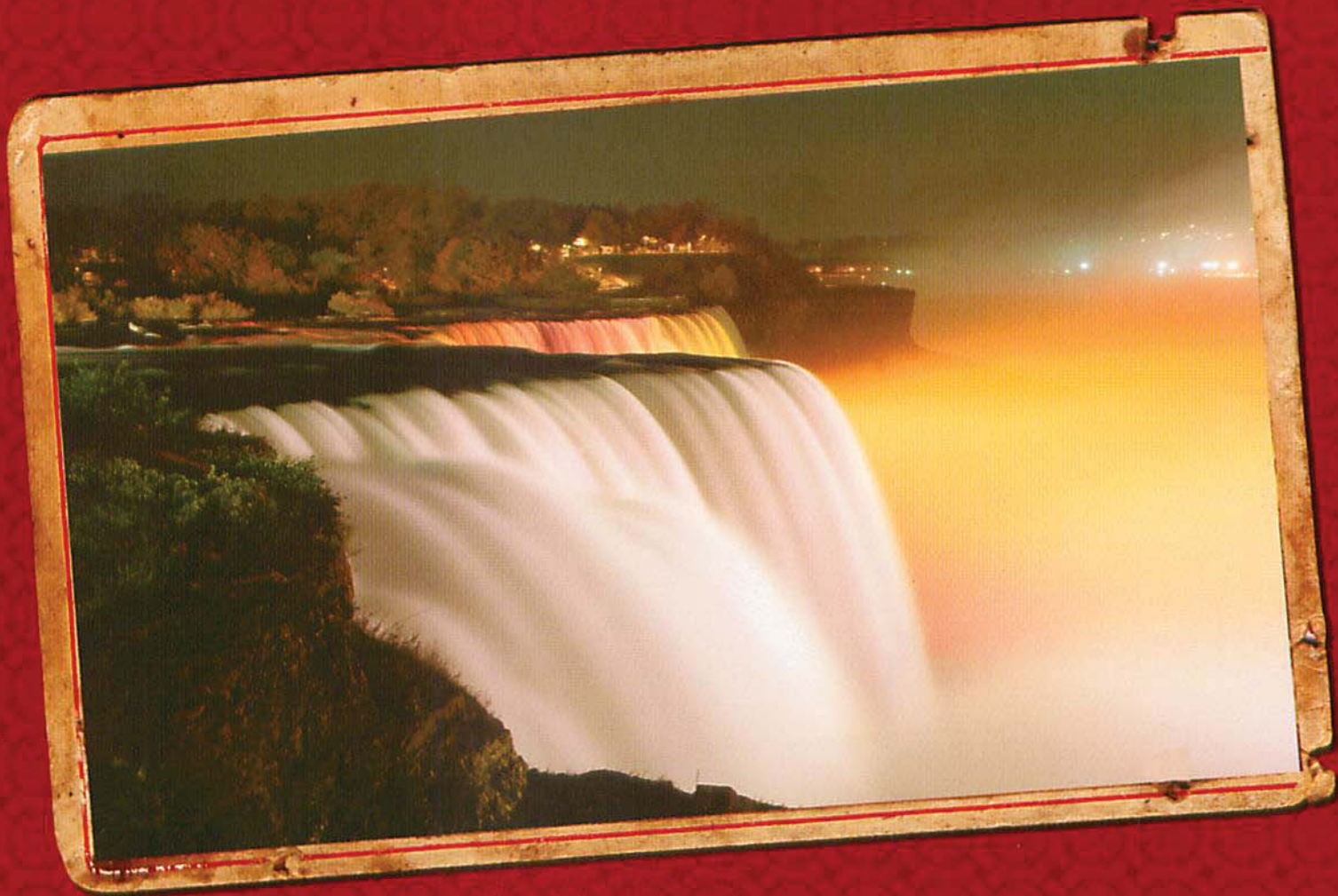


Part Three



Key Interpretive Themes and National Heritage Area Criteria

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Key Interpretive Themes and National Heritage Area Criteria



Re-enactors assemble on Parade Ground at Old Fort Niagara

Key Interpretive Themes

The key interpretive themes identified by the study team are derived from a number of sources including the region's history and its extant resources, previous efforts to define the region such as *Rethinking Niagara*, current interpretive materials offered at existing attractions such as the Orin Lehman Visitor Center at the Niagara Falls State Park or Old Fort Niagara, as well as input from local experts and the public. To summarize the region's history, a historic context statement was prepared by historians on the study team. The text of the historic context statement may be found in Appendix H. It is also important to emphasize that the identification of themes was largely guided by existing related resources. In considering which themes most adequately described the area and its resources, an inventory of identified, natural, cultural, and recreational resources located within the primary study area was undertaken. Based on an analysis of this information, the team identified the themes that were the most cohesive, pervasive, and distinctive in relation to the identified resources.

The four themes are meant to be broad and comprehensive so that they are able to capture a wide range of pertinent stories and individual sites.

Potential Niagara National Heritage Area Themes

1. Natural Phenomenon

At Niagara we encounter a natural phenomenon that is overwhelming in its magnitude and deeply embedded in popular consciousness. Over Niagara Falls courses the outflow of four of the Great Lakes. To understand the distinctive characteristics of the region, the primary focus must be on this unparalleled resource and the geological processes that formed it.

Geographically, this theme is probably the most narrowly focused but opens a wide range of possible interconnections. Focused on the Falls, the natural phenomenon theme embraces the Gorge and rapids. It includes the prehistoric origin of the Falls at the Niagara Escarpment at Lewiston.



View to Whirlpool Rapids Bridge from the Niagara Gorge Trail

Valuable programmatic links can be made to other portions of the Niagara Escarpment and, indeed, throughout the Great Lakes region. Niagara is one of the major points at which the origin of the entire Great Lakes drainage system can be presented in compelling terms. An example of an approach to capturing the visitor's interest would be to discuss how the Niagara River displays almost none of the characteristics of a typical river. Like the Detroit River, the Niagara River is essentially a strait separating nearby land masses and linking adjacent bodies of water—in this case, Lakes Erie and Ontario.

