



Niagara

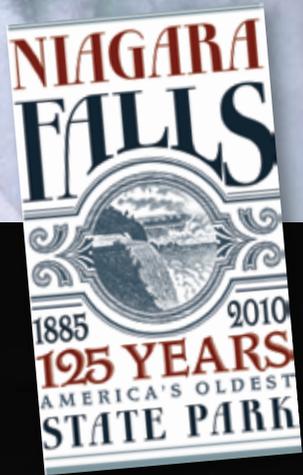
Celebrating 125 Years of Power, Romance and Daredevilry

Carl Heilman II

by Bernadette LaManna

As we enter the waning months of 2010, we mark the culmination of the 125-year anniversary of Niagara Falls State Park. Although a nip of winter chill now accompanies our celebration, mist from the thundering falls freezes on every twig, branch and lightpost, creating a dazzling display of glistening light. And no matter the weather, visitors will see there is much to observe and do in Niagara Falls, often for free or only a nominal fee.

The Niagara Falls are the most powerful waterfalls in North America. Wider than they are high, the falls' water volume peaks in late spring or early summer, and although they are an important source of hydroelectric power, they are probably best known for their beauty. But if it hadn't been for the efforts of a few concerned citizens, the beauty of this natural wonder may have been lost to the public forever.



In the early nineteenth century, businessmen sought to take advantage of the tremendous power of Niagara Falls. They built factories and mills along the Niagara River, with the waste products from these facilities dumped directly into the river. As industry began to rapidly increase, the natural beauty of the area suffered and became mostly inaccessible to the general public.

Alarmed by the changes going on, a small group of people founded the Free Niagara movement in the late 1860s, focusing on preserving the falls and their environs. Led by artist Frederic Edwin Church, landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted and architect Henry Hobson Richardson, Free Niagara saved the falls from being almost exclusively used for industrial and commercial purposes. However, it took nearly two decades before their efforts resulted in legislation that in 1885 created the Niagara Reservation, New York's first state park, now known as Niagara Falls State Park.

Beginning in October 1901, daredevils—the first of whom was 63-year-old Annie Edson Taylor—have used various

Annie Taylor



devices (or nothing at all!) in which to plunge down Niagara Falls. Some died in the attempt, but a surprising number survived, many with relatively minor injuries. Eventually, those who performed such stunts “without permission” and survived were often heavily fined.

Other daredevils walked across tightropes anchored on either side above the falls. Some of them were blindfolded, performed acrobatics, pushed a wheelbarrow across, balanced on a chair, and, in one

***Looking for something to do this winter?
Visit Niagara Falls and join in the celebration.***



John Rozell/OPRHP

case, even carried another man on his shoulders. A museum in town is devoted to these “stunters,” and the graves of many of them, including Mrs. Taylor’s, can be found at Oakwood Cemetery in Niagara Falls, NY.

Even though Niagara Falls is known as the “honeymoon capital of the world,” how it became such a popular site for all things romantic isn’t exactly clear. Some suggest the effect of positive ions spraying out of the mist from the falls is responsible. Although numerous traditional venues are available, couples who want to have a unique wedding experience can even get married on a helicopter as it flies above the falls.

Every night from November through early January, white and colored spotlights alternately illuminate the Horseshoe Falls and the American Falls. This feature might be one reason why so many are drawn to the falls, particularly for vacations or special occasions.

The Prospect Point Observation Tower is located within Niagara Falls State Park and provides spectacular views of the American Falls and the torrents below. For an even closer (and wetter) look, visitors can take an elevator to the base of the gorge and then climb the stairs to the Crow’s Nest, an observation deck. Weather permitting, the tower is open year-round, and admission is free from November until April.

More great sightseeing can be enjoyed along the Niagara Gorge Trail System, which extends from Niagara Falls, NY north to Lewiston, NY, a distance of about 14.5 miles. Guided tours are available.



In the early 1900s daredevils began performing stunts at the falls.

A path from Horseshoe Falls connects to the Upper Great Gorge Trail, leading in turn to Whirlpool Rapids. Whirlpool and Devil’s Hole State Parks can be reached by car. However, visitors who choose to travel on foot should dress appropriately and be prepared for rugged and steep trails. The Robert Moses Parkway Trail is a year-round, multi-use, recreational trail. Three miles long, it can be accessed from the Discovery Center and Whirlpool and Devil’s Hole State Parks.



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From November through early January, colored spotlights alternately illuminate the American Falls (pictured here) and the Horseshoe Falls.



Neil Satterly

Overlooking the American Falls, with Horseshoe Falls in the background.

Instead of hiking for miles, those who prefer to get their exercise and fresh air in smaller doses can visit some of the dozens of historic structures in and around Niagara Falls that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. These range from homes, schools and churches to an armory, a hotel and a post office, many of which were constructed before the Civil War.

No matter the weather, there is much to do and see in Niagara Falls.

The Niagara Falls Visitor Center is open year-round and offers interpretive displays and exhibits, maps and information, a gift shop and eateries. It also houses the Adventure Theater. Admission to the center itself is free. During warm weather, the 1.5 acres of floral gardens outside the center depict the Great Lakes region above the falls with grassy areas shaped like lakes Michigan, Superior, Huron and Erie. In addition, a walkway follows the course of the Niagara River.

Knowledgeable guides share the history of the park on a comfortable, half-hour scenic trolley ride, during which visitors can get off at one or more of the six stops along the three-mile route. Although the trolleys have a vintage look, they run on natural gas and are prominent in Niagara Falls' "Green Park Project," which received the 2006 Clean Air Excellence Award.

The Niagara Gorge Discovery Center showcases the natural and local history of Niagara Falls and the surrounding area. Visitors can enjoy interactive displays, take a virtual elevator

trip into the gorge, experience 12,000 years of the Niagara River in the 180° multi-screen theater, or climb a 26-foot rock wall that resembles the walls of the gorge, complete with fossils and geological formations.

In December and early January, a variety of traditional holiday-related activities and events are scheduled in Niagara Falls and the surrounding area. In addition, the Charles Rand

Penney Collection of prints of Niagara Falls will be on display at the Castellani Art Museum at Niagara University. This collection is the largest of its kind in the world and includes the earliest known painting of the falls—Father Louis Hennepin's "Chute d'eau de Niagara" (1698). Images throughout the collection reflect the historic and cultural changes that have occurred in Niagara Falls since the seventeenth century and illustrate the city's significance to American history.

So if you're looking for something to do this winter, visit Niagara Falls and join in the park's celebration. With a variety of historical and cultural entertainment, there's plenty to do and see.

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