same year, just north of Clarksville on the former Trott farm, Chilton Avenue was constructed as the first paved street in Niagara Falls.<sup>63</sup>

### **3.11.2 Suspension Bridge**

The village of Suspension Bridge was originally part of the Village of Bellevue, which in 1854 was incorporated as Niagara City. Following the construction of Suspension Bridge and the rapid advancement of the place as a railroad center, it was known as Suspension Bridge. In 1892, the village became part of the City of Niagara Falls. Suspension Bridge is situated above the Niagara River, two miles below the falls. Colonel John Fisk of Rochester, General Charles B. Stuart of Schenectady, J.V. Vedder of Geneva, and Rosnell G. Benedict of Saratoga, in 1815 formed the Bellevue Land Company, which purchased much of the land and had much to do with the future development of the village. In 1845, the farmhouses of E.P. Graves and Orson Childs were the only buildings in the village. The Childs residence was demolished in 1920 to make way for a large theater erected by the Bellevue Theater Company.

The land included in the village was owned in three parts by Messrs. Graves and Childs, and an Englishman named Williamson. The latter held the central portion that embraced the landing point of Suspension Bridge. The only other structure in the village at that time was the sulphur spring along the river north of the bridge. The spring was a popular resort and formed an object of interest to visitors from abroad. The vein which supplied the spring was cut off from its course at that time the anchor plates of the first suspension bridge were being put down and the area lost this tourist attraction.

Colonel John Fisk of Rochester, General Charles B. Stuart of Schenectady, J.V. Vedder of Geneva, and Rosnell G. Benedict of Saratoga, in 1815 formed the Bellevue Land Company, which purchased much of the land and had much to do with the future development of the village. Its first work, in 1846, was the construction of a narrow, through safe, road down the river bank. This became known as the Maid of the Mist roadway, and it stretched from the top of the bank near the end of the bridges and Ontario Avenue down to the bank to the water's edge at an eddy. That year, the first Maid of the Mist steamer was built (1921). The road and "Maid of the Mist" craft was originally built for the accommodation of pleasure parties and uses as a means of ferriage across the river at that point. However, in 1861 strong opposition from other parties, resulted in a change of regulations detrimental to the success of the venture. Mr. W.O. Buchanan, who owned the "Maid of the Mist," at that time, decided to sell the vessel in 1861. The craft was sold to a party at the mouth of the river, and several men (Joel Robinson,

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

James McIntyre, and James H. Jones) navigated the craft through the Whirlpool Rapids and delivered the boat to the buyer.

Suspension Bridge was one of the most important ports of entry in New York in the mid-nineteenth century. Under the supervision of a collector and a deputy collector, the large business of the port and its many dependent offices along the frontier was carried on by a large number of officials. The port of entry was removed to Suspension Bridge from Lewiston in 1863 (Wiley and Garner, 1892). Located on a site first determined by a narrow section of the Niagara River over which two railroad bridges were built in 1863, linking Niagara Falls to Canada, the United States Custom House now stands in the shadow of the elevated Robert Moses Parkway (Figure 3-15). The two-and-one-half story stone building is built into a railroad embankment with its north and west facades having frontages at street level. Through the nineteenth century, the business connected with the collection of customs at Suspension Bridge, formed a significant portion of its commercial activity. At one point, NYC operated a freight yard with forty miles of track that could handle 2,000 cars a day.<sup>64</sup>



**Figure 3-15.** U.S. Custom House (1863)

As of the 1870s, Suspension Bridge was a thriving place of business and industry. The village was one of the best-known railroad points in the East. It was the scene of bustling activity in all the departments of the railroad including express, freight and telegraph interests. The business transacted at cattle yards was immense beginning in 1860, when the cattle yard was established, until the 1870s, when a cattle yard and an international bridge were established in Buffalo. The following railways passed through the village in 1978, all except the Erie using the depot belonging to the Central company: Erie railway; New York Central and Hudson River Railroad; Rome, Watertown, and Ogdensburg Railroad; Great Western Railroad; and Canada Southern Railroad.

The international bridge and the railway connections led to a rapid growth of the village, which included a number of hotels. At least ten to twelve hotels were built between 1850 and 1897.<sup>65</sup> The first hotel in the village was the New York Central, which was located west of Atwood's Western Hotel, which was built later. The New York Central Hotel burned in the 1870s. Afterwards, J. Felix Nassoiy built another New York Central Hotel east of Atwood's Western Hotel. The New York Central and Atwood's Western Hotels were both located on the north side

<sup>64</sup> Dun, p.218.

<sup>65</sup> Pool, n.p.

of Depot Street, just north of the project area. The construction of the Mount Eagle Hotel, a stone structure that was located approximately one mile north of the project area, was famous for its luxurious accommodations for tourists. The hotel was constructed from 1848 to 1855. In 1921, it was used as cold storage for an ice manufacturing plant.<sup>66</sup>

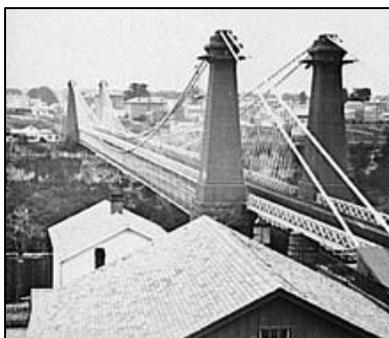
The massive undertaking of cutting through the stone riverbank for the construction of Niagara Falls and Lewiston Railroad required significant labor support. German and Irish laborers settled in the area known as the North End, where they remained for a century. The German settlers populated the Southern portion of the Village Suspension Bridge, which hosted the “German Hotel” on the corner of present-day Main and Pierce streets. The Irish settled in the northern limits of the village. Stable residential blocks fanned out east and west of Lewiston Avenue, providing a population base to support a commercial district.

As the northern village experienced commercial and residential growth, the Village of Niagara Falls to the south experienced increasing development stimulated by increased tourism. The expansive railroad network provided easier access to the Falls. Although there was not a bridge crossing the river in this location until 1869, visitors from all over the world visited the cataract. The post-Civil War period marked an increase in service related business such as hotels, restaurants, and taverns, including the General Parkhurst Whitney’s famous Eagle Tavern.

Due to the Village of Suspension being a great railroad center and the Village of Niagara Falls containing a number of mills, and being visited by a number of tourists, Suspension Bridge became part of the City of Niagara Falls in 1892. These common interests brought people of the two villages into close business and social relationship, which provided for a successful consolidation.

### 3.11.3 Bridge History at Suspension Bridge

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the village of Suspension Bridge was best known for its engineering accomplishments, which included Suspension Bridge and the Cantilever Bridge. The International Suspension Bridge Company organized in 1847. The following year, the company built the first suspension bridge over the chasm under the supervision of Mr. Charles Ellet. The immense undertaking began when Mr. Ellet offered a prize of \$500 dollars for the first person to get a string across the chasm. Before long, a youth with a kite managed to get a string across and there after larger and larger cables were passed over until a bridge could be built. The original structure had four massive wooden towers, two on either bank, some eight feet high in height. The wagon bridge measured eight feet and carried both carriages and pedestrians. The Carriage Suspension Bridge of 1848 was replaced by the Railroad Suspension Bridge in 1855, opening the village up as a center of commerce.



**Figure 3-16.** J.A. Roebling’s Suspension

The first bridge served as an excellent auxiliary to the construction of the Railroad Suspension Bridge (Figure 3-16). Located two miles below the Falls, the railroad bridge was 800-ft long and spanned 230-ft above its waters, one of the most turbulent streams in the world, whose current flows at the rate of close to 30 miles per hour. The bridge had two distinct roadways, the one above for trains, and the lower deck for

<sup>66</sup> E.T. Williams, 1921.

carriages and foot passengers. Massive stone towers replaced the wooden towers of the first bridge. The masonry towers were replaced by iron towers about 20 years after the bridge's completion. It was constructed under the superintendence of J.A. Roebling, famous for the Brooklyn Bridge, and finished in 1858. Nine thousand miles of wire were employed in the four cables that made up the bridge. The Great Western Railway, the predecessor of the Grand Trunk Railway, principally used the railway. It was regarded as a great triumph of engineering skill. In 1897, the current bridge, a steel two-hinged spandrel-braced arch bridge replaced Suspension Bridge. The earlier bridge became obsolete because of increasing railroad loads. Leffert Buck, who had previously overseen the reconstruction of Roebling's bridge in 1877, designed the current bridge. Buck pioneered the use of steel arch bridge structures in the United States. At the Suspension Bridge, he again employed unique methods that allowed the new spandrel braced arch structure to extend over 804 feet (245m) over the Niagara River. The new span was constructed on the same centerline as the old suspension bridge.