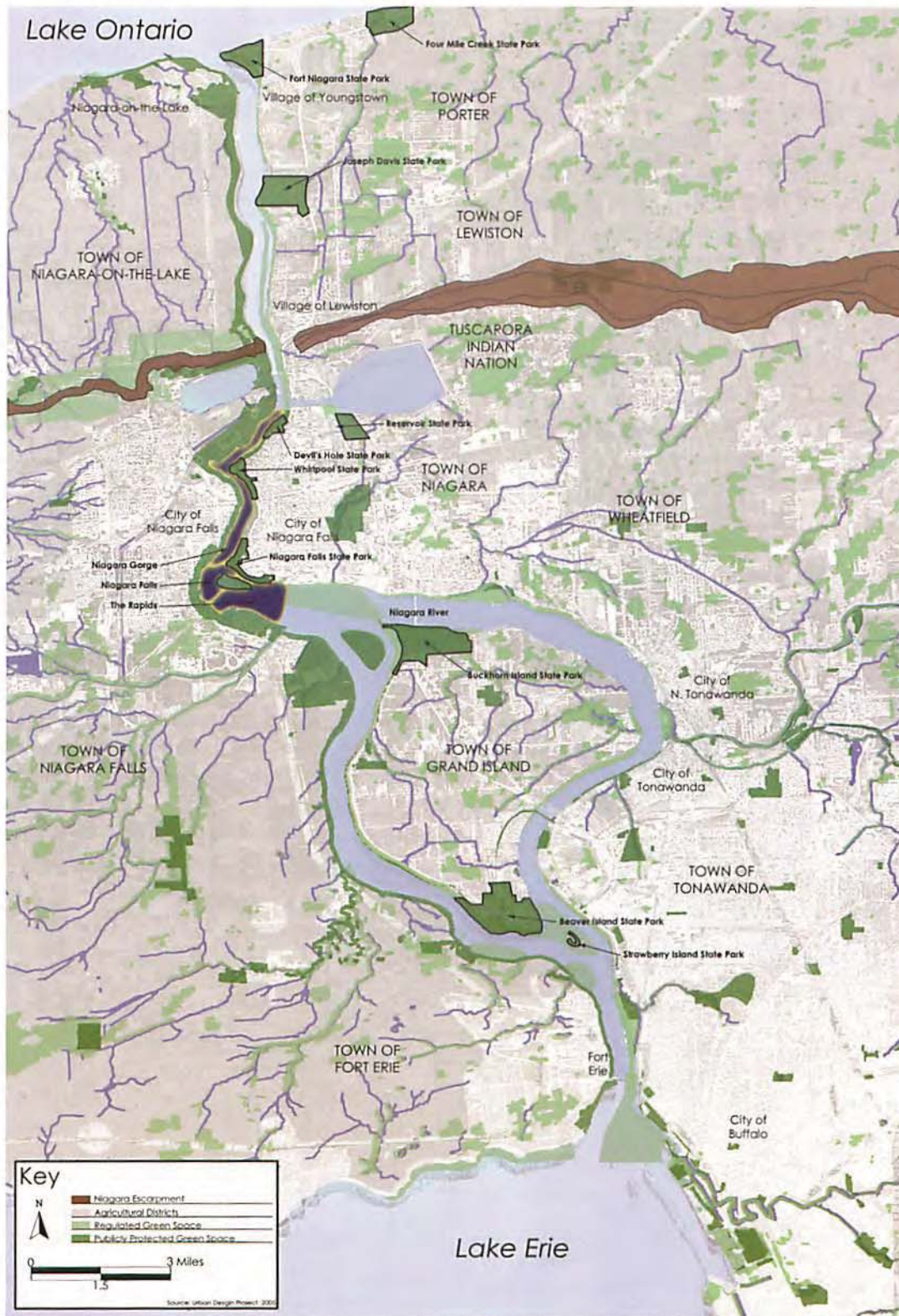
This is a descriptive, physical theme, which presents a geological basis for the dramatic spectacle that visitors come to see. Like the Grand Canyon, the processes are still active and the “story” is easy to read. This theme also accommodates the full range of natural resources including the unusual plant and animal communities that flourish due to microclimates in the area.

The remaining three themes are cultural. They describe how people have perceived and made use of the compelling natural resource.

Niagara is one of the major points at which the origin of the entire Great Lakes drainage system can be presented in compelling terms

2. Tourism and Recreation

This theme addresses the development of Niagara Falls as a cultural symbol and a tourist attraction. Niagara offers an exceptional opportunity to examine American responses to the natural world. From their first encounters with the Falls until well into the 19th century, Europeans and their American descendants beheld Niagara with awe, perceiving it as an outstanding expression of the “sublime.” To these early visitors the spectacle was emblematic of the New World, in which everything appeared outsized and limitless. Niagara exemplified the concept of wilderness, with the grandeur and terror it represented.



With Niagara firmly established as an extraordinary phenomenon, it became a favored destination of travelers and is representative in large measure of the evolution of tourism in the nation as a whole. Completion of the Erie Canal in 1825 made Niagara Falls easily accessible for the first time. Thereafter, the story has been largely one of making Niagara available to an ever broader portion of the population. During this process, a place that had once appeared as the supreme manifestation of the sublime became over the next century a byword for tasteless commercial exploitation.

Later in the 19th century, Niagara emerged as a major battleground between divergent visions of the value and meaning of the Falls and the natural environment in general.

*Niagara Falls Reservation
was an early triumph of the
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and became a major influence
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national parks.*

Educated, urban, progressive forces battled to protect the integrity of the natural wonder in the face of economic exploitation by tourism, manufacturing, and hydropower generation. The founder of landscape architecture and the public park movement in America, Frederick Law Olmsted, was a leader in this preservation movement. He lobbied for and eventually designed Niagara Falls Reservation (recently renamed Niagara Falls State Park), which was established in 1885. Niagara Falls Reservation was an early triumph of the American conservation movement and became a major influence on the creation of national parks. The story of this period, its contributions to the national conservation movement, and its relationship to the creation of

today's National Park System should be a key facet of this theme. Under Olmsted's carefully developed conception, he attempted to shift the focus from the raw terror of the Falls to a constructed park environment that was intended to inspire contemplation. The public appreciated the new Reservation, and visitation skyrocketed.

Tourism at Niagara Falls and debates over its direction have continued through more than a century since the creation of the state park. The intervening period witnessed the growth of mass tourism, the rise and decline of the honeymoon phenomenon, and the development of the Robert Moses Parkway in the 1960s. The general image of Niagara Falls was harmed by the decline of local industry and the failure of urban renewal programs to revitalize the city of Niagara Falls in the 1960s through 1980s. More recently, there have been proactive efforts to reinvent tourism. These include \$44 million worth of improvements in visitor amenities at Niagara Falls State Park and the Seneca Niagara Casino, which opened December 31, 2002.

The tourism theme is centered on the Falls and related tourist attractions and facilities in the immediate vicinity. There is less potential for interpretive links reaching further into the Niagara Region. One relationship that could prove fruitful is with the Erie Canal, which provided much of the route genteel travelers followed to Niagara Falls early in the 19th century, creating an American version of the Grand Tour.

This theme asks present-day visitors to consider the evolution of travel rituals. The study of tourism history covers, in addition to relevant landscapes and landmarks (many 19th- and 20th-century hotels and attractions have been lost to redevelopment) near the Niagara River, the astonishing array of tourist traditions and memorabilia that human ingenuity created in order to interpret an overpowering natural feature. The memorabilia takes the form of guidebooks, advertisements, postcards, posters, photographs and news accounts that are now located in both public and private collections. Such materials are available in the local history room of the Niagara Falls Public Library, the collections of Niagara University, and in the archives of local newspapers such as the Niagara Gazette. The

tourism theme also includes the traditions of outrageous, risky behavior that have flourished at Niagara such as high-wire acts and riding a “barrel” over the falls. These latter activities have colored the folklore of the Niagara Region.

Whereas these themes in general can apply on either side of the international boundary, this one allows a meaningful distinction to be made between the two sides. The American side’s Niagara Falls State Park and, particularly, Goat Island is less commercialized and more naturalistic than the Canadian side. Visitors to the island can encounter the natural resource in a way that is more intimate and accessible, with the potential to obtain a more direct awareness of the conflicts that led to the creation of the state park and what Olmsted sought to accomplish there. The Canadian side is more intensively developed for visitor use and is characterized by formal gardens and promenades, a multiple-use recreational trail, and shops, restaurants, arcades, amusements, gambling casinos, and other visitor amenities. (The American side has developed more of these tourism attractions farther away from the Falls).

3. Power and Industry

This theme also derives from human use of Niagara Falls. In the generation of electric power and the resultant industrial development, Niagara presents a major story of technology and its consequences. The enterprise is notable for its magnitude, its innovation, its elaborate planning, and the element of binational cooperation. Contributing resources are the present and former generating plants, power canals, reservoirs, and related infrastructure.

