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NIAGARA

Niagara is a river, a cataract, a frontier, a peninsula, an escarpment; all of which have an expansive, enlightening and exciting history. The falls have been called Great Thunderer, Thundergate, Throatway, Horseshoe, Canadian and American, and a wonder of the world.

The Niagara Frontier, as it is known, is revered by many for its geology, its power, and its mystifying natural beauty. It is endeared by many for its part in the growth of two nations, its military history, a rebellion, its energy and commerce, and for its entertainment. Legends of this region have been recounted by unknown numbers of storytellers, poets, novelists, historians, painters, singers, photographers and film makers (1).



The Library of Great Lake Ontario has a variety of items relating to the story of Niagara Frontier and The Falls. This article offers a few areas for a reader's research, along with a few references to items in the library's collection. Beyond the Library's shelves, resources on Niagara and the Falls seem limitless.



Niagara was the land of the Iroquois and Huron, with Seneca on the eastern shore and Ojibway (Chippewa) on the western shore. It was first visited by Europeans through the explorations of French trappers, soldiers and clerics. A French expedition arrived at the mouth of Niagara in 1678 under the command of Sieur de LaSalle, along with Father Louis Hennepin, a priest who recorded the first written description of Niagara's falls. Their mission was to establish a water route to the west, up the river to Lake Erie. LaSalle built GRIFFON, the first sail vessel to course Great Lake waters above Niagara.

"The waterfall" sketched from description of Father Louis Hennepin (2)



The Niagara Peninsula Portage route from Lake Ontario to Lake Erie had been used for many years by pioneers and the indigenous tribes.(3)

The first permanent French structure - the Maison, the Castle - built in the 1720s, still stands on the eastern tip of Niagara River where it empties into Lake Ontario. (4)



The European Seven Years War between France and England, extended to Niagara and Lake Ontario by way of the “French and Indian War” pitting the French and Huron against the British. It was fought, in part, from St Lawrence River, along Lake Ontario into Niagara. The conflict’s end began as the French at Fort Frontenac (Kingston, Fort Henry) were defeated by the British. That success cut off French supply lines to settlements in the Great Lakes. The final battle was fought in 1759 when British General James Wolfe defeated the French forces of Marquis de Montcalm at Quebec City, the capitol of New France. This brought the end to French control of New France: Lower Canada (Quebec), Upper Canada (Ontario), northern New York, and farther west and south.



The British then took over the entire coastline of New York from St Lawrence River to Niagara, including fortifications at Cape Vincent, Fort Ontario at Oswego, and Fort Niagara. Newark (Niagara on the Lake) at the entrance to Niagara was made the new capitol of Upper Canada. After the American Revolution, colonists who remained loyal to the king (Loyalist) went to Canada. Many of them were key to the development of towns in southern and eastern Ontario.

In 1798, a treaty (Jay Treaty) between the Americans and Great Britain allowed American occupation of the lake's fortifications.

Concerned with American military ambitions, Upper Canada's first Governor John Simcoe moved the capitol from Newark to York (Toronto) and ordered building Fort George at Newark on the river's western bank across from Youngstown New York. (Read more: "First Great Lake Lighthouse," in the Library's resource list.) Some of the first skirmishes of the War of 1812 took place on the river above the falls. A number of lake battles took place just off the coastline of the Niagara peninsula. (Read more: "Schooners, Hamilton and Scourge," in the Library's resource list.) The war was wide spread across the new American nation. It ended in 1814 with the Treaty of Ghent. The Rush-Bagot Convention of 1817 between Great Britain and the US established the US Canada border along the Great Lakes and subsequent disarmament of the border. Canons on British Lake Ontario vessels were removed to a storehouse in Kingston. The US Canada border along the 49th parallel is known as the longest unfortified border in the world.

Mid 1800s saw a newspaper publisher from Queenston attempt a rebellion against the British crown's Canadian government. William Lyon Mackenzie had railed for years against aristocratic rule of Upper Canada. Owning a printing press, he became a prolific pamphleteer against "Family Compact" injustices. He organized a contingent of rebels who attempted a take over of Upper Canada from the crown. He began his rebellion with the sinking of the English steam gun ship CAROLINE in the Niagara River. For a while his troops occupied Navy Island in the Niagara. The Patriots Rebellion failed. Its death blow came in a battle and surrender on Cavelton Island in the headwaters of St Lawrence River. Mackenzie was charged with treason, but was never imprisoned in Canada. In fact, he was jailed in Rochester. (Read more: "William Lyon Mackenzie," in the Library resources list. (5)



As the nineteenth century progressed, Niagara became a convenient and strategic crossing place, both above and below the falls. One group of travelers crossing the river were escaped slaves being helped to "Follow the North Star" from plantations in southern United States. Safe houses dotted the river as part of the Underground Railroad, operated by sympathetic Abolitionists who acted as "railroad conductors." Slaves were also given safe passage from ports along the New York shoreline, as well as across St Lawrence River. Several "Negro Colonies," like Wilberforce and Buxton, were established on the Canadian side of the river as refuges for escaped slaves. They existed throughout the province's southwestern region as far west as Detroit River.