Following the organization of the Niagara River Bridge Company in 1883, the Cantilever Bridge was completed. This was considered another engineering feat. The bridge was located a few hundred feet up the river from the steel arch bridge, formerly the railway suspension bridge. Three thousand tons of iron and steel were employed in its construction. Its total length was 910-ft and the clear span across the river was 494 feet, 9 inches.<sup>67</sup> The bridge was used by the Michigan Central Railroad Company, which was later part of the system of the New York Central lines, with which it connected. C.C. Schneider, chief engineer in charge and Edward Hayes, engineer of the Central Bridge Works designed the bridge. The structure consisted of two immense steel towers, 139.5-ft high. Each tower supported a cantilever measuring 595.5-ft long. The shore ends of the cantilevers are anchored to the abutment masonry or anchorage piers, and both river arms were connected by an intermediate span of 120 feet, which was suspended from the extreme ends of the river arms. In 1925, this bridge<sup>68</sup> was replaced by a current steel arch bridge (Figure 3-17).



**Figure 3-17.** The Michigan Central Railway Bridge (1925) in the foreground is presently owned by the Canadian Pacific Railway.

<sup>67</sup> Samuel Wiley and W. Scott Garner. *Biographical and Portrait Cyclopaedia of Niagara County, NY*. (Philadelphia: Gresham Publishing Co, 1892).

<sup>68</sup> The first Steel Arch Bridge (1883) was dismantled and sent to South Africa.

### 3.11.4 Deveaux Neighborhood

North of Suspension Bridge is the Deveaux neighborhood, which was named after Judge Samuel Deveaux who owned most of the land in the northernmost part of the current city limits. Judge Deveaux was one of the most important entrepreneurs and political figures in the early history of Niagara Falls. He opened the first dry goods store, was the second postmaster, a member of the school board, county judge, county supervisor and state legislator.<sup>69</sup> In 1839, Deveaux authored a guide book of Niagara Falls. In the early period of the village of Niagara Falls, his store was a center for trade. Deveaux's original farmhouse still exists on Lewiston-Main Road. Lewiston Road not only connects the northern towns to Niagara Falls, but prior to the development of railroads and canals, it served as the overland portage route for goods and people moving between Lake Ontario and Lake Erie. In the the second half of the nineteenth century, this section of the city remained sparsely populated and rural.

The primary nineteenth century institution in Deveaux is the "Deveaux Campus," which was established through a bequest of Judge Deveaux in 1856. The bequeth was to be used for the purpose of establishing, founding and maintaining a benevolent institution under the care of the Protestant Episcopal Church. The school was to be used for poor and orphaned boys. Schoelkopf Hall, Vogt House, Deveaux Farmhouse, and Monteagle House are some of the more significant historic buildings. Schoelkopf Hall is one of the few original remaining structures and is National Register Elligible (Figure 3-18). Deveaux Woods State Park was created in 1998 when New York State purchased the 51-acre site from Niagara University, making it the 159<sup>th</sup> State Park.



**Figure 3-18.** Schoelkopf Hall, Deveaux Woods State Park.

### 3.12 Incorporation of the City of Niagara Falls

On July 6, 1848, during the period between the Porter's call to potential investors and the beginning of the construction of the canal, the village of Niagara Falls was incorporated. At the time of its incorporation, the village probably contained less than 2,000 people.<sup>70</sup> The village limits reached to Pierce Avenue, and the area to the north was located in the hamlet of Suspension Bridge. In the second half of the nineteenth century the two villages were centers of a bustling trade industry. Niagara Falls had enjoyed a long history of tourist traffic, while Suspension Bridge was long before 1892 a great railroad center. Common trade interests had brought the people of the two places into close business and social relations, so it was comparatively an easy matter to adjust affairs on consolidation.<sup>71</sup> On March 17, 1892, the two villages and a portion of the Town of Niagara merged to form the incorporated City of Niagara Falls. The founding of the city on St. Patrick's Day was not coincidental; it was engineered by the prominent local Irishman Thomas V. Welch, 'Father of the Niagara Reservation.' The city initially had four wards, which by the second decade of the twentieth century had increased to

<sup>69</sup> Vinal, p. 51.

<sup>70</sup> Adams 1927, vol I. p. 74.

<sup>71</sup> "History of City to Date." *Niagara Falls Gazette* (June 15, 1912): 7.

thirteen wards. At that time, the newly formed city had a total population of 12,640 people.<sup>72</sup> Due to its late charter date, Niagara Falls is one of the latest cities to be established in New York State. Architect George W. Wright, last president of the Village of Niagara Falls, was elected the city's first mayor.

In 1892, the City of Niagara Falls was vastly different with a population of almost 12,000 people who mostly resided on the river side of Tenth Street. In the middle distance, between the two villages (once known as Clarksville), there were few houses. The old horse cars were just giving way to trolleys. The crosstown lines were beginning construction. There was no pavement and the Niagara Falls Power Company work was merely in its beginnings. At that time, the City of Niagara Falls had only three public schools and two parochial schools. There were the Cleveland Avenue School and the Sacred Heart School at the north end; Fifth Street Third Street, and Saint Mary's schools at the south end.<sup>73</sup>

### 3.12.1 Growth of Main Street

The section of the western end of current Main Street, at Rainbow Bridge, was Ontario Street. Known as the South End today, this area was called "Village of Niagara Falls" and "Manchester." The earliest commercial development in Niagara Falls occurred in the original section of the city, near the Falls. Service-related business for tourists centered on this section of the city. The village had numerous hotels and restaurants on what became "lower" Main Street. These included the Cataract House, Falls Hotel, Eagle Tavern, St. Lawrence Hotel, Niagara House. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, commercial buildings were constructed the north on Main Street in Suspension Bridge. Commercial development flourished after the establishment of the industry at the Falls.



**Figure 3-19.** Coit Block

Niagara Water Power Company owned the west side of Main Street from Niagara Street to Cedar Avenue. The company had subdivided the land for development in the early twentieth century. Main Street became the "Road to Lewiston," as it passed through the village of Clarksville. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, commercial buildings were constructed the north on Main Street in Suspension Bridge. The mid-nineteenth century streetscape of downtown Niagara Falls no longer survives; the only recognizable building remaining on Main Street from this period is the Coit Building in Suspension Bridge (Figure 3-19).

<sup>72</sup> John Theodore Horton and Edward T. Williams. *History of Northwestern New York, Volume II*. (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, Inc., 1947), 398.

<sup>73</sup> "History of City to Date." *Niagara Falls Gazette* (June 15, 1912): 7

### 3.13 The Niagara Reservation<sup>74</sup>

A National Historic Landmark, the Niagara Reservation is a 139-acre park consisting of the American Falls and the land immediately adjoining it, including Goat Island and its related smaller islands. The first state park in the United States (1885) is located at one of the acknowledged natural wonders of the world. The area comprising the Niagara Reservation is the site of important historic events from colonial through modern times.

Niagara Reservation was designed according to the recommendations of America's foremost landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmsted. In 1887 Olmsted and Vaux produced the General Plan for the Improvement of the Niagara Reservation. Immediately after the opening of the Reservation, 150 buildings were removed from the area of the city near the Falls. New York State became the first state in the country to exercise the power of eminent domain. With the face of the city stripped, a new downtown commercial district emerged. An early twentieth century commercial streetscape replaced the indiscriminate nineteenth century buildings that were constructed haphazardly to serve a prosperous tourist industry.