Like the preceding, this theme is strongly focused around the Falls and the Gorge. Thematic links could embrace industries dependent on Niagara power, but the potential may be limited by the fact that the general decline of American manufacturing has reduced the number of industrial plants in existence. Surviving plants may be off-limits for safety reasons or may be inherently uninteresting to the majority of visitors.

Although the hydropower of the Falls had been used to a limited degree during the latter half of the



Power generation evident in Niagara landscape

19th century, technical advances in the 1890s made it possible to truly harness their potential. By 1900, the violent cataract that had awed early sightseers had been tamed so that its flow could be fully regulated for hydroelectric generation. This triumph was celebrated conspicuously at the 1901 Pan-American Exposition, which, though held at Buffalo, was powered and inspired by Niagara Falls.

Although hydroelectric generation and tourism and preservation might seem antithetical, they have coexisted for a long time. As William Irwin described in *The New Niagara* (1996), during the early 20th century it was believed that the two uses could flourish side by side without detriment to either. Some technological advocates believed that Niagara Falls seemed to be leading the way toward a more benign and humane industrial system powered by abundant electricity. For a time this “New Niagara” seemed so marvelous that industrial plants such as the Shredded Wheat factory became tourist attractions. Niagara power illuminated the Falls for the edification of tourists; and the Gorge electric railway, though not intrinsically different from trolley lines everywhere, reminded them of the influence and potential of electricity. When diversion of the Falls for energy purposes threatened Niagara’s scenic qualities, however, the International Joint Commission was established in 1909 to manage a diversion regime that balanced preservation and energy needs.

Figure 3: Tourism & Recreation Theme — Resources

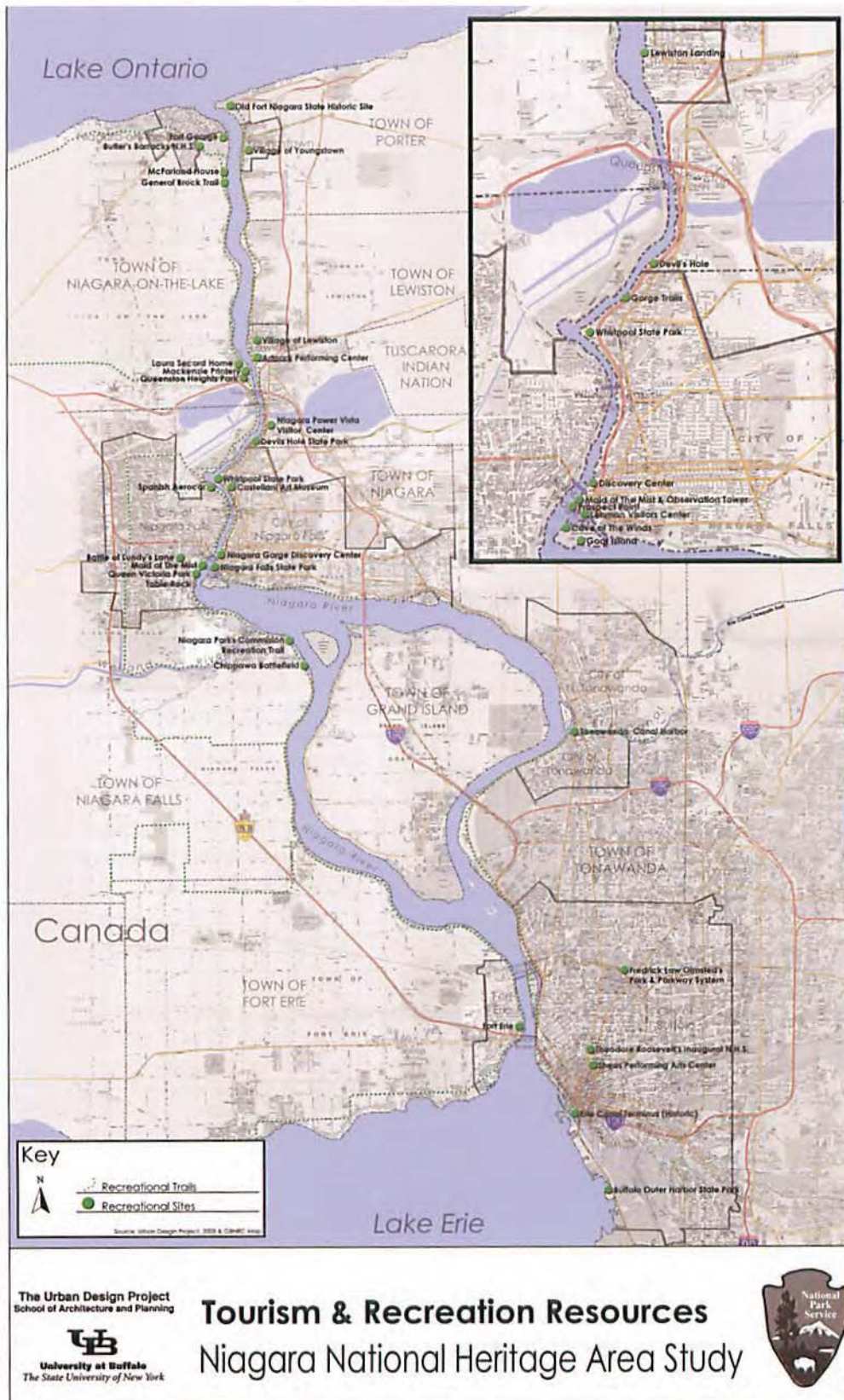
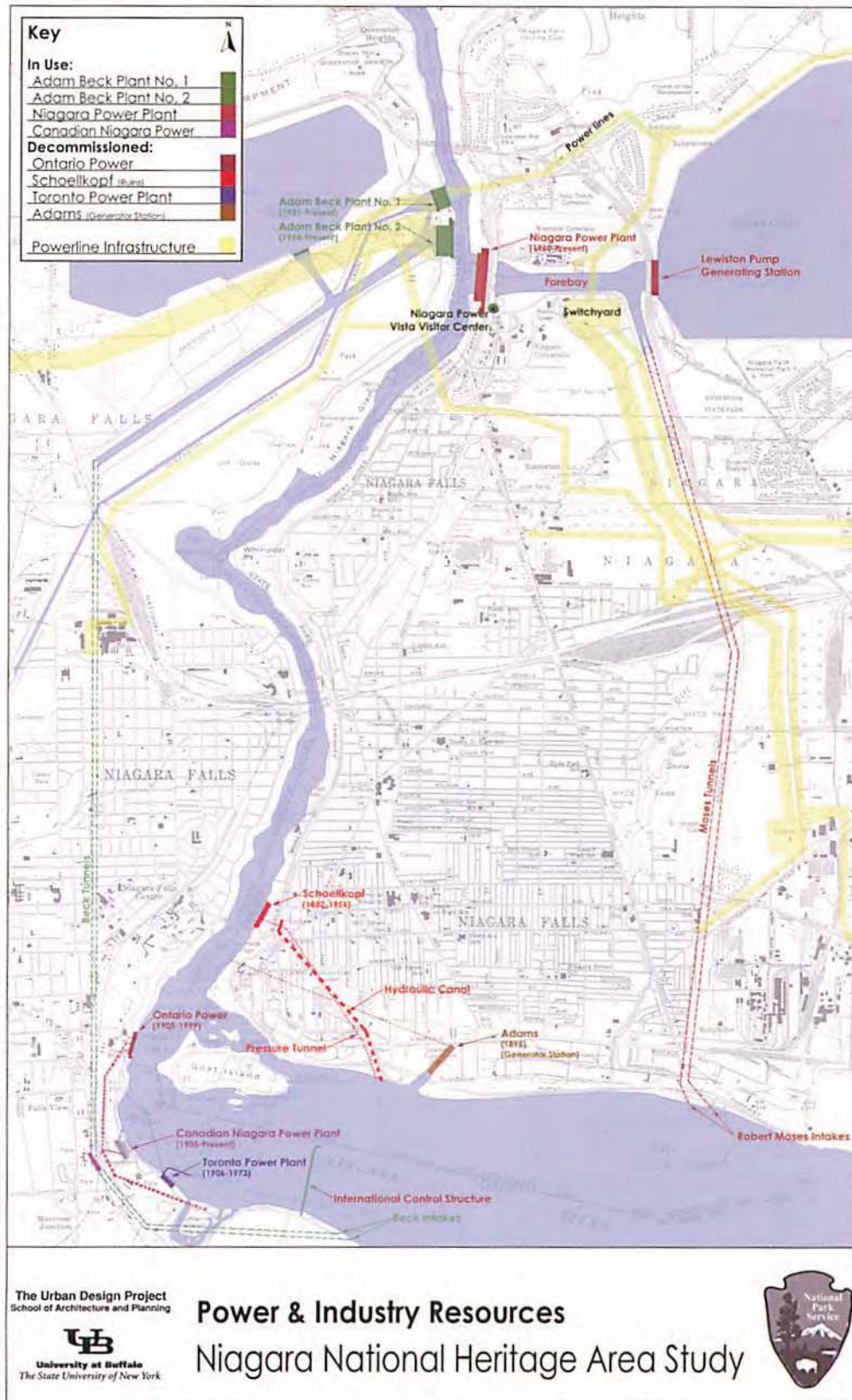