Over the decades, several bridges were built. Some collapsed from poor construction, some by ice buildup from the fall's mist. The falls and the river became an entertainment paradise both for leisure and excitement. Many a daredevil pursued a barrel ride over the cataract, or dared to cross the gorge by balancing on a tightrope. Niagara Falls also became known as "The Honeymoon Capitol," which fostered a bustling commerce in lodging and recreation.

The Niagara was and has continued to be a major source of electric power. The enormous flow of upper Great Lakes water cascading over its brink produces millions of watts of electric power each day. This energy source led both cities of Niagara Falls, in Ontario and New York, to become centers of industry. Some of those companies created well known products like shredded wheat cereal. Others created scars on the natural harmony of the river's waters, such as the infamous Love Canal. (6)

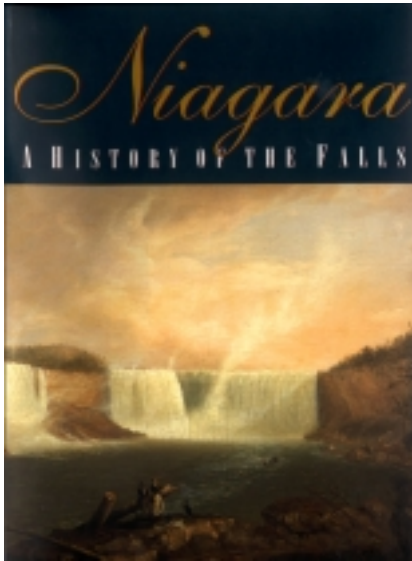


Legendary "Maid of the Mist" (7).



Yearly, millions of commercial and personal vehicles now cross over Niagara on the Lewiston Bridge at Queenston, Rainbow Bridge at the falls, and Peace Bridge at Fort Erie and Buffalo. Ocean vessels circumvent the falls by using the Welland Canal across the Niagara peninsula from Lake Erie to Lake Ontario, along the St Lawrence Seaway to the Atlantic Ocean.

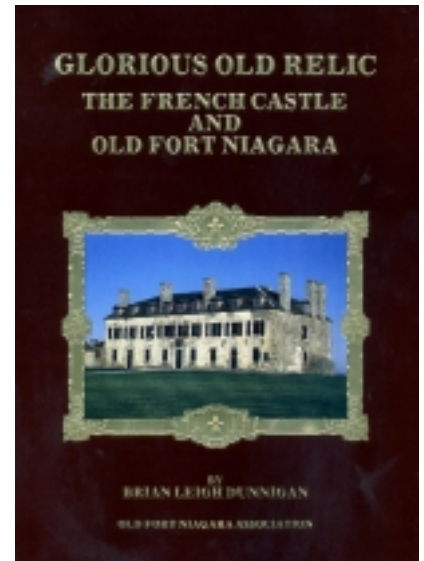
Niagara Frontier is one of the most energetic and exciting areas of the Great Lakes. The Library of Great Lake Ontario suggests further discovery with this assortment of materials. Other resources are widely available.



