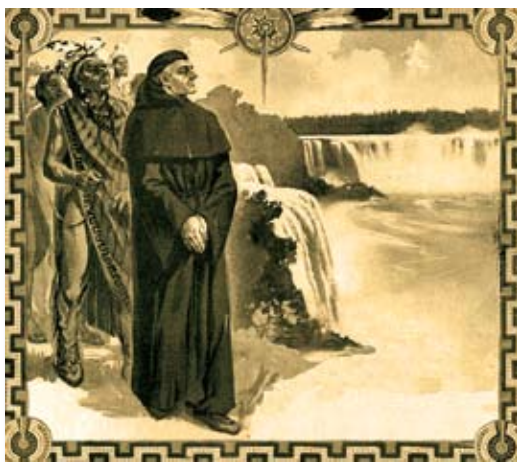


NIAGARA FALLS, New York, (population 55,593) located 15 miles north of Buffalo, sits in the shadow of one of the world’s most famous natural wonders. The city is framed on the south and west by the Niagara River, which makes a turn at the cataract.

The Niagara River divides at Goat Island, forming two main waterfalls. The Horseshoe (Canadian) Falls curve around a 2,215-foot crest, dropping water 177 feet. Although the American Falls, with a 1,075-foot crest, is higher at 184 feet, a large pile of rock at its base breaks the water’s drop. The falls were originally formed 7 miles north of their present location about 12,000 years ago as a glacial lake poured over the ridge of the Niagara Escarpment into Lake Iroquois (Lake Ontario’s glacial predecessor), near what is now Lewiston, New York and Queenston, Ontario. The falls have since carved a gorge to their current location on the 35-mile-long Niagara River, midway between Lake Erie and Lake Ontario.

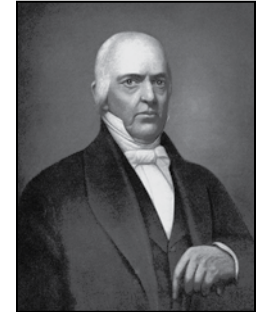
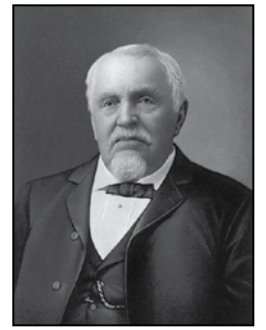
The city of Niagara Falls has heavy industrial roots. Factories line the upper Niagara River along Buffalo Avenue. The main business district extends along Falls Street and Pine Avenue, and to the north along Main Street. The residential areas are located primarily to the north and east of the downtown area.

Ancestors of the Seneca Indians inhabited the area around Niagara Falls for centuries before Europeans first saw the cataract. The Indian name *Niagara* is translated to mean the “Thunderer of Waters.” The first published view of Niagara Falls was based on the recollections of Father Louis Hennepin from a visit he made in 1678. The area was of strategic importance to the French because of the seven-mile portage around the falls. Over the years, the French built log forts at the mouth of the Niagara River at Lake Ontario (see Youngstown), with construction of the present structure beginning in 1726.



TOP: An 1882 panoramic map of Niagara Falls, New York. (Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division)

BOTTOM: Father Louis Hennepin viewed Niagara Falls for the first time in 1678.



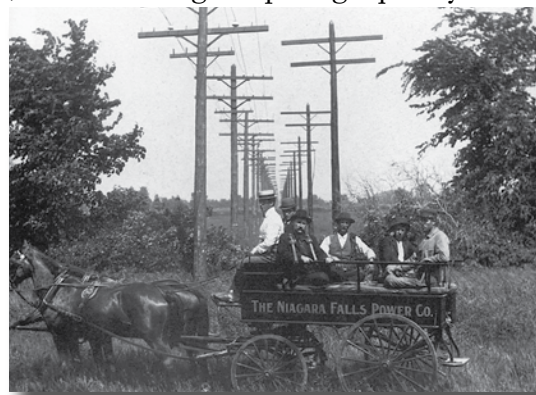
The French also built two forts near the falls in 1745 and 1750 to guard the upper terminus of the portage. As the British approached the area in 1759, the French master of the portage burned the two forts near the falls before retreating. The British took over what was left of the forts and built Fort Schlosser. That same year, the British gained control of the region when the French surrendered Fort Niagara. The British remained in control of Fort Niagara and the region until 1796, when the U.S. government took possession.

Augustus Porter, a surveyor, first visited the falls in 1795. His vision of building a manufacturing center brought him back to the area a few years later with his family. He became the master of the portage and named the settlement Manchester after its industrial counterpart in England. The British burned Fort Schlosser on the upper Niagara River and most of the settlement of Manchester during the War of 1812.