Figure 4: Power & Industry Theme —
Resources



The current Robert Moses Niagara Power Plant began generating electricity in 1961. At the time of its construction it was the largest hydropower facility in the western world. Today it is the biggest electricity producer in New York State. The development of



Water outlet for hydropower plant

the Niagara Power Projects infrastructure, including the Power Vista Visitor Center and the Robert Moses Parkway, was envisioned and carried out by the politically shrewd and tenacious Robert Moses, then chairman of the New York Power Authority. Known as the “Master Builder,” Robert Moses held sway over major public works projects across the state of New York over five decades, reshaping the character of urban and regional landscapes.

One of the byproducts of industry and urban development at Niagara Falls was pollution. For years, industries spewed untreated wastes and the municipality emptied untreated sewage into the Niagara River until cleanup efforts went into effect in the latter 20th century. Pollution led to the loss of fish and wildlife habitats. Industries in the area also deposited hazardous wastes in the ground and smaller watercourses, with the most notable example being Love Canal, which spurred major national cleanup efforts starting in the late 1970s. This pollution and subsequent remediation efforts illustrate the theme of “Transforming the Environment,” from the NPS Thematic Framework.

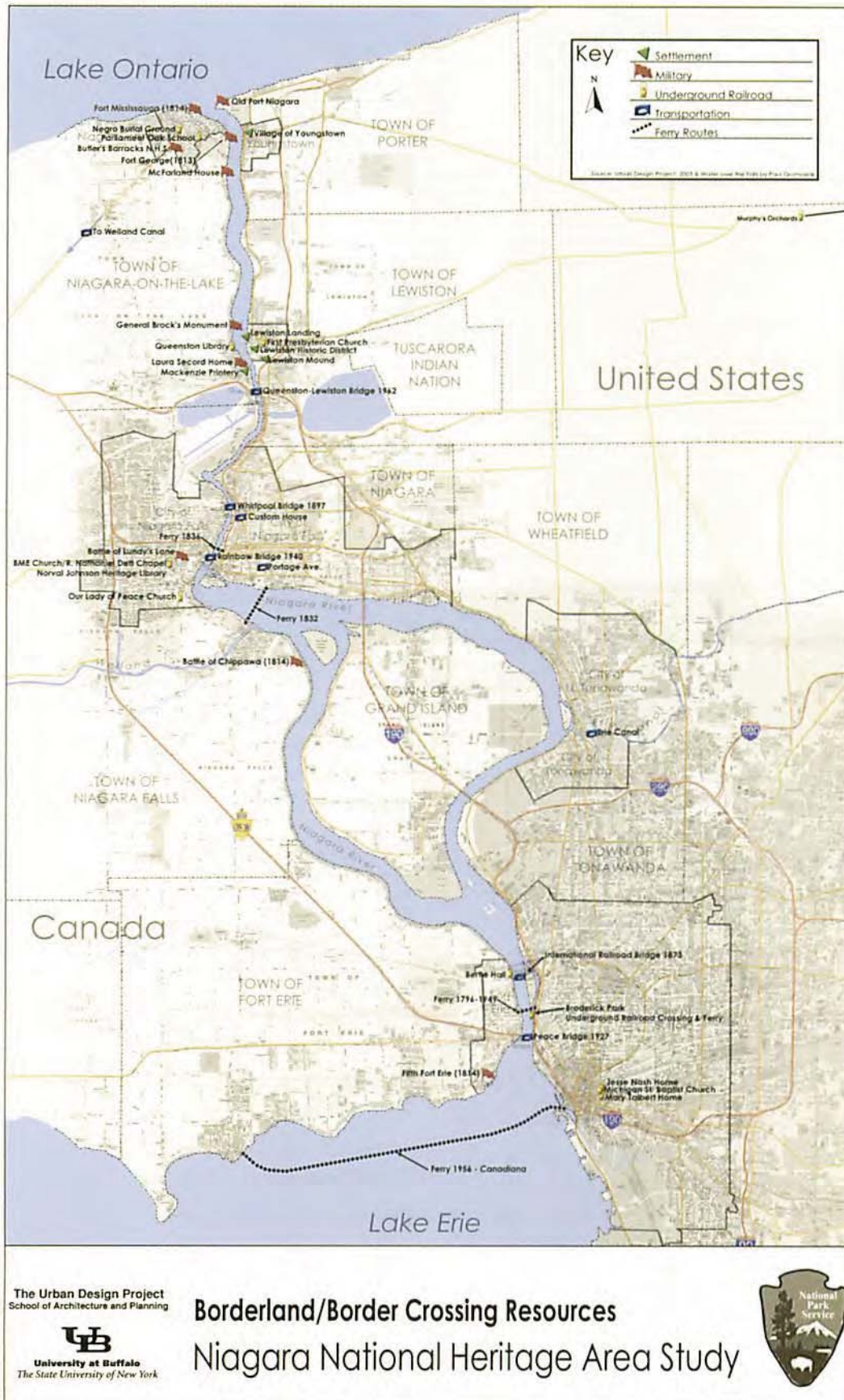
4. Borderland/Border Crossing

Niagara’s position on an international boundary has shaped its character in a number of ways. Whereas the preceding themes would be applicable even if the Niagara Region lay entirely within one nation, this theme depends on the accident of history that placed an international boundary down the center of the Niagara River. The region was a center of conflict, first between the colonial powers of France and Great Britain, then between the United States and its former colonial ruler. If the continent had been settled and divided along different lines, both by Indians and Europeans, the Niagara Region might not have become a zone of contention.

The most obvious reminder of this theme lies in the evidence of military activity. Fort Niagara is the most conspicuous historic landmark on the American side, though resources such as the remains of military portage roads, sites of camps, temporary field fortifications, and burial places would also contribute. The last formal military action occurred during the War of 1812, but defensive preparations, military threats, and mutual wariness persisted through much of the 19th century.