### 3.14 Late Nineteenth Century Industrial Development

After Jacob Schoellkopf purchased the hydraulic canal in 1877, the waterway realized its full potential. Schoellkopf's widely accepted reputation as a successful merchant and manufacturer of Buffalo fostered a sense of optimism among village residents. Within five years after the purchase of the canal, waterpower serviced seven mills, and for the first time, an electric generator was used. In 1878, Schoellkopf incorporated a new company under the name, The Niagara Falls Hydraulic Power and Manufacturing Company.<sup>75</sup> Under Schoellkopf, the canal was periodically improved and enlarged with two major widening campaigns in the early 1890s and in 1923.<sup>76</sup> Along with his partner George B. Matthews of Buffalo, Schoellkopf established a large flouring mill on the area between the canal and the top of the cliff below the falls. The success of their mill stimulated growth of manufacturing industries along the canal.

Flouring mills and wood pulp factories were the two largest industries to utilize hydropower.<sup>77</sup> In 1881, a hydro-electric generating station, located at the hydraulic canal basin, supplied electricity for commercial use for the first time.<sup>78</sup> A year earlier, Charles Bush, the inventor of the carbon arc light came to Niagara Falls to use the generated hydropower to light his lamps. The use of hydraulic power converted into electric light in 1881 was the first public distribution of electricity at Niagara Falls. However, the problem of how to transmit the power of Niagara Falls 20-miles south was not solved until Nikola Tesla's invention of alternating currents. His theories were employed and by 1896, Buffalo became the first city in the world to use alternating currents.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> For a more detailed history of the Niagara Reservation see Section 4 by Frank Kowsky.

<sup>75</sup> Adams (Vol I), p. 78.

<sup>76</sup> The W.W. Reed Collection at the Niagara Room houses Reed's photodocumentation of the 1923 widening.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, p. 76.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>79</sup> Donald Briader, *The Niagara* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972), pp. 264-268.

### 3.15 The Age of Electricity

Industrial development of Niagara Falls began in earnest when Jakob F. Schoellkopf purchased the hydraulic canal on May 1, 1877.<sup>80</sup> Schoellkopf helped develop the potential for milling along the canal. In 1878 he established a flour mill using hydropower generated from the canal. The success of the Schoellkopf's mill encouraged other businessmen to exploit the canal. The canal was used to generate hydraulic power that was converted to electric light in 1881 and was the first public distribution of electricity of Niagara Falls. The transmission of the power generated from at Niagara Falls to Buffalo, some twenty miles to the south, began in 1896, and Buffalo became the first city in the world to use alternating electrical currents via a transmission invented by Nikola Tesla.<sup>81</sup>

A milestone occurred for Schoellkopf's company in 1896 when the state of New York recognized the company's riparian rights. The act of legislature, Chapter 968 of laws of 1896, confirmed the company's rights "to take, draw, use and lease and sell to others to use the waters of Niagara River for domestic, municipal, manufacturing, fire and sanitary purposes, and to develop power there from."<sup>82</sup> The Schoellkopf Power Station remained in use, under the ownership of the Niagara Power Authority until 1956 when it was crushed by a rock slide.

The construction of the power tunnel attracted what would become two major forces in the city for the next century; the arrival of immigrants to build the tunnel and the development of industries to use the resulting power. After the German and Irish settled in the north end of the city, Italian and Polish immigrants populated the Pine Avenue and Eastside areas. The newly fueled city offered a diversity of groups, including a sizeable Jewish population, which established the spirit of the new city. Although the later immigrants did not settle directly on Main Street, and had their own business districts on Pine Avenue and East Falls streets, many of the new citizens owned or worked in establishments on the growing blocks of the city's main thoroughfares.

In 1900, Niagara Falls had a population of 19,452 inhabitants, ten years later this number increased to 30,445 people, and in 1920 the population had reached 50,760 in number. The use of Niagara Falls as a power source spurred the industrial development of Niagara Falls. The first half of the twentieth century was the age of industry in the Niagara Falls area. Inexpensive hydroelectric power attracted companies such as the Francis Manufacturing Company, who moved in 1900 from Main Street to a location on the canal, at the northeast corner of Erie Avenue and East Quay Street. An enterprising businessman, Francis diligently advertised his quality hood and eye products in newspapers and magazines. His three story-high 22,500 square feet factory housed a full line of special machinery that mass-produced standard makes as the Francis Hook and Eye and the Hump Hook and Eye.<sup>83</sup> The company also manufactured several special patented articles such as the Niagara Dress Fastener and the Francis Invisible Eye. The Niagara Dress Fastener is another example of continued invention in Niagara Falls. It was designed as a labor saving device to eliminate tedious spacing and sewing of multiple hooks and eyes.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Adams (Vol. I), p. 76.

<sup>81</sup> Braider, pp. 264-268.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> *Niagara Gazette* (Dec. 31, 1897).

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

### 3.16 Adams Power Plant: Emergence of the Industrial Landscape of Niagara Falls

The Niagara Falls Power Company was a catalyst for the development of industry in the Niagara Frontier and led the way in the history of electrical engineering in the United States and abroad. The Niagara Falls Power Company engaged the distinguished firm of McKim, Mead & White as architects for their experimental power station, which reflects the consciousness of high standards in aesthetics as well as engineering (Figure 3-20). The production of electricity at the Adams Power Plant was made possible by the diversion of the fast-flowing Niagara River water into an intake canal before it reached the falls. Floating logs, ice and debris were sifted out by an iron grating at the entrance of the canal. The diverted river water descended into the 180-ft pits underneath each of the two power stations. A series of parallel vertical penstocks passed down this wheel pit and carried the water to turbines, from the turbines the water was discharged through tunnels running under the City of Niagara Falls and returned to the river in the gorge below the falls.

The Edward Dean Adams Station Tunnel (Tail-race Tunnel) ran under the City of Niagara Falls at a depth of 100ft. The tunnel is a modified version of Thomas Evershed's original 1866 plan for power development at Niagara Falls. Evershed's grandiose plan included the construction of a 3.5-mile tunnel with twelve water inlets and 238 wheel pits. The resulting tunnel was reduced to a modest length of 6,700-feet with a single inlet and one wheel pit slot on each side of the inlet. Rodgers and Clement began construction of the 7,500-ft long, brick-lined tunnel in 1890. Considered virtually indestructible, its lining was constructed of hand burned Buffalo brick set in Portland cement. The tunnel was considered a major engineering feat for there were no known empirical formulas that could provide "...reliable results under such untried conditions" as those confronting the Cataract Construction Company.<sup>85</sup>



**Figure 3-20.** Adams Power Plant (1893-1895) on Buffalo Avenue, southwest of Portage Road. Designed by McKim, Mead & White, only Transformer House No. 3 remains today (building in center). NHL.

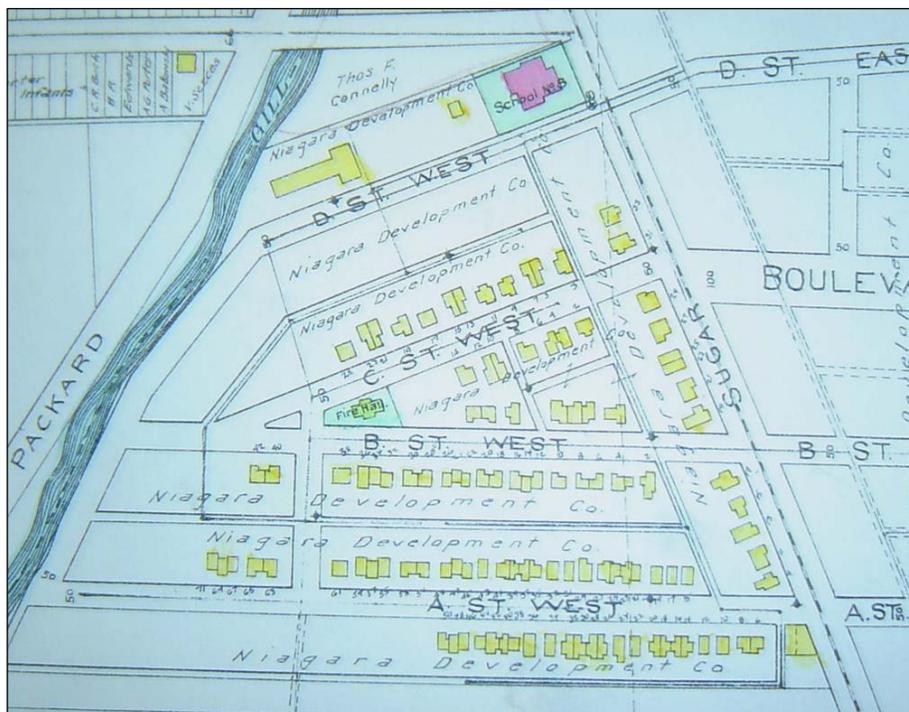
### 3.17 Echota and the Niagara Falls Power Company

In the late nineteenth century, Niagara Falls Power Company also secured a large 368-acres tract of land in the southern central section of Niagara Falls, New York for residential development. In 1893 Stanford White of McKim, Mead, & White, designed a utopian model city for the Niagara Falls Power Company. Named Echota after the Cherokee word meaning shelter or a place of refuge, the model city was constructed on 84-acres of reclaimed swamp land. The Niagara Falls Development Company, a subsidiary of Niagara Falls Power Company, built 67 dwellings that could accommodate 112 families. Completed in 1895, Echota was located along the banks of Gill Creek in the southern central section of Niagara Falls, New York (Figure 3-21).

