

PRE - 1904

It Began with a Bridge!

THE TOWN OF NIAGARA FALLS

It was an event of far-reaching importance when, in 1848, the first bridge was opened across the Niagara River. Located where the Whirlpool Rapids Bridge is now, it was known as the Suspension Bridge and was designed for pedestrian and carriage traffic. The site, about two miles below the falls, was chosen simply because it is the narrowest part of the gorge. This meant that the engineering challenge, although still formidable for the time, would be somewhat less than if the bridge had been constructed elsewhere along the length of the river. Naturally, the cost would be less as well.

Five years later the Great Western Railway was completed between Hamilton and the Suspension Bridge. Almost immediately work began to rebuild the span so it could handle rail traffic. The result was a double deck suspension bridge, with trains using the upper level while carriages and pedestrians crossed on the lower deck. It opened in 1855.

In the meantime, a small settlement had developed at the Canadian bridgehead. Christened Elgin after the governor general at the time, Lord Elgin, it was incorporated in 1853. Elgin was not only at one end of a significant international crossing, but was also an important railway divisional point. Consequently, its population rapidly increased.

Back in 1832, another community had come into being just to the south. Known as Clifton, it was situated around the present-day Centre Street, Victoria Avenue, Clifton Hill area. Although in a lovely setting, Clifton

grew quite slowly. In 1856, Clifton and Elgin amalgamated under the name Clifton. However, by 1881 many residents felt that the name of the community should relate to the world famous natural spectacle at its doorstep. This had become particularly important since Clifton was now trying to compete for tourism dollars with Niagara Falls, New York. As a result, the settlement's name was changed to the Town of Niagara Falls that year.

THE VILLAGE OF NIAGARA FALLS

Even before the War of 1812 there had been a small cluster of homes and several taverns around the Lundy's Lane, Ferry Street, Portage Road (later Main Street) intersection. Following the war, the tiny community began to grow, bolstered by its location at a strategic crossroads, its picturesque setting, and its proximity to the famous Lundy's Lane battlefield. Incorporated in 1831, the village took the name Drummondville, commemorating Sir Gordon Drummond who had commanded the British and Canadians at the Battle of Lundy's Lane, July 25, 1814.

Following Clifton's name change to the Town of Niagara Falls in 1881, Drummondville decided it should follow suit. Accordingly, the very next year it became the Village of Niagara Falls. However, to lessen the confusion, the village was commonly referred to as Niagara Falls South or just the South End.



Photo by E. & H.T. Anthony & Company, Niagara Falls Heritage Foundation Collection, Niagara Falls Public Library (Ontario)

THE DOUBLE DECK SUSPENSION BRIDGE, which opened in 1855, was considered a marvel of engineering and attracted almost as many sightseers as the falls, located only two miles upriver. This view, from around 1860, was taken from the American side, looking across the Niagara Gorge and into Clifton (later renamed Niagara Falls) on the Canadian side. Although it was a rapidly growing community, Clifton was still relatively small with a population of about 1,200 at the time. Notice the dense woods in the distance.



Kiwanis Collection, Niagara Falls Public Library (Ontario)

THIS CIRCA 1860 PHOTO shows much of Drummondville. Most of the buildings in the distance are along Main Street (Portage Road). Note the open land and forested area between Main Street and the Niagara River. Opened in 1799, Drummond Hill Cemetery, as it is now called, dominates much of the scene. This was the focal point of the Battle of Lundy's Lane, July 25, 1814. A bit of the Presbyterian Meeting House, currently the site of Drummond Hill Presbyterian Church, can also be seen at the extreme right. A muddy Lundy's Lane cuts diagonally across the picture.



Public Archives of Canada, C 77863

THIS WAS THE SCENE AT THE FOOT OF BRIDGE STREET in the 1870s. The Suspension Bridge with its massive towers and mighty cables was a spectacular sight. The upper deck was for trains while carriages and pedestrians used the lower level.



Photo by Kilburn Bros., Niagara Falls Heritage Foundation Collection, Niagara Falls Public Library (Ontario)

THIS IS HOW THE AREA THAT IS NOW QUEEN VICTORIA PARK looked in the early 1870s. Livery stables can be seen in the upper centre of the photo, while the Niagara Falls Museum and Table Rock House are dimly visible in the upper left corner. Note the absence of fencing along the edge of the gorge.



Welland Tribune (Welland, Ontario), July 15, 1875



Kivans Collection, Niagara Falls Public Library (Ontario)

VICTORIA HALL WAS ONE OF THE MORE attractive nineteenth century hotels in Niagara Falls. It was located on Victoria Avenue at the Centre, where the Imperial Hotel is now located. Among the interesting details to note in this circa 1890 photo are the wooden sidewalks, the hitching posts, and the woman holding the croquet mallet. Victoria Hall was built about 1870 and destroyed by fire in March 1907.