Even in the absence of overt conflict, the existence of the boundary has had far-reaching implications. The area was an important passage to the Great Lakes and the interior of the continent and contains resources that express its character as both a barrier and gateway. Undoubtedly the boundary influenced transportation developments, as each nation felt compelled to create transportation facilities skirting Niagara Falls.

Despite the friendly relations that have long endured between the United States and Canada the border is the longest undefended international boundary in the world—the boundary at Niagara remains consequential. Legal and social differences between the two nations in the period before the American Civil War made the Niagara Frontier one of many important destinations in the operation of the Underground Railroad. There have been considerable and revealing differences in each nation’s approach to tourism. The harnessing of hydroelectric power at the Falls has required binational



agreements and treaties. Security issues resulting from the attacks of September 11, 2001 make this theme as current as today's headlines.

The long-time presence of Indian tribes in the Niagara Region places the "borderland" theme in a somewhat different perspective, since their presence predated the European-imposed concept of "border." In the centuries prior to the establishment of the border between the United States and Canada, various tribes contested control of the area. After the American Revolution and the settlement of both side of the border by Americans and British Loyalists, the Indian tribes lost much of their land. The Tuscaroras, on the American side, and other members of the Six Nations, on the Canadian side, were limited to control of relatively small reservations. These reservations testify to the continued presence of these Nations in the Niagara Region. The historical Indian presence is also conveyed by the region's place names, including Ontario, Erie, Tonawanda, Cheektowaga, Chippawa, Mississauga, and Onondaga. The word "Niagara," once thought to mean "thunder of the waters" more probably means, "neck," to described the strait between Lake Erie and Lake Ontario.⁵

The "borderland" theme can be more expansive in both geographical and interpretive scope. Contemporary scholars David L. Herzberg, Robert Shibley, and Bradshaw Hovey have described a sprawling border region in which people on both sides of the boundary feel an affinity and have sometimes been able to make beneficial accommodations despite contrary official policies. This interpretation can address an array of economic and social issues that are in some way dependent on the existence of an international boundary. However a border region may be conceptualized, its center will inevitably lie along the Niagara River, and the feature that most strongly defines its character will be the Falls. The "border region" concept could inspire programmatic connections that would call increased attention to Niagara Falls by explaining its importance in a larger context.

*No other national heritage
area contains a natural resource
with the global recognition
of Niagara Falls.*

Relationship to National Park Service Thematic Framework

The four heritage themes of the Niagara Falls area fit within the revised "Thematic Framework" (<http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/thematic.html>) that the National Park Service adopted in 1994 for interpreting the role of historic sites in American history. The National Park Service has identified eight major historic themes that cover the full span of our nation's history. Of these, the heritage resources of the Niagara Falls area fit mainly into the following NPS categories:

1. Expressing Cultural Values
(Tourism and Recreation)
2. Transforming the Environment
(Natural Phenomenon; Tourism and Recreation, Power and Industry)
3. Developing the American Economy
(Power and Industry, Tourism and Recreation)
4. Expanding Science and Technology
(Power and Industry)
5. Changing Role of the United States in the World Community (Borderland)
6. Peopling Places (Borderland)
7. Creating Social Institutions and Movements
(Borderland)

In comparison with other national heritage areas, the Niagara Falls area is suitable for interpretation of a range of themes that are not interpreted by other national heritage areas.

Application of NPS National Heritage Area Criteria

The following heritage area evaluation applies the National Park Service's Interim Criteria for National Heritage Areas as described in Part One. Criteria 1 through 5 apply specifically to the composition and integrity of the resources contained within the study area. The remaining criteria apply to aspects of feasibility such as community support, organizational capacity, and level of civic engagement.

1. The area has an assemblage of natural, historic, or cultural resources that together represent distinctive aspects of American heritage worthy of recognition, conservation, interpretation, and continuing use, and are best managed as such an assemblage, through partnerships among public and private entities, and by combining diverse and sometimes noncontiguous resources and active communities.

Niagara Falls is a world-renowned scenic attraction and is a prominent feature located at one of the most highly used international gateways to the United States. It has been a major tourist destination for nearly 200 years and to a large extent epitomizes the evolution of tourism in the U.S. Its

fame has been based on being an authentic resource, a geological wonder of overwhelming magnitude. This outstanding geological feature forms the inescapable core that defines the assemblage of resources in the surrounding region. It is unique in North America and is enormously significant as a cultural icon. The Niagara Frontier has played an influential role in defining the international border between the United States and Canada. No other national heritage area contains a natural resource with the global recognition of Niagara Falls.

The geological resource centers on the spectacular Falls themselves and embraces related features such as the Rapids, the Niagara River Gorge, the Cave of the Winds, the Whirlpool, and Devil's Hole. Niagara Falls State Park embraces land near the Falls itself, and Devils Hole and the Whirlpool are also state parks. Considerable land in the Gorge is publicly owned through the New York Power Authority. Another state-owned facility, the Niagara Gorge Discovery Center (formerly the Schoellkopf Geological Museum) is operated by OPRHP and interprets the remarkable geology visible from its overlooks.

Niagara River Gorge Rapids



Even where features have been developed as tourist attractions, such as the Cave of the Winds, the observation tower, and the Maid of the Mist boat, their appeal is rooted in the geology of the Falls, and they relate a segment of the dramatic geological story. The city of Niagara Falls also contains a number of commercial tourist attractions whose presence does not directly derive from the resource itself, but which draw on the vast assemblage of people brought there by the natural resource. For instance, long-established local institutions like the Niagara Falls Wax Museum offer insights into how the place has been traditionally interpreted for the visiting public, in contrast to the state park's new visitor orientation facility which offers a more contemporary presentation of information to visitors. Additionally, two historic hotels remain in downtown Niagara Falls: the Hotel Niagara, currently operated by Travelodge and the Red Coach Inn, both constructed during the 1920s.

Niagara Falls State Park, especially Goat Island, is a particularly valuable resource due to its central role in the history of tourism and the struggle to preserve the integrity of the natural resource, in which noted landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted figured prominently.



Maid of the Mist at Horseshoe Falls

Much of the rest of the history of tourism at Niagara Falls has been obscured by subsequent development or, like the various stunts that have enlivened the story, is essentially ephemeral. Periodic physical change has also obliterated features that once were celebrated tourist locales. By necessity, much of this story must depend on collections of tourist literature and memorabilia. The local history department of the Niagara Falls Public Library includes substantial collections related to the history of tourism in the city. Niagara University in Lewiston has created a digital library of 19th-century Niagara Falls guidebooks.

Of the other themes that have been identified as characterizing Niagara Falls, power generation is well represented by the New York Power Authority's Power Vista and other visible contemporary facilities like the power station and intake towers. Historic features like the Adams Power Plant transformer house, a National Historic Landmark (NHL), and other traces of former power plants and canals are also evident including the ruins of the earlier Schoellkopf Power Plant. The Holley-Rankine House is considered important primarily for its architecture, but is related to the history of Niagara's power generation and industrial growth. (From 1902 to 1905 it was the residence of William B. Rankine, who was active in the Niagara Falls Power Co., which earlier had built the Adams Power Plant.) The James G. Marshall House, home of the founder of Union Carbide, also conveys the depth of the region's industrial contributions. The Canadian side presents a parallel set of power-related resources, notably the Sir Adam Beck Generating Station No. 2. Although some of the industrial infrastructure remains visible, the industrial identity of Niagara Falls, New York has become less evident with the general decline of manufacturing in the region and the nation as a whole.