<sup>85</sup> Adams (Vol. II), p. 9.

The streets were named from "A" Street through to "G" Street. The Echota subdivision is today located just west of the intersection of Buffalo Avenue and Hyde Park Boulevard (formerly Sugar Street) just north of the Niagara River. The western boundary is Packard Road.

A number of the original houses in the several block area still stand. The workers' houses of Echota were executed in a modest, scaled-down version of the Shingle style, a popular style of the period. The exterior walls of the homes were sheathed with cedar shingles. Most of the homes were constructed as two-family dwellings. Typically, the two-family house featured double front gambrels with a common central porch. Though much of the original Echota streetscape has changed, there are remaining character defining features of the neighborhood that include dense canopies of trees, landscaping, granite curbs and uninterrupted rows of homes that still convey Stanford White's residential utopian ideal. For White and the Niagara Falls Power Company, Echota not only represented a model of industrial progress, but also social and aesthetic development.



**Figure 3-21.** Plan of Echota on the 1908 Atlas map. Note all of the buildings are frame except for the school on D Street.

### 3.18 The Milling District

The mills in Niagara Falls initially drew water from the Upper Rapids and not from the Falls. Industries continued to use water-wheels until the turbine was developed. In the late nineteenth century, industrial works in the original mill district on the "High Bank" were bound close to the gorge by their "tail or dead water," the canal water that passed through the turbines and emptied into the river below. Known as "tails," these exit systems directed water over the cliff in narrow, slender falls of different heights that varied according to depth of the wheel pits they were conveyed from (Figures 3-22 to 3-25). Schoellkopf's canal served the needs of the village, but mill owners wanted more options for industrial development. In 1886, Thomas Evershed

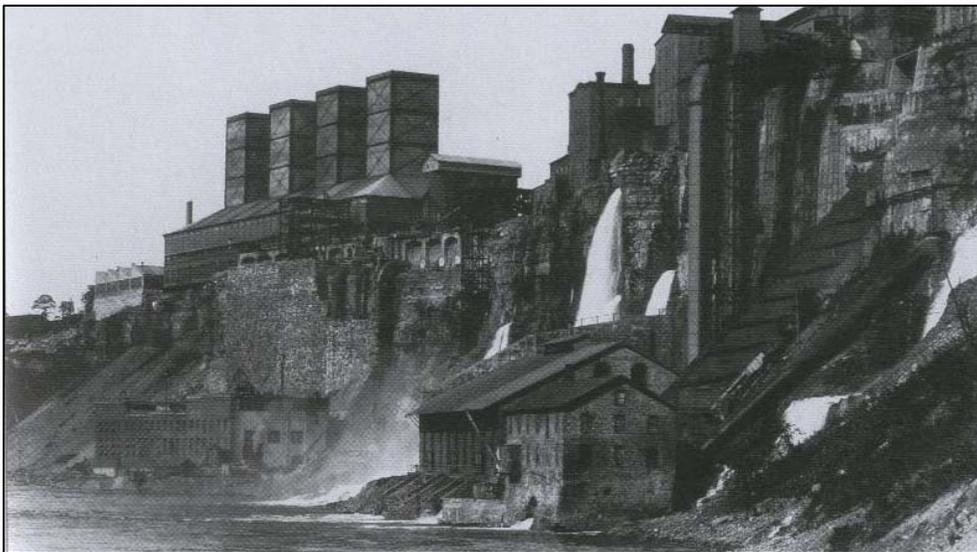
responded with a plan that would satisfy the need for increased power by expanding the construction of mills outside of the canal basin, north of the boundaries of the Reservation. His plan proposed a tunnel 2.5 miles long that would begin near where Gill Creek joined the Niagara River and end north of the upper bridge at 12-ft. above water level. As designed, the tunnel collected the tail water from mill built on along the upper river. Twelve inlet surface canals whose water would enter 238 wheel pits would serve the mills. The dead water would leave the wheel pits through small mains into the enormous tunnel that emptied into the gorge below. A group of local businessmen who were invested in the future of Niagara Falls as an industrial center supported the Evershed Plan. The investors formed “The Gaskill Company” and began blasting rock for the tunnel. However, the cost of construction mounted and the Evershed Plan had proved impractical to the Gaskill Company. Though not executed, Evershed’s Plan was important in the development of Niagara’s power because it confirmed the need to find a means of generating power at a central station near the Falls and then of sending it to distant locations. Ultimately, the only feature of Evershed’s plan utilized later in the Adams Power Station was the tunnel, which passed from near Port Day to the lower river.



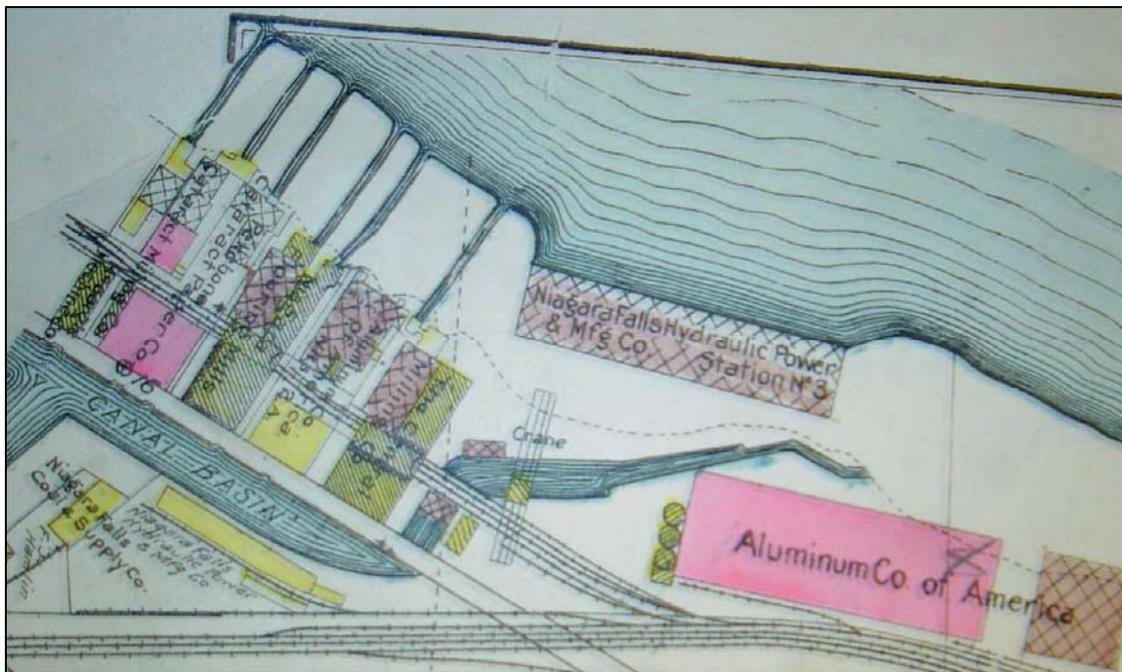
**Figure 3-22.** A ca. 1875 photograph of Gaskill Flouring Mill on the High Bank. Charles Gaskill made the first and only use of water power along the old hydraulic canal for his flour mill.