With the completion of the Erie Canal in 1825, business along the portage quickly faded, and Porter looked to the falling water and its potential to power industry. The railroad arrived in 1840, and soon mills and factories were well established along the upper rapids and on the rim of the Niagara Gorge. The Roebling Bridge was built across the gorge in 1855, providing a more direct route for rail traffic across southwestern Ontario to Detroit and beyond to Chicago, the shortest possible route to the expanding west. A canal, diverting water from the upper river to the mills along the gorge wall, was completed in 1862. In 1877, Jacob F. Schoellkopf, whose family later merged their holdings with the Niagara Falls Power Company, purchased the canal. By 1881, electricity was being generated. In 1892, Niagara Falls was incorporated as a city. Four years later, lines carried electricity to Buffalo. In 1901, Niagara Falls power lit the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo.

The availability of electricity brought more industry. Factories sprung up to produce abrasives, food products, paper, foundry materials and machinery. The electricity also powered the development of technology to begin the production of aluminum, carbide, graphite and chemicals. Niagara Falls was an important manufacturing center during both world wars.

In 1956, a rockslide destroyed most of the Schoellkopf Generating Station along the

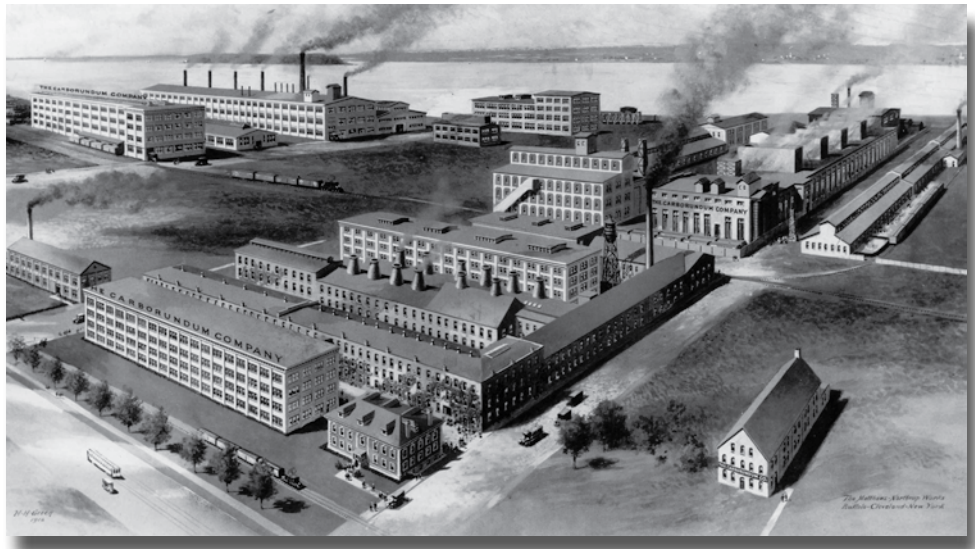
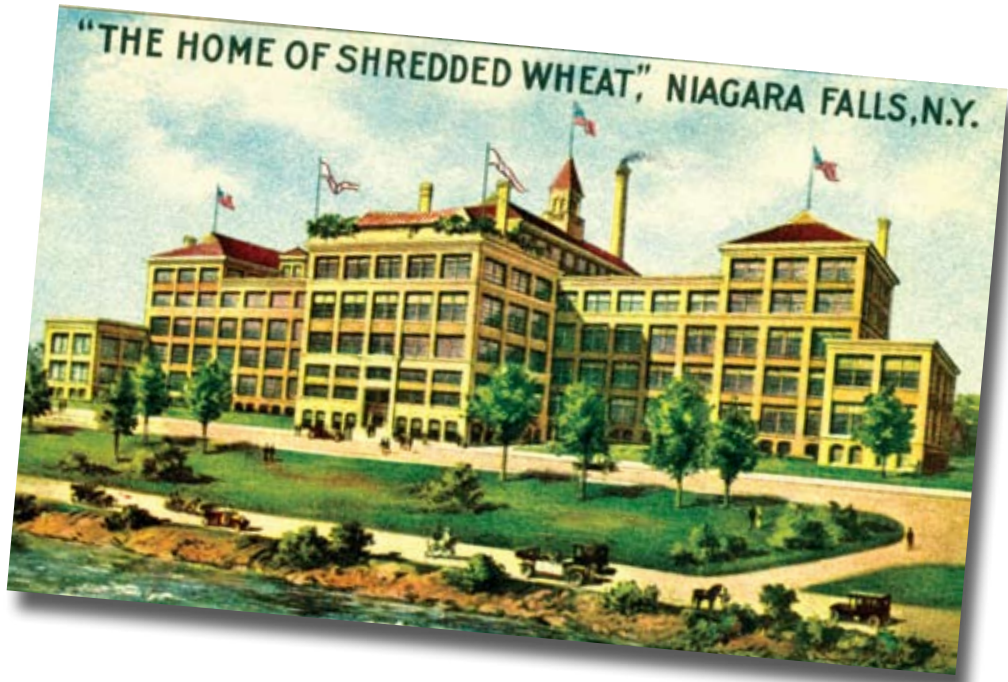


TOP: Jacob Schoellkopf (1819-1899) owned the hydraulic canal at Niagara Falls. His canal provided power for several mills and an early electric generator. (Local History Department, Niagara Falls, New York Public Library)

ABOVE: Augustus Porter (1769-1849) established a gristmill along the Niagara River and a settlement called Manchester. (Local History Department, Niagara Falls, New York Public Library)

TOP LEFT: Factories using the power of the Niagara River lined the gorge wall through the early 20th century.