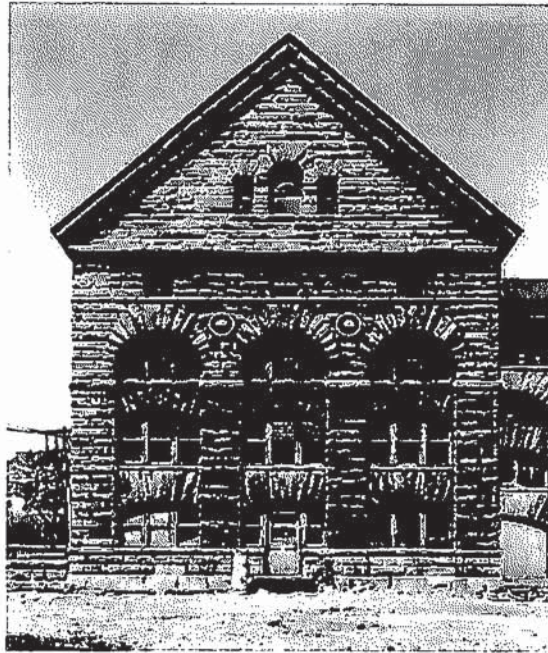
The theme of Niagara Falls as the scene of international rivalry is represented in the United States by Fort Niagara and related archeological resources within the Colonial Niagara NHL, but the theme is not represented extensively throughout the region. Other resources, such as the old Niagara Falls Customs House, several international bridges, and the present-day border-crossing facilities, testify to

the importance of the international boundary in defining the region's character. It is interesting to note in this context that the indigenous people who continue to live in the region do not, in theory, acknowledge an international boundary at all. In an annual ceremony, the Iroquois people of Canada and the U.S. cross the border to underscore its seamlessness to them as a community.

Despite the presence of Fort Niagara on the United States side, Canada contains more extensive evidence of international conflict and military preparation. The War of 1812 brought much military action and destruction to the New York side, but there are few landmarks and other evidence of these events at historic sites. Major battlefields and related resources from this conflict are preserved in Canada, notably the Chippawa Battlefield, the Queenston Heights Battlefield and Brock's Monument, the Laura Secord Homestead, and Old Fort Erie. This exemplifies the point that although each nation contains significant resources, Niagara is truly a binational region whose story cannot be adequately comprehended on only one side of the border. As our nation approaches the 200th anniversary of the War of 1812, the important role of the Niagara Falls region in this conflict offers opportunities for tourism based interpretation and education about this major event in U.S. history.

Even in the absence of overt conflict, the existence of the boundary had far-reaching implications on other aspects of life. The area was an important passage to the Great Lakes and the interior of the continent and contains resources that express its character as both barrier and gateway. Remaining evidence of landings, portages, and military roads reflects this. Undoubtedly the boundary influenced transportation developments, as each nation felt compelled to create transportation facilities that bypassed Niagara Falls.

The Erie Canal, which was built to carry trade of the Great Lakes to the Hudson River and New York City, avoided Niagara Falls by opening into Lake Erie. The Welland Canal runs from Lake Erie to Lake Ontario parallel to the Niagara River on the Canadian side.



Adams Power Transformer Station

The study area contains some notable cultural facilities, such as the ArtPark at Lewiston and the Castellani Art Museum on the campus of Niagara University, but the city of Buffalo, with a constellation of cultural facilities, has created a stronger overall identity as a regional cultural center. Buffalo's notable historic architecture has emerged as one of the city's greatest assets in defining and marketing itself in the post-industrial era, but this asset is only indirectly related to the geological phenomenon of Niagara Falls.

Niagara has inspired many artists to paint, etch, or photograph the Falls. Many such images can be found at local museums: the Castellani Art Museum, in Niagara Falls (on the campus of Niagara University) and the Albright-Knox Art Museum and the Burchfield-Penney Art Museum, both in Buffalo. The Albright-Knox collection, for example, includes images of Niagara Falls by artists Thomas Cole, Frederic Church, John Ferguson Weir, and Hiroshi Yoshida.

Considering that the defining themes of the area that have been identified in this study derive directly from a shared geological configuration, the lack of a coordinating entity hinders the full appreciation of the resource assemblage. This is true not only between the two nations, but within each of them as well. A number of private, nonprofit advocacy groups and friends groups, in addition to New York State agencies and municipalities, are concerned in some way with resource management and tourist promotion, but there is no overarching organization or forum in which these interests can be harmonized or comprehensively discussed.



Path at Prospect Point, Naigara Falls State Park

Regional tourism development requires a clear, strategic vision as well as strong leadership and sustained coordination among managers of parks and operators of tourist attractions and amenities. It is also important to identify and nurture mutually beneficial binational opportunities in the Niagara Region. Ad hoc cooperation has sometimes been effective, but an overall coordinating body could promote constructive actions such as program creation, development of thematic links, shared publicity, uniform signage and publications in short, the features that would give the region a more unified identity. Such cooperative and collaborative efforts could also apply to enhancing resource protection and interpretation directly or through marshaling greater public promotion and stewardship of heritage resources.

Organizations like the Binational Niagara Tourism Alliance and the Institute for Local Governance and Regional Growth are currently engaged in efforts to formalize some of these ad hoc cooperative initiatives. While their efforts have been far-reaching, at this time their emphasis is on marketing and promotion rather than resource protection and interpretive programming.

2. The area reflects traditions, customs, beliefs, and folk life that are a valuable part of the nation's story.

The longtime presence of the Seneca and Tuscarora Nations near the Niagara River suggests that the resources that are essential to the character of the Niagara Region are also of great importance to these American Indian nations and may be considered ethnographic resources.

The presence of native peoples in the area stretches back thousands of years. During the colonial era, the Indian tribes played an important role as participants in the struggle for empire between the English and the French, and later between the English and the Americans. Incorporation of Native American traditions and participation of tribes in heritage area planning and implementation would add significantly to visitors' understanding of these important aspects of our nation's history.

The 200-year-old tradition of tourism at Niagara Falls has created local traditions and inspired certain beliefs in American culture such as the American

“Grand Tour,” the Niagara Falls honeymoon, and automobile-based, working-class getaways. The local traditions are carried on by both local residents servicing the tourist trade and by the tourists themselves, who follow certain patterns when visiting the Falls. Beyond the local context, Niagara Falls has played an important role in American culture, serving as a symbol of the boundless wilderness, the divine providence inherent in nature, the potential for economic and social transformation embodied in hydroelectric power, and both the despoliation and preservation of natural wonders.

It is apparent that a type of folk life of tourism has evolved at Niagara Falls. Living in the presence of an internationally famed attraction has formed a distinctive set of attitudes that sets the area apart from neighboring portions of New York. Generations of local families have participated in the tourism industry as business owners, hoteliers, restaurateurs, tour guides and purveyors of Niagara souvenirs, and as visitors. Local ownership of the tourism infrastructure has declined as larger corporate interests from outside the region have taken hold.

Beginning with 19th-century tightrope walkers and extending through an assortment of individuals who performed stunts at the Falls, Niagara gained a reputation as a raffish sort of place, where unconventional, often risky behavior occurred. Present-day Clifton Hill, in Niagara Falls, Ontario, may represent a more controlled residual expression of this carnival atmosphere. Niagara Falls is a natural resource that has long been exploited for commercial gain. As historian Karen Dubinsky has explained in *The Second Greatest Disappointment: Honeymooning and Tourism at Niagara Falls* (1999), honeymoons at Niagara Falls are a folkway of North American mass culture. Further study is needed to understand exactly how tourism folkways and traditions developed.