**Figure 3-23.** A ca. 1898 photograph captured the rapid industrial development on the High Bank. Also known as the “Old Mill District, these works were fueled by the Niagara Falls Hydraulic & Manufacturing Company’s Power Station No.2, which stood at the bottom of the gorge. Note the network of tailraces emptying into the gorge.



**Figure 3-24.** The Niagara Falls Hydraulic Company principally conveyed hydropower to the Pittsburgh Reduction Company plant (ALCOA), with its massive towers, on top of the High Bank. This 1910 photograph shows the Power Company’s station No.3 at left with its penstocks concealed behind a wall constructed of native rock.



**Figure 3-25.** Mills on the “High Bank” as depicted in 1908. (North is to the right of the image)

### 3.19 The Industrial Niagara (1901 to 1950)<sup>86</sup>

In 1905, the two powerhouses at Niagara produced one-tenth of all of the electric power generated in the United States, with much of it consumed by industrial Buffalo. The natural landscape of the Falls stood out in striking contrast to the industrial landscape that grew around it. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the manufacturing districts of Niagara Falls were well defined (Figure 3-26). There were three distinct areas of industrial development zones within the city. These included the property of the Niagara Falls Power Company lying along the upper river; the property of the Hydraulic Power Company below the Falls, and, which is known as the lower milling district, and an industrial section in the northern part of the city which was known as the “new” industrial section.<sup>87</sup> Overcrowding of the existing industrial areas of the city necessitated a new location for industrial expansion in the city. Known as the Highland neighborhood, new industry in this outlying section of Niagara Falls maintained “...manufacturing districts intact, facilitates [sic] the service of the various corporations by the power companies, and protects residential sections from undesirable encroachments.”<sup>88</sup> In 1912, the Niagara Falls Gazette praised the city with the following declaration:

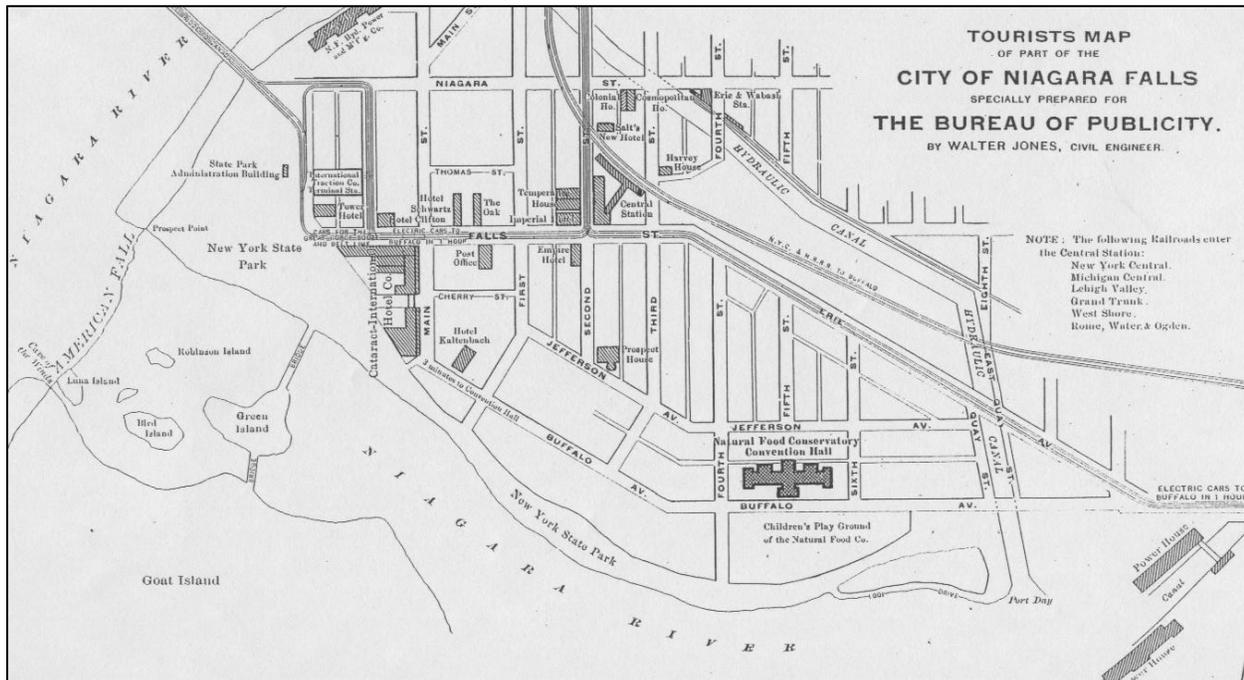
“Niagara Falls is now known as the greatest centre of electro-chemical manufacture in the world. Industries that were not known prior to the development of electric power here are now among the largest in this city. The dreams of chemists have become the facts of everyday life. Air and earth are

<sup>86</sup> For a detailed history of Electrochemical Companies at Niagara consult <http://ublib.buffalo.edu/libraries/exhibits/panam/sel/electrochemcompanies.html#alcoa>.

<sup>87</sup> “Industrial Growth of Niagara Falls from 1904 to 1909.” *Niagara Falls Gazette* (June 15, 1912): 8

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

separated into their constituent elements in Niagara Falls and the products put into neat packages for sale at low prices.”<sup>89</sup>



**Figure 3-26.** A ca. 1903 Tourist's Map of Niagara Falls depicting both tourist sites and prominent industrial manufacturing sites. Located in the center of the map is Central Station, which serviced New York Central, Michigan Central, Lehigh Valley, Grand Trunk, West Shore, and Rome, Water. & Ogden railroads.

The age of electricity attracted new industries to Niagara Falls, while existing industries such as the paper industry expanded. Niagara Falls offered cheap power to industries, and as manufacturing processes advanced, power became a key factor. The Carborundum Company, the Pittsburgh Reduction Company (ALCOA), Union Carbide and International Paper Company were the earliest large-scale industries to move to Niagara Falls. Other electrochemical companies from this period in Niagara Falls include International Acheson Graphite Company, Castner Electrolytic Alkali Company, Acker Processing Company, Niagara Electrochemical Company, Norton Emery Wheel Company, Acetylene Light and Power Company (Union Carbide Company), Roberts Chemical Company, and Oldbury Electro-Chemical Company.

During this period, a conflict had emerged between the promoters of hydro electrical development and the commissioners of the State Reservation. The hydro electrical industry desired to increase the amount of water diverted from the Upper Niagara to expand the industry. Whereas, the State Reservation commissioners wanted to protect the Falls from future industrial development. In 1906, the Burton Bill was enacted by State Legislature. The Bill limited the amount of water that could be diverted from the Upper Niagara, and as a result new processes and construction of new factories were halted. In 1915 the State Census reported that Niagara Falls was the fastest growing city in New York Survey. A 1920 survey of city buildings by the

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

City Assessor identified 8,860 houses, 5,957 apartment buildings, 1,628 factory buildings, 1,482 stores and 35 hotels.<sup>90</sup>

### **3.19.1 Pittsburgh Reduction Company (ALCOA)**

The Pittsburgh Reduction Company formed in 1888. The two principals were Charles M. Hall, an inventor of the electrolytic process used to recover aluminum, and metallurgist Alfred E. Hunt. Pittsburgh Reduction was the first electrochemical company to contract with the Niagara Falls Power Company. The Niagara plant was located approximately one-quarter of a mile up river from the power station and operation began in August 1895 (Figures 3-22 to 3-25). In November 1896, a second plant began production below the falls, using power produced by the Niagara Falls Hydroelectric Power and Manufacturing Company. In 1907, the Pittsburgh Reduction reorganized as the Aluminum Company of America (ALCOA).<sup>91</sup> The Pittsburgh Reduction Company constructed its first Niagara County Plant in 1895 on Buffalo Avenue.

Niagara Falls was central to the early aluminum industry. Charles M. Hall invented an electrolytic process for aluminum manufacturing, and also patented an electric furnace. Niagara Falls was a prime location for this new electricity-based industry. Hall himself became vice-president of ALCOA. When the initial plant opened in 1895, it alone was consuming almost half of the power company's possible output. By 1914, ALCOA consumed more hydroelectric power than any other company in the world. In 1899 the majority of the world's aluminum was produced in the United States, and most of the aluminum sent abroad came from Niagara Falls.