Francois J. Peirre Collection, Niagara Falls Public Library (Ontario)

THE CLIFTON HOUSE HOTEL, SEEN HERE IN 1871, was Niagara Falls' most renowned nineteenth century hotel. Built in 1833, it stood at the foot of Clifton Hill on the site now occupied by Oakes Garden Theatre. Distinguished and famous guests were quite frequent, a nineteenth century Niagara Falls, New York newspaper once commenting that the hotel's registers "can show a list of names possessed by no other place or resort." As an example, Charles Dickens was a guest for ten days during an 1842 visit to Niagara Falls. The structure was totally destroyed by fire in June 1898 and replaced by a second Clifton Hotel in 1906.



THIS CIRCA 1879 photo, taken from Loretto Academy, shows a passenger train at Fallsview with the falls and Goat Island in the background. The Upper Suspension Bridge is in the distance. Portage Road can also be seen paralleling the tracks. This rail line opened in 1854 and was owned by various companies over the years, including the Erie and Ontario, the Michigan Central and, lastly, Canadian Pacific.

Ontario Hydro Collection, Niagara Falls Public Library (Ontario)

FOLLOWING ITS ARRIVAL in Niagara Falls in 1853, the Great Western Railway built a board and batten station on lower Bridge Street, close to the Suspension Bridge. Destroyed by fire in early 1879, it was replaced later that year by a large red brick station on the same site. This structure is still being used.



François J. Pettit Collection, Niagara Falls Public Library (Ontario)



Toronto Public Library (TRL), J. Ross Robertson Collection T31406

SAMUEL ZIMMERMAN was, in many respects, the father of Niagara Falls. An early promoter and developer in the community, Zimmerman was killed in a railway accident in 1857.



Francis J. Petre Collection, Niagara Falls Public Library (Ontario)

TAKEN FROM AN OBSERVATION TOWER along Lundy's Lane, this 1880 view is looking east towards the Main and Ferry intersection (almost dead centre) and beyond to the Niagara River. The large brick building in the foreground was the Drummondville Methodist Church built in 1846. This is now the site of Lundy's Lane United Church. The Stamford Township Hall, now the Lundy's Lane Historical Museum, is the tall building seen in the distance slightly to the right of centre.



Lundy's Lane Historical Museum

DRESSED IN THEIR BEST, THE ELIAS SHERK FAMILY has its picture taken in what is now Queen Victoria Park about 1880. The American Falls provided a spectacular backdrop.

NIAGARA FALLS SOUTH, July 11, 1871		
Dr. M. MORSE,		
UNDERTAKER AND		
PREPARIAN, EMBALMER,		
AND DEALER IN COFFINS, CASKETS, AND FUNERAL		
FURNITURE. Special Bids of all grades and styles. Special Investigations. Terms Plain-Deal. Cash on Delivery.		
June 9	To Casket and Case	45.00
	Embalming Body	2.00
	Hearse	5.00
	One Carriage	2.50
	Funeral Furniture	3.00
	Coffin and two pillows	1.00
	of the wife	
	33 months interest	
		47.75
		47.75

Morgan Funeral Homes

AUSTIN MORSE, a furniture maker and undertaker, went into business on Main Street in 1826. His son, Marsena, later took over the firm. Still operating on the original site, the Morse & Son Chapel, of Morgan Funeral Homes, as the business is now known, is the oldest funeral home in Canada.

James Walton Jackson's poem, "The Test of 'Cantilever,'" was published in 1884 in honour of the bridge's awesome opening ceremony.



Niagara Falls Public Library (Ontario)

THE CANTILEVER BRIDGE receives the ultimate test of strength as ten of the twenty locomotives used rumble across it during the bridge's opening in December 1883. Built by the Michigan Central Railway, it was replaced by an arch bridge in 1925. The Upper Suspension Bridge and the falls can be glimpsed in the distance.

The Test of 'Cantilever'

Lo! Cantilever stands the test,
See! see! it bears upon its breast
Fully twenty locomotives' weight,
Nor bends beneath the heavy freight.
See! twenty engines safely ride
Across Niagara's seething tide –
Across the mystic iron span –
Last product of the god-like man.
"The Cantilever bridge is strong!"
Exultant shout the wondering throng.
Lo! fifty locomotives screech,
Two nations' praise blends each with each,
Resounds the East, resounds the West,
The matchless triumph each attest.
The loud applause – the palm each yields
To Cantilever and to Fields.



Kivansis Collection; Niagara Falls Public Library (Ontario)

THIS INTRIGUING PHOTO appeared in the *Dominion Illustrated*, published in London, England, on September 22, 1888. It shows a lacrosse game taking place at the Bridge Street Athletic Grounds on the northeast corner of Bridge Street and Victoria Avenue. In the background, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church on St. Clair Avenue can be seen. It stood where the loading docks for the main post office are now. St. Andrew's, part of the United Church of Canada since 1925, relocated to Morrison Street, across from Oakes Park, in 1961.



Photo by Strohmeier and Wyman, Niagara Falls Heritage Foundation Collection, Niagara Falls Public Library, (Ontario)

THE ORIGINAL UPPER SUSPENSION BRIDGE was constructed in 1869. Its wooden towers were later replaced with steel ones as seen in this mid-1890s photo. The view is looking from the American end into Canada. The Clifton House Hotel (now the site of Oakes Garden Theatre) along with its stables and large concert hall can be seen at the left.