Contemporary observers David L. Herzberg, Robert Shibley, and Bradshaw Hovey, in “Rethinking the Niagara Frontier” (2001), have described a sprawling but not sharply edged border region in which people on both sides of the boundary feel an affinity and have sometimes been able to make beneficial accommodations despite different official regimes. Under this conception, inhabitants of this Frontier region have developed a sensibility

shaped by subtle and fluctuating differences between the two nations combined with the relative ease of travel between the two.

One example of this kind of cross-border tradition, which is now receiving increasing recognition, is the Underground Railroad, the system of escape routes that helped black people enslaved in the United States reach freedom in Canada. Well-known Underground Railroad “conductor,” Harriet Tubman, is known to have traveled through Niagara Falls en route to St. Catharines in Ontario. Despite the inherent difficulty of documenting sites that were supposed to be secret, many have been identified; both New York and Ontario have made considerable progress in this direction. In addition, a local tour operator focuses on Underground Railroad stories.

3. *The area provides outstanding opportunities to conserve natural, historic, cultural, and/or scenic features.*

Niagara Falls State Park preserves vital land on the American side of the Falls, and much of the gorge is similarly in public ownership under NYS OPRHP or the New York Power Authority. In recent years New York State has improved visitor facilities at Niagara Falls State Park to enhance the visitor experience. International agreements protect the scenic qualities of the Falls and regulate the flow of the Falls themselves. The International Joint Commission is responsible for overseeing these agreements. Early-20th-century industrialists and scientists advocated the total diversion of Niagara Falls for power generation, but this did not come to pass. Nevertheless, the flow of the Falls is intensely managed. The Niagara Power Project is aptly interpreted at NYPA’s Power Vista visitor center in Lewiston. However, the remains of power canals and tunnels as well as the ruins of the old Schoellkopf Power Plant merit further documentation, protection, and interpretation.

Most of the natural and cultural resources on the Canadian side are managed by the Niagara Parks Commission. The local management authorities on



Frontier House, Lewiston, NY

each side of the Falls lack control over protecting viewsheds on either side. Traveling north along the Gorge, views across the river in both directions retain greater integrity. The potential exists to protect and enhance existing viewsheds.

Both the villages of Lewiston and Youngstown possess well-defined historic areas that could merit National Register designation as districts. These villages would benefit from such a designation by fostering greater awareness and stewardship for the contributing structures and cultural landscape. Costumed interpreters working with the Seaway Trail offer interpretive tours of Lewiston's historic area weekly during the summer months.

Fort Niagara preserves the main resource on the United States side that depicts historic military conflict. Significant archeological resources pertaining to the 18th century and earlier periods are known to exist at the historic Lower Landing, now within the Earl W. Bridges ArtPark State Park, and may be present at other locations in the area. State ownership provides some measure of protection for archeological resources within ArtPark, but the protection of other potential archeological resources is uncertain, and important sites may remain unknown.

Some land on the edge of the Niagara River is in private ownership and thus potentially subject to adverse development (e.g., upstream of the GrandIsland Bridge and downstream of ArtPark). Trails run much of the distance from Niagara Falls to Fort Niagara along the immediate riverbank and gorge with few interruptions. The question of whether the Robert Moses Parkway encourages or impedes scenic access over much of its length is debated. Public support for completing a lake-to-lake greenway along the Niagara River presents an opportunity to provide a valuable scenic and recreational resource. In 2004, the New York State Legislature approved the creation of the Niagara River Greenway Commission to support its development.

Important aspects of the Niagara story, notably the historic development of tourism, are not fully told or integrated into the overall visitor experience. The new visitor center at Niagara Falls State Park has made progress in this direction, but this effort could be expanded.

The National Audubon Society has designated the Niagara corridor as an Important Bird Area (IBA). This designation highlights the need to protect the area from threats such as the loss of habitat. Largely due to microclimates peculiar to the area, the Falls and Gorge are known to contain a large number of rare plant species, within the context of New York State. In general, there is an overarching need for more financial support to protect and preserve the region's nationally important resources.

4. The area provides outstanding recreational and educational opportunities.

Some of the institutions mentioned earlier offer outstanding educational opportunities for Niagara themes. Old Fort Niagara is one of the most important sites on the American side of the Niagara River for depicting the story of European settlement, contact with American Indians, and the Wars for Empire, extending through 1815. The Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor links Niagara to the heroic story of the settlement and growth of Upstate New York and the nation. The New York Power Authority's Power Vista offers an overview of present and historic power generation in the region. For the geological story, the Niagara Gorge Discovery Center and the Orin Lehman Visitor Center at the state park complement and explain the geological marvel that is conspicuous nearby.

Niagara Falls itself, with the state park and related resources, is the area's leading recreational resource, as evidenced by the millions who visit it from all parts of the world. The park offers walking trails, overlooks, and landscaped grounds. Also within the park, visitors have access to an Observation Tower and other attractions including the privately operated Maid of the Mist and the state-operated Cave of the Winds. ArtPark offers access to the Gorge Trail, as well as multiple venues for fine and performing arts activities. Several state parks in the vicinity, such as Fort Niagara, Joseph Davis, Reservoir, and DeVeaux Woods, provide recreational day-use facilities for residents offering opportunities for both active and passive recreational activities. OPRHP has expressed a need to continue making capital improvements to ensure visitor access and safety and to improve interpretive signage and programming. Complementary resources exist on the Canadian side. Though not formally considered under this study, they are available to and are heavily used by visitors to the study area.

As a result of the presence of large areas of public land and the creation of formal pathways and trails, visual and physical access to the river's edge is improving. The state passed legislation that will facilitate the creation of a multiple-use lake-to-lake trail that would be similar to the one located on the Canadian side. There are a number of trails in the

area, including waterfront trail segments in Buffalo, North Tonawanda, Niagara Falls, Lewiston, and Porter. Throughout the study area, interpretive signage and programming could use improvement, particularly in interpreting the region's history. Recreational opportunities along the Robert Moses Parkway could be maximized and programmed, and physical links could be developed with related areas such as the Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor and Niagara Falls, Canada.

Institutions like the Castellani Art Museum at Niagara University, the Niagara Falls Aquarium, and the Niagara Aerospace Museum include education as part of their primary mission and develop projects that enhance educational opportunities for both their adult patrons and young people. Beyond the primary study area, the cities of Buffalo and Niagara Falls, Ontario, also offer myriad educational and recreational opportunities. Likewise, Erie and Niagara Counties offer similar amenities on a smaller scale.

5. Resources that are important to the identified theme or themes of the area retain a degree of integrity capable of supporting interpretation.

The region seems to be characterized by a relatively small number of resources that are currently known to be of national significance, beginning with the Falls themselves, but those few are of outstanding importance. These are obviously capable of supporting relevant interpretation, since they have been doing so for many years. Two notable examples, the New York Power Authority Power Vista and the Niagara Gorge Discovery Center, relate to the heritage themes of hydroelectric power and geology, and they exist to provide educational services. Fort Niagara preserves the main resource on the American side that depicts the historic military conflict. Its integrity has been recognized through its designation as a National Historic Landmark. Niagara Falls State Park (originally referred to as Niagara Reservation) has also been designated a national historic landmark for the original design provided by Frederick Law Olmsted. The historic importance of the Erie Canal, which enters the study area, has been recognized in its designation as a national heritage corridor, and comprehensive plans are being developed for its interpretation.