The ALCOA plant ceased operation on February 28<sup>th</sup>, 1949 due to both relatively higher costs of aluminum production at the Falls, and a greater desire for electrical power available for general consumption.<sup>92</sup> In 1951, the Niagara Mohawk Power Corporation leveled the factory, and landscaped the area.

### **3.19.2 Carborundum Company / Acheson Graphite Company**

In 1894, Edward G. Acheson (1856–1931) established the Carborundum Company in Monongahela City, Pennsylvania, to produce grinding wheels, whet stones, knife sharpeners, and powdered abrasives. Contemporaneous with the Pittsburgh Reduction Company, the Carborundum Company built their first silicon carbide plant in 1895 just off of Buffalo Avenue. Carborundum, the second company to contract with the Niagara Falls Power Company, began production on a four-acre plot of land on the upper river about ½ mile from the power plant. In its electric furnace, Acheson subsequently produced artificial graphite, another product that he commercialized (Acheson Graphite Co.). He also discovered that various organic substances allowed colloidal suspension of particles of graphite mixed in oil or water (Figure 3-27).

Carborundum manufactured artificially made “electrofused” grains such as the silicon Carbide, which was discovered by Dr. E. G. Acheson in 1891.<sup>93</sup> The company produced 85,000-plus tons annually with several types of grains.<sup>94</sup> Silicon carbide is an abrasive that when mixed with

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<sup>90</sup> Niagara Falls Gazette. “Peep into the Past,” (3/11/1954).

<sup>91</sup> Hamilton B. Mizer. *A city is born: Niagara Falls : a city matures : a selected topical history of the city's formative years, 1892-1932*. Niagara County Historical Society; Rev. and expanded edition (1991), p. 6.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> Michael Vogel. *Echoes in the Mist: An Illustrated History of the Niagara Falls Area*. (Chatsworth, CA Windsor Publications, 1991) p. 126.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

water it can cut granite. It is used in the making of steel, as well as in electrical circuits and lightning arrestors because of low conductivity. Acheson's invention later distinguished Niagara Falls as the host of the single greatest concentration of electro mineral producers in North America. In 1986, the oldest abrasive grain producer in the United States, Washington Mills acquired the Electro Minerals Division of the former Carborundum Company. Aluminum oxide is another grain produced by Washington Mills, the largest producer of electrofused grains in North America. Washington Mills Electro Minerals has supplied specialty electro-fused minerals to the refractory, electronics, automotive, and other high-tech ceramic industries. The factory houses two of the largest electric tilt furnaces in the world.



**Figure 3-27.** Gredag Plant at 1920 Buffalo Avenue (Clarence A. Tryon, engineer, 1914/1920), a reinforced concrete frame factory built by the Acheson Graphite Co. for the manufacture of Gredag, a lubricant composed of graphite and grease. The firm's main plant, which produced solid graphite, dry graphite powder, electrodes and anodes, stood on the south side of Buffalo Avenue next to the Carborundum Co. plant. All of the Acheson plant buildings, except for the office and Gredag Plant, have been demolished. That plant was closed in 1982. Acheson Graphite Co. was the only manufacturer of graphite in the U.S.

### 3.19.3 *Du Pont*

The origin's of Du Pont's Niagara Plant trace back to 1896 when the Niagara Electro Chemical Company constructed and operated a facility for the manufacture of chlorine and metallic sodium along the banks of the Niagara River.<sup>95</sup> Niagara Falls Electro Chemical Company merged with the Roessler and Hasslacher Chemical Company in 1925, and Du Pont purchased the facility five years later. Sodium produced at the facility has been used in the manufacture of agricultural chemicals, specialty lightweight metals, and in processes to produce dyes.

### 3.19.4 *Titanium Alloy Manufacturing Company (TAM)*

Founded in 1906 by Auguste Rossi, holder of the patent for technology that extracts titanium metal from its ore.<sup>96</sup> The company established its operation in Niagara Falls on Hyde Park Boulevard in order to take advantage of the electric power required to manufacture ferro titanium alloys. The Titanium Alloy Manufacturing Co. produced ferro carbon titanate, an alloy developed by Rossi for use in steelmaking. In further work involving titanium, Rossi was able to

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

separate an impure titanium oxide. He found that the material produced opacifying properties when mixed in an oil, thus setting in motion a sequence of developments that would lead to the genesis of a multibillion-dollar industry and a cornerstone of modern paint technology. In further work involving titanium dioxide, Rossi and his associates demonstrated the material's effectiveness as a white pigment with unique properties. Their work resulted in the launch, in 1916, of the Titanium Pigment Co. and the construction of a plant at Niagara Falls to produce titanium pigments. Commercial production of pigments was delayed by World War I, but finally began in 1918.

### **3.20 Other industries**

#### **3.20.1 Moore Business Forms**

In 1882, Samuel Moore established the world's first factory devoted to the manufacturing of sales books in Niagara Falls, New York. Moore's Paragon Black Leaf Counter Check Book, revolutionized business record keeping and established the business forms industry.<sup>97</sup> Samuel Moore had emigrated from Entalge to Canada in 1861. He was attracted to Niagara Falls for its readily available electric power and its proximity to Toronto. In 1925, the company acquired a manufacturing building at 1001 Buffalo Avenue, which is still in operation today. Since then Moore has become one of the largest printers in North America. Presently, the company is headquartered in Mississauga, Ontario, with corporate offices in Bannockburn, Illinois and Stamford, Connecticut. Moore has 45 production facilities, 14 Print Fulfillment centers, 23 warehouse hubs and 220 sales locations throughout the world.

#### **3.20.2 Empire Builders Supply Company**

Began in 1919 as the successor to Mitchell's Builder's Supply, who produced coal, ice, brick and dynamite.<sup>98</sup> Originally located in the Gluck building, Empire continued to supply these products to local contractors, branching into concrete production in the mid-1930s. The company won the dynamite contract for the Niagara Power Project.

#### **3.20.3 Shredded Wheat Plant**

The turn of the twentieth century marked the arrival of one of the most prominent companies in early twentieth century Niagara Falls, the Natural Food Company. Henry D. Perky relocated his company in 1901 from Worcester, Massachusetts to Niagara Falls (Figure 3-28). Enticed by the inexpensive electrical power and the ideal location of Niagara Falls, Perky constructed his model factory on Buffalo Avenue. The Natural Food Company produced Perky's famous Shredded Wheat breakfast cereal, a three by four inch wheat biscuit that he believed to be a panacea for all personal and social woes.<sup>99</sup> The company's other major product was the Triscuit, a shredded wheat wafer, that was baked entirely by electricity. Perky designed his factory as a tourist attraction in order to carry out the company's vision of synthesizing nature and technology for the benefit of humankind and the environment.<sup>100</sup> He advertised his product as the the "wonder of the Age" bestowed upon the "8<sup>th</sup> Wonder of the World" the title of "the Home of Shredded Wheat." Moreover, Perky further identified his company with Niagara Falls

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<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>99</sup> Irwin. 1996, 179.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

by featuring an image of the falls on each box of shredded wheat. Perky's marketing efforts brought his company and the city to national attention. The "Home of Shredded Wheat" became a tourist destination at the Falls.



Increasing success of the Shredded Wheat Company led to the construction of a new factory on Erie Avenue, now Rainbow Boulevard, in 1912. At that time, the Erie Avenue location consisted of a 60,000 bushel capacity grain tank, a tower and an elevator.<sup>101</sup> The original Erie Avenue plant was razed for the construction of a modern four-unit elevator system. When the National Biscuit Company (NABISCO) purchased the Shredded Wheat Company patents and its factory in 1919, bakeries on Erie Avenue were enlarged. After Nabisco consolidated in the mid-1950s, the original Shredded Wheat Factory buildings on Buffalo Avenue were demolished; the office section of the plant stood until 1976. The NABISCO grain elevator is a visual and local landmark that once was painted with a sign identifying it as the "Home of the Triscuit".