THIS IS WHAT THE PUBLIC TRANSIT service in Niagara Falls looked like in the 1890s. The picture was taken on Main Street, with the conductor posing at the rear of the horse-drawn car.



Photo by England Photographers, Lundy's Lane Historical Museum



Pat and Rosa Simon

AN UNKNOWN LADY proudly poses with her bicycle, which has been decorated with flags and flowers. The photo was taken in the Erie Avenue studio of Barnett and Tuckey during the late 1890s.



Photo by England Photographers, Lundy's Lane Historical Museum

IT APPEARS AS THOUGH THESE THREE MEN have a bit of a dilemma – their wagon is caught between the tracks of the street railway. The scene was captured on a very muddy Ferry Street during March 1898.



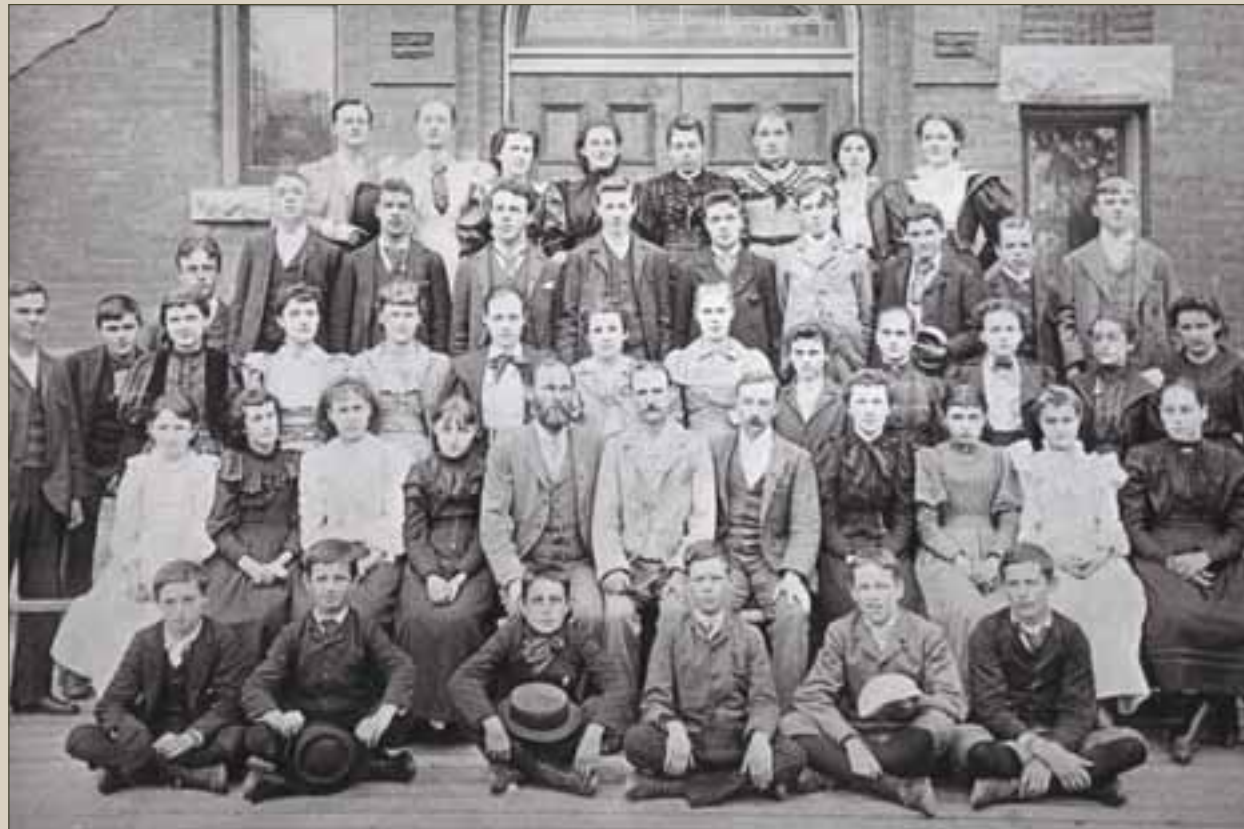
Photo by Clifton Graydon Portrait and View Company, Francis J. Peirce Collection, Niagara Falls Public Library (Ontario)

NIAGARA FALLS ENTREPRENEUR GEORGE ELLIS, his wife, and their young female companion pause for the photographer during a sleigh ride in Dufferin Islands. It was the winter of 1890.



Lundy's Lane Historical Museum

NIAGARA FALLS COLLEGIATE INSTITUTE as it looked not long after the school opened in 1893. Located in the centre of Epworth Circle, this site had previously been occupied by a large tabernacle that was part of a Methodist Camp Meeting development known as Wesley Park. Considerably altered and enlarged over the years, the former collegiate is now privately owned and known as Kingston College.