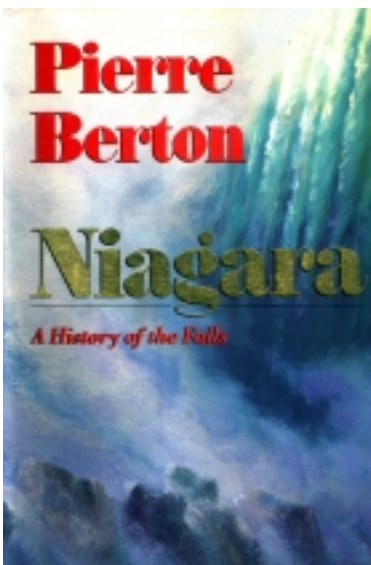
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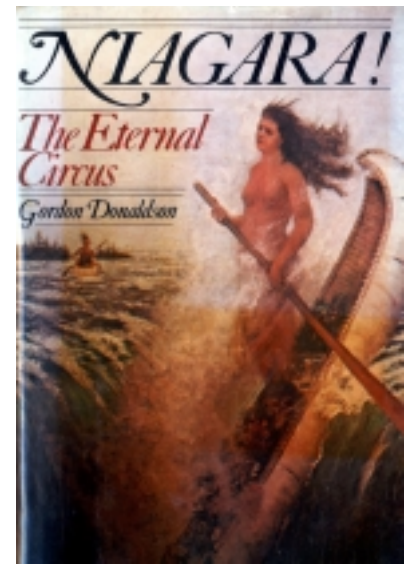
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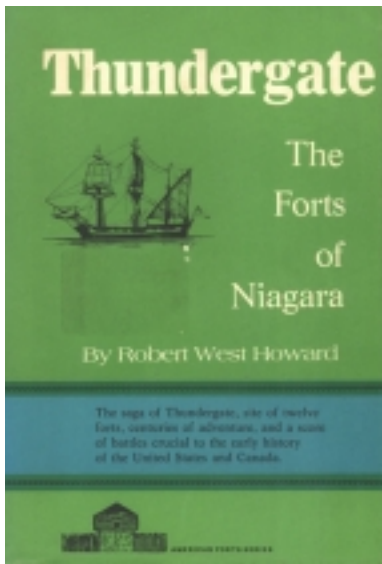
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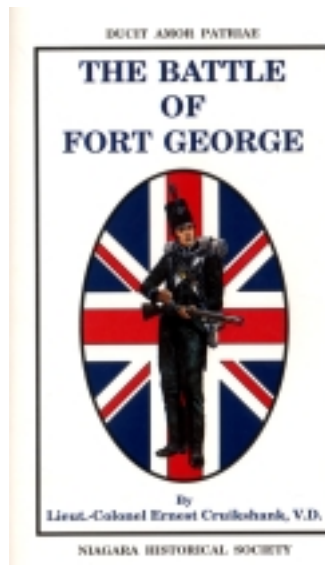
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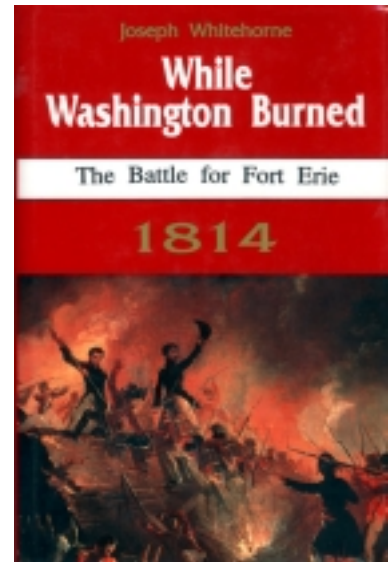
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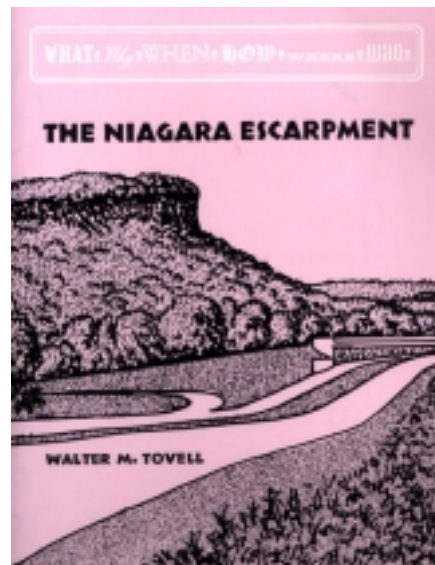
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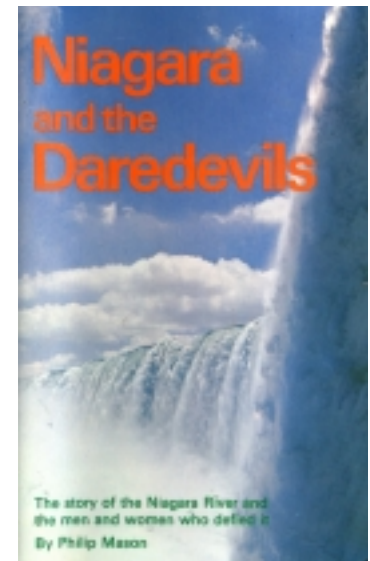
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