**Figure 3-28.** An early 20<sup>th</sup> c. postcard depicting Niagara Falls and the "the Home of Shredded Wheat."

### 3.21 The Buffalo & Niagara Falls Interurban

The Buffalo & Niagara Falls Interurban (B&NF) opened on September 20, 1895. Constructed in only 113 days, the twenty-mile long double track line connected the cities of Buffalo and Niagara Falls. The line paralleled the Niagara River as it headed northward. During its first year of operation, the B&NF transported 662,445 passengers on its 35 cars.<sup>102</sup> Cars ran every 15 minutes from each terminal. In 1902, B&NF was consolidated with other lines to form the International Railway Company (IRC), which became the leading electric railroad business in the Niagara Frontier.<sup>103</sup> The success of the line prompted the IRC to construct a true interurban line between the two cities. In 1917, just after interurban construction had peaked nationwide, the IRC put into operation a High Speed Line.<sup>104</sup> In Niagara Falls, the new line ran from Portage Road along Buffalo Avenue, Erie Avenue, and Falls Street to the terminal.

<sup>101</sup> Niagara Gazette (Oct. 14 1916).

<sup>102</sup> Dun, 183.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

### 3.22 Early-to-mid Twentieth Century Niagara Falls Residential Development

The LaSalle neighborhood became a part of the city of Niagara Falls in 1927, at which time it had a village population of 6,258 people. Located in the southeast and eastern section of Niagara Falls, LaSalle is bordered on the west by Hyde Park Boulevard, to the north and east and by the city line, and on the south by the Niagara River. Comparatively, the LaSalle area experienced a slow development period during the nineteenth century. In 1850 there were just two dwellings in the area. The first settlement was called Cayuga Creek, which was changed to LaSalle in 1862. The LaSalle area is primarily residential and it developed in the early-to-mid 1900s with some construction occurring in the late 1950s. This area is bisected north and south by the Niagara Expressway and from east-west by the LaSalle Expressway. The major artery along the river is Buffalo Avenue, which served as the main path to the Tonawandas and Buffalo in the early development of the city.

The DeVeaux neighborhood is another example of a residential area of the city that developed in the early-to-mid twentieth century. Named after Judge Samuel DeVeaux who owned most of the land in this area, it is located in the northernmost part of the city between the northern city line and the CSX Railroad to the south. The former “Hojack” Railway lines form its eastern boundary, and separates it from the Highland Neighborhood District. The Robert Moses Parkway and Niagara Gorge form its western edge. Lewiston Road is the primary north-south thoroughfare that bisects the area. The DeVeaux neighborhood developed from 1920 to 1940 and is primarily residential except for a few stores scattered along the Lewiston Main road. The DeVeaux neighborhood offers outstanding examples of period residential architecture.

### 3.23 Mid-Twentieth Century

The City of Niagara Falls continued to prosper in the 1940s and 1950s, especially for manufacturing interests. During World War II restrictive measures on the amount of water diverted from Upper Niagara were lifted. In 1940, the city’s population was 85,000 people<sup>105</sup>. Within ten years, the population expanded by 10,000 residents, many of whom lived in the new residential developments of DeVeaux and LaSalle.<sup>106</sup>

The streetscape of Downtown Niagara Falls also underwent a change with the expansion of the State Reservation. The state purchased the Cataract House site in 1947 and eliminated the Riverway, along with all of the buildings on the south east side of the street. Additionally, all structures on the south side of Falls Street and the north side of the street between Riverway and Prospect were demolished.<sup>107</sup>

### 3.24 Demise of the Industrial Age

The industrial age ended in Niagara Falls on June 7, 1956 when a rockslide crushed the Schoellkopf power plant. Nearly all of the power plant was destroyed when nearly 12,000 tons of rock from the gorge wall above the power station broke away. After the collapse, the electric power source produced a shortage of low-cost power in the Niagara region. Electricity had to

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<sup>105</sup> Urban Design Group. *Historical Inventory of Niagara Falls, New York*. (Buffalo: Urban Design Group SUNY at Buffalo, 1991), p. 28.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

be routed in from other power sources. Local industries were left powerless and many were forced to relocate, leaving behind an economically devastated community. From 1958 to 1963, while the Niagara Power Authority's Niagara Project was under construction, the city lost one-third of its factory jobs, over 10,000 positions.<sup>108</sup>

### 3.25 Influence of Robert Moses

Robert Moses (1888-1981) was instrumental in the construction of much of the transportation infrastructure in New York State that included bridges, roadways, buildings, tunnels, housing projects, power facilities, state parks and city parks in New York. Though Moses himself never learned to drive, his view of the automobile was shaped by the 1920s, when the car was considered more for entertainment than utilitarian purposes. Moses' highways were curving, landscaped "ribbon parks," intended to be pleasures to drive through. In the early 1930s the New York State Emergency Public Works Commission was established. This allowed Robert Moses, chairman of the commission in 1933, to pursue his park and parkway plans for the Niagara Frontier by establishing the Niagara Bridge Authority.<sup>109</sup> The authority received \$2.8 million in federal funds for bridges that would connect the north and south ends of Grand Island to the mainland in Erie and Niagara Counties. The construction of the New York State Thruway in the region in the 1950s allowed for greater access to Niagara Falls from other areas of the northeast.

In 1962, construction of the Robert Moses Parkway began. The four-lane highway extends from the Upper Niagara River, along the lower river gorge to Lewiston, and through the countryside to Route 18 at Youngstown. The parkway embraced Moses' philosophy that urban and suburban space was dispensable for the automobile. Designed as a detour around the City of Niagara Falls, the Robert Moses Parkway was constructed over historical sites that included the Schoellkop Power Plant, and the mills in the Canal Basin. Many buildings in the northern section of the city were moved to accommodate the parkway. The entire extent of the Robert Moses Parkway between the North Grand Island Bridge and the Loop was laid out on top of rock fill dumped into the Niagara River during the excavation of the Niagara Power Project's conduits and canals.

### 3.26 The Late Twentieth Century and Urban Renewal

During the early 1960s efforts were made to revitalize the city's economy by implementing an urban renewal plan that would restore the city's image to its once former glory (Figure 3-29). Instead of an industrial revitalization, city planners focused on a massive redevelopment project that would make Niagara Falls a "visual jewel and a convention city boasting a superb facility."<sup>110</sup> In 1963, the Niagara Falls Planning Board began outlining a new urban renewal project that would extend the South End general neighborhood renewal plan north along the abandoned Hydraulic Canal to include the area bounded by Niagara Street.<sup>111</sup> The master plan for the \$160 million dollar, 82-acre redevelopment of downtown Niagara Falls included the acquisition and razing of properties. That same year, the last New York Central train ran through the city.

<sup>108</sup> *Buffalo Evening News* August, 12, 1972.

<sup>109</sup> M Mead & Hunt. *Contextual Study of New York State's Pre-1961 Bridges*. Prepared for the New York State Department of Transportation (November 1999), p.137.

<sup>110</sup> *Buffalo Courier Express* Aug. 29, 1971.

<sup>111</sup> *Niagara Gazette* April 5, 1963.

E. Dent Lackey, Mayor and Urban Renewal Agency chairman, held high hopes for the Urban Renewal Project. Lackey announced he was “going to make the theory of urban renewal a reality here. The people are impatient for action [and] we are going to give it to them.”<sup>112</sup> The over-all project called for modernization of 175 acres of the downtown section which is bordered on two sides by the majestic Niagara River. The total cost of the entire project, which was split into five phases, was estimated at \$50-million dollars.



**Figure 3-29.** A ca. 1960s aerial view of Downtown Niagara Falls, facing southeast.

After the collapse of the power plant, the Niagara Mohawk Power Corporation gave the canal land to the city. Beginning in 1958, the Hydraulic Canal slowly filled with non-burnable, non-food wastes such as rocks, tin cans, cinders and bottles.<sup>113</sup> The city ultimately filled the canal with sanitary fill, and it soon became a public nuisance. Plans for a highway to be constructed over the canal were first discussed in 1962.<sup>114</sup> The portion of the canal under the Third Street bridge was not filled in by the city until 1974, when the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) began its plan for the LaSalle Arterial.<sup>115</sup>

As proposed, the LaSalle Arterial would have connected the Robert Moses Parkway and Niagara Street. To accommodate the proposed LaSalle Arterial, the NYSDOT had to acquire adjacent properties between the south side of Niagara Street and the Niagara Falls Convention Center property, between Fourth and Seventh streets. A 1973 map from the engineering company of Deleux, Cather and Company illustrated the plans for the LaSalle Arterial and the area around the Convention Center. Although the LaSalle Arterial was never constructed, properties located in its expanded right-of-way of 150-ft were demolished.