Many other resources are currently listed on or are considered eligible for the National Register for Historic Places and are important for their state and local significance. They, too, possess historic fabric that is intact and capable of supporting interpretation. Examples include the James G. Marshall House in Niagara Falls, representing the theme of Power and Industry, and the Frontier House in Lewiston, which is illustrative of the Borderlands/Border Crossing Theme.

...the Niagara River Gorge itself offers numerous opportunities to interpret aspects of all four of the major themes identified for the area.

Many more sites have not been fully evaluated for National Register eligibility but possess sufficient fabric to offer unique opportunities to interpret the area's themes. For instance, the Niagara River Gorge itself offers numerous opportunities to interpret aspects of all four of the major themes identified for the area. As noted previously, both Lewiston and Youngstown possess well-defined villages and waterfronts that offer great opportunities to interpret their history as border towns during times of both war and peace.

A table summarizing the distribution of resources across proposed national heritage area themes may be found in Appendix G.

6. Residents, business interests, nonprofit organizations, and governments within the proposed area are involved in the planning, have developed a conceptual financial plan that outlines the roles for all participants including the federal government, and have demonstrated support for designation of the area.

Local interest in creating a national heritage area around Niagara Falls solidified in 2001, when U.S. Senator Charles Schumer organized a panel of local leaders to meet with National Park Service officials to discuss the potential for a national heritage area. Members of the panel included federal, state, county, and municipal elected officials, businesspersons, planners, academics, union officials, foundation executives, historians, environmentalists, and other citizens. Consultations with the panel led to the "Report on the Reconnaissance Survey of the Niagara River Corridor in the State of New York Conducted March 19-20, 2001 by the Northeast Regional Office of the National Park Service" and the federal legislation initiating the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area feasibility study. Members of this panel have participated in public meetings and individual discussions since the start of the feasibility study process in May 2003. Many municipal and county officials were also consulted as part of the study process. Public meetings held in Niagara Falls in November 2003 and June 2004 revealed considerable public interest in and support for national heritage area designation. During the feasibility study process, many other local citizens have provided input on the proposed national heritage area. The "Summary of Public Involvement" section of the report provides information on the process for obtaining public input and identifies contributors. Comments resulting from the review of this draft study report will be similarly documented and taken into consideration.

The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (NYS OPRHP) has supported the national heritage area concept since 2001, and Commissioner Bernadette Castro testified at a Congressional hearing in its favor. The NYS OPRHP has participated on the study project team in evaluating resources and heritage themes and exploring potential management alternatives.

The Urban Design Project, of the University of Buffalo, has provided technical and outreach support for the study process. Dr. Robert Shibley and Dr. Bradshaw Hovey, who have been leaders in regional planning activities in the Buffalo Niagara binational area for many years, have helped integrate the national heritage area concept into on-going regional economic and cultural tourism planning efforts.

7. *The proposed management entity and units of government supporting the designation are willing to commit to working in partnership to develop the heritage area.*

The potential management entity for the Niagara National Heritage Area would have representation from local governments, as well as a wide range of organizational and citizen interests. The study has considered using a federal commission, a state commission, or a private nonprofit organization (see Management Alternatives for discussion of each) as the management entity. The study team has initially found the greatest local support for a federal commission because local stakeholders believe it could most effectively involve federal, state, tribal, and local government, as well nonprofit economic development, cultural, historical, environmental, and civic organizations. With the creation of the Niagara River Greenway Commission, a new possibility should be presented for consideration by the public as a potential management alternative during the comment period for this draft report.

Representatives of state agencies, Niagara County, the City of Niagara Falls, the Towns of Lewiston and Porter, and the Villages of Lewiston and Youngstown have met with the study team and expressed interest in participating on a national heritage area management entity.

The Niagara Tourism and Convention Corporation and USA Niagara, a subsidiary of the Empire State Development Corporation of the State of New York, are organizations active in developing tourism and revitalizing downtown Niagara Falls. They have recognized that a heritage area can improve the image of Niagara Falls, develop new attractions, and result in a management entity for coordinating heritage initiatives. New York State OPRHP, which owns Niagara Falls State Park and several other state parks in the area, has made over \$44 million of improvements to the grounds and the facilities at the park. These improvements have been intended to upgrade the visitor experience and draw more visitors to Niagara. A new heritage area would complement and help expand upon these efforts at tourism development.



Sign noting site of Fort Schlosser

A key to the heritage area's success will be the enhancement of opportunities to create links among tourist attractions and amenities as well as to expand partnerships between the City of Niagara Falls and the NYS-operated parks.

Defining actual commitments, rather than general support for heritage area designation, has been hampered because the public has not yet been able to focus on the management entity alternatives contained in this report. As the public expresses its support for one of the alternatives presented, the study team will ascertain more specific commitments and partnerships that may be available involving local governments and area organizations.

8. The management entity proposed to plan and implement the project is described.

The study team has been working with local officials and citizens to determine the most appropriate management entity for the proposed Niagara National Heritage Area. The three management entity forms under consideration are a federal commission, a state commission, and a local private nonprofit organization. Descriptions of these management entities and their possible advantages and disadvantages are in Part Three of this report.

9. The proposal is consistent with continued economic activity in the area.

The proposed Niagara National Heritage Area would be highly consistent with economic activity in the area. Niagara Falls has been an important attraction for 200 years, and tourism has been a significant element of the local economy. One of the reasons for interest in a national heritage area at Niagara Falls is to help strengthen the appeal of this place to visitors by telling stories related to the natural environment, history, and culture of the larger Niagara Region and enhancing connections between heritage sites within the region. Another reason is to help redevelop downtown Niagara Falls, which has suffered disinvestment in recent decades.

The Villages of Lewiston and Youngstown, the Towns of Porter, Lewiston, North Tonawanda, Tonawanda, and Wheatfield, and the Cities of Niagara Falls and Buffalo, and the Counties of Niagara and Erie have been seeking to improve their economic bases and have seen tourism as an important part of that effort. For these communities, the most significant needs include maintaining physical, programmatic, and marketing links to Niagara Falls to draw visitors from the Falls; protecting their community character; and making the public aware of the resources that they have to offer.

Heritage tourism is also compatible with the efforts of two other groups that are promoting tourism in

the region: (1) the Buffalo Niagara Cultural Tourism Initiative; and (2) the Binational Niagara Tourism Alliance. The Buffalo Niagara Cultural Tourism Initiative is a new effort, which is seeking to promote cultural institutions and events in Erie and Niagara Counties, while the Binational Niagara Tourism Alliance is a four-year-old effort that coordinates marketing and tourism programming on both sides of the Niagara River. Both have indicated that heritage area designation can help in these areas.

10. A conceptual boundary map has been reviewed by the public.

The study area maps that show conceptual boundaries for proposed Niagara National Heritage Area alternatives may be found with the Management Alternatives in the following section. The maps have been developed by the Urban Design Project of the University of Buffalo and the National Park Service. Conceptual boundaries were discussed at a public meeting on November 5, 2003 and at numerous smaller informal meetings. A revised boundary proposal was presented to the public in June 2004. Meeting participants were generally supportive of the proposal setting forth a boundary with related resources eligible for participation in the surrounding region. The public will have an opportunity to further indicate its support for a boundary during the public comment period.

Conclusion

Based upon the analysis of natural and cultural resources in the study area, evidence of an effective thematic framework, the potential for effective public and private partnerships, opportunities for the protection of natural and cultural resources as well as recreation and education, and public support for a national heritage area designation, the study team concludes that the study area meets a number of the NPS interim criteria for designation as a National Heritage Area.