BOTTOM: In 1896, Niagara Falls Power Company lines began transmitting electricity 20 miles away to Buffalo. (Local History Department, Niagara Falls, New York Public Library)



ABOVE: Robert Moses (1888-1981), a powerful public official, oversaw construction of the Niagara Power Project. (Local History Department, Niagara Falls, New York Public Library)

TOP: The Shredded Wheat plant, built in 1901, was known as "The Palace of Light." It closed in 1954.

BOTTOM: In 1895, the Carborundum Company built a plant on the upper Niagara River to manufacture abrasives. (Local History Department, Niagara Falls, New York Public Library)

river's gorge. The crisis led Congress to pass the Niagara Redevelopment Act in 1957. Under the direction of Robert Moses, crews began construction of the Niagara Power Project. When completed in 1961, the project was the largest hydroelectric power complex in the western world.

For nearly a century, there was little civic planning to control the furious growth of industry and the larger problem of the disposal of industrial wastes. Dumps in the area quickly filled, including one at the site of the never completed and abandoned Love Canal, several miles above the falls. A brew of the most toxic chemicals known to man was dumped into Love Canal through the 1940s, seeping into the ground and surfacing in area homes and a school built on the dump. In the 1970s, as the chemicals surfaced, the area was closed and the federal government moved hundreds of residents elsewhere.

Much of the city's central core was demolished in the 1960s and 1970s for urban renewal. Vacant buildings and open spaces exist, despite some development taking place from the 1960s through the 1980s, including the large Niagara Falls Convention Center (now housing a casino), and several retail establishments.



The falls may be viewed from the Niagara Reservation, New York State's oldest State Park dating to 1885. The Reservation includes Goat Island and Prospect Point on the American side of the river. A parkway, beginning several miles upriver from Niagara Falls and extending to Lake Ontario, sliced through the Niagara Reservation as part of Robert Moses's legacy. The portion of the parkway near the falls was later closed, allowing for easier access to the park and rejoining the city with its natural wonder.

During the off-season for tourists and during nighttime hours year-round, more than half of the water in the Niagara River is diverted from the river above the falls to drive turbines in power plants on both sides of the river. More than 90 percent of the remaining water drops over the Horseshoe Falls.

Niagara Falls' area attractions include the Cave of the Winds trip, Schoellkopf Geological Museum, Niagara Falls Aquarium, state parks and the Niagara Power Project Visitor Center. For automobile traffic, three bridges link the U.S. and Canadian sides of the river.



TOP LEFT: An early 20th century view of Niagara Falls from the Steel Arch Bridge.

TOP RIGHT: Tourists were allowed to venture onto the ice bridge until 1912, when ice suddenly broke up, carrying three people to their deaths.

BOTTOM: A nighttime view of Niagara Falls from the Rainbow Bridge.

DAREDEVILS AND SURVIVORS



Niagara Falls has been a lure for those in search of fame and fortune, while others have unintentionally become part of the lore of the falls. In 1829, Sam Patch leaped from a 100-foot-high platform into the water at the foot of the falls. French tightrope walker Charles Blondin crossed the gorge several times in 1859 and 1860 and a number of people made the trip over the falls in various contraptions. Perhaps most famous was Annie Edson Taylor, who survived the plunge in a barrel in 1901.

Only two people are known to have survived the plunge over the falls without the aid of a barrel or any other device. In October 2003, Kirk Jones, 40, of Canton, Michigan, went over the Canadian Horseshoe Falls. Tourists were stunned as Jones quietly slipped into the water just above the falls, floating past on his back before going over headfirst. He pulled himself out of the water onto the rocks below.

Suffering only minor injuries, Jones was immediately arrested and taken away for psychiatric evaluation. The other person did so unintentionally. Roger Woodward, a seven-year-old boy, went over the falls in the summer of 1960 after the 12-foot aluminum boat in which he was riding with his sister, Deanne, and family friend, James Honeycutt, was sucked into the upper rapids. After hitting a shoal upstream from the falls, the shear pin on the 7.5 horsepower motor snapped, immobilizing the craft and sending it toward the cataract. In the rapids above the falls, the boat capsized, dumping the trio into the torrent. Two tourists from New Jersey pulled Woodward's sister from the water just feet from the brink. The boy clad only in bathing suit and lifejacket was pulled from the water below the Horseshoe Falls by the crew of the *Maid of the Mist* tour boat. Honeycutt's body was found four days later near the *Maid of the Mist's* Canadian dock.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: French tightrope walker Charles Blondin (1824-1897) made numerous trips across the Niagara River gorge. In 1901, Anna Edson Taylor survived a trip over the falls in a barrel. Taylor with her barrel. Young Roger Woodward was rescued below the falls after plunging over the cataract in 1960. (Local History Department, Niagara Falls, New York Public Library)