Photographs taken during the Urban Renewal period captured the magnitude of the demolition to the area surrounding the convention center. The once a densely inhabited neighborhood had been leveled. In 1972, construction of the Convention Center began (Figure 3-30). The city hired the esteemed architectural firm of Phillip Johnson and John Burgee of New York City to design its new facility, which was to be the focal point of the city's resurgence plan. This major urban renewal venture for the downtown area of Niagara Falls also included a hotel, offices, a

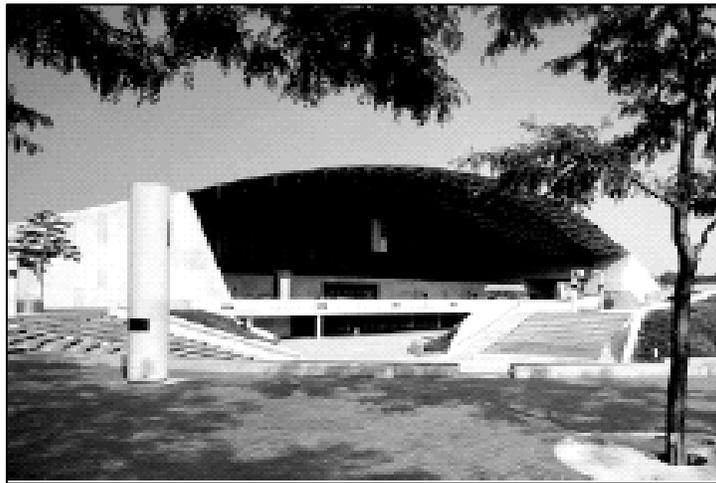
<sup>112</sup> *Courier Express* “Falls Renewal Centers on Tourist Lure.” (Feb. 4, 1966).

<sup>113</sup> *Niagara Gazette* Jan. 23, 1973.

<sup>114</sup> *Niagara Gazette* June 11, 1962.

<sup>115</sup> *Niagara Gazette* June 26, 1976.

shopping center, winter garden, parking garages and a museum. Johnson and Burgee's design created a strong visual feature as an icon for urban Niagara Falls with the axis of the project a 1,500 foot-long tree-lined pedestrian mall. At the Niagara River end of the mall is a riverside park and the most dramatic view of the waterfall. At the other end of the mall is the convention center, a metaphorical triumphal arch, or Pantheon. Viewed from down the mall the building is a vast glass quarter-moon anchored by stone plinths at either end. The other major building constructed during this period was the Carborundum Office Building at 345 Niagara Street. At that time, walls of the former canal could be followed into the Convention Center and Carborundum construction sites. Figures 3-31 and 3-32 illustrate the impact of urban renewal on the downtown streetscape.



**Figure 3-30.** Niagara Falls Convention Center after its completion in 1974. A potentially National Register Eligible building.

To improve socio-economic conditions, the city undertook three projects: the Allen MacKenna Avenue project, the Highland – Hyde Park Industrial Project, and the Downtown Rainbow Center project.<sup>116</sup> Other major projects in the late twentieth century include a Water Park, the Turtle, Earl W. Brydges Public Library and the Niagara Falls International Airport. Several modern motels were constructed in the residential areas of downtown Niagara Falls.

<sup>116</sup> Urban Design Group, p.29



**Figure 3-31.** A 1918 photograph of the northwest corner of Falls and Second streets. Note the former Imperial Hotel (1893) in the center.



**Figure 3-32.** A ca. 1975 photograph of Falls Street, facing west.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, plans were developed to place a “Mega Mall” between Niagara Street and Buffalo Avenue from Porter Avenue to Eighth Avenue, but the project was later abandoned.<sup>117</sup> One of the major east-west arteries into Niagara Falls, US Route 62 (Niagara Falls Boulevard) experienced extensive commercial development in the LaSalle section of the city. Additionally, the original road network of city has expanded over the last two decades to accommodate the density of vehicles. Large-scale road construction projects have either widened or improved some of the city’s primary thoroughfares.

Other types of institutions created during this project included the Aquarium of Niagara Falls and Native American Center for the Living Arts (Turtle). In 1965, the Aquarium of Niagara Falls opened as a privately funded and operated institution. The aquarium is one of the city’s major attractions for education and recreation. The facility became a model for the operation of inland aquariums. Technology was applied for the first time on a large scale in the preparation, handling and management of synthetic sea water. The Native American Center for the Living Arts is an impressive building based on the Iroquois Nations story of the Turtle forming North America. The building is shaped like a turtle raising his head to acknowledge Niagara Falls as a special and sacred place (Figure 3-33).



**Figure 3-33.** The “Turtle” once housed the Native American Center for the Living Arts (1978-1980). Note the United Office Building in the background.

### 3.27 Environmental Issues in the Late Twentieth Century

Love Canal is considered the most significant environmental crisis resulting from the Falls great industrial history. The former Hooker Chemicals and Plastics Corporation waste deposit site in Love Canal is located near 97<sup>th</sup> and 99<sup>th</sup> streets in the LaSalle residential district of Niagara Falls. In 1976, after years of exposure to heavy snowfalls and rain, the old canal turned into a porous mass that allowed its contents to overflow into the surrounding clay and sandy loam.

<sup>117</sup> Conlin, 1991.

The toxic material filtered through the old creekbeds and swales that formed swampy channels extending into the neighborhood. At least fifteen organic chemicals were identified in Love Canal. Louise Gibbs, a local homemaker, and the Love Canal Homeowners brought the crisis into the national spotlight. President Jimmy Carter declared a federal state of emergency at the Love Canal Dump on August 7, 1978. Carter declared a second state of emergency in 1980. Funds were set aside under the Disaster Assistance Administration to allow the evacuation of 728 homes in a fifty square block area. Carter visited Love Canal to sign an agreement with the state to appropriate \$15 million dollars to buy 564 houses in addition to those in the first two rings next to the canal. By February 1981, more than four hundred families had left the Love Canal area. Total cleanup costs mounted to \$500 million dollars. Two decades later, people have returned to the Love Canal to live.

The cheap electrical power generated by harnessing the Niagara River and Falls attracted numerous industries to the area during the early part of the 20th century. Some of these industries, such as Occidental Chemical, EI Dupont, US Vanadium, and Goodyear, remain, providing work for those in the population who aren't connected to the hospitality and tourism trade. The City's industry declined in the 1980s. In 1982, the Nitec Paper Corporation went bankrupt and the Tajon Inc. closed netting a total loss of 900 jobs. Carborundum laid off 650 workers in 1983 and moved 275 jobs to Texas in 1987. The same year, Union Carbide terminated 650 workers. Many industries have either shut down in the last 30 years or moved to the suburbs or surrounding small towns. Over the last four decades, the city has lost two-thirds of its industrial jobs.

The city's once prosperous industrial-tourist economy survives today in the form of brownfields. With factories now closed, these industrial and commercial sites sit stagnant throughout Niagara Falls. Demographic shifts and the overall trend away from heavy industry have contributed to the lack of redevelopment. Additionally, lack of interest in developing brownfields is also due to environmental liabilities stemming from soil contamination and groundwater pollution. Instead, developers seek 'greenfield' sites in suburban or rural areas. The City of Niagara Falls encourages brownfields redevelopment efforts.

After a prolonged economic downturn, Niagara Falls has been revitalizing its downtown area, thus making the city more attractive and viable for both residents and businesses. In comparison to the overdeveloped Canadian side of the Falls, with its multi-story hotels and casinos, the skyline of the American side of the falls remains relatively free of intrusive commercial development. Presently, the tallest building in Niagara Falls is the United Building. This will soon change when the Seneca Nation of Indians and Seneca Niagara Casino finishes construction of their 26-story signature hotel behind the former Convention Center, which houses the casino. Undoubtedly, the casino is the most successful commercial endeavor in the city in recent years. Its success has spurred economic reinvestment in the city. Early twentieth century commercial buildings on Third and Main streets are slowly being occupied and reinvigorated with façade improvements. The City of Niagara Falls contains many valuable historic buildings such as the former Nabisco plant, the former Carborundum building and the United Building that hold the potential for revitalization and economic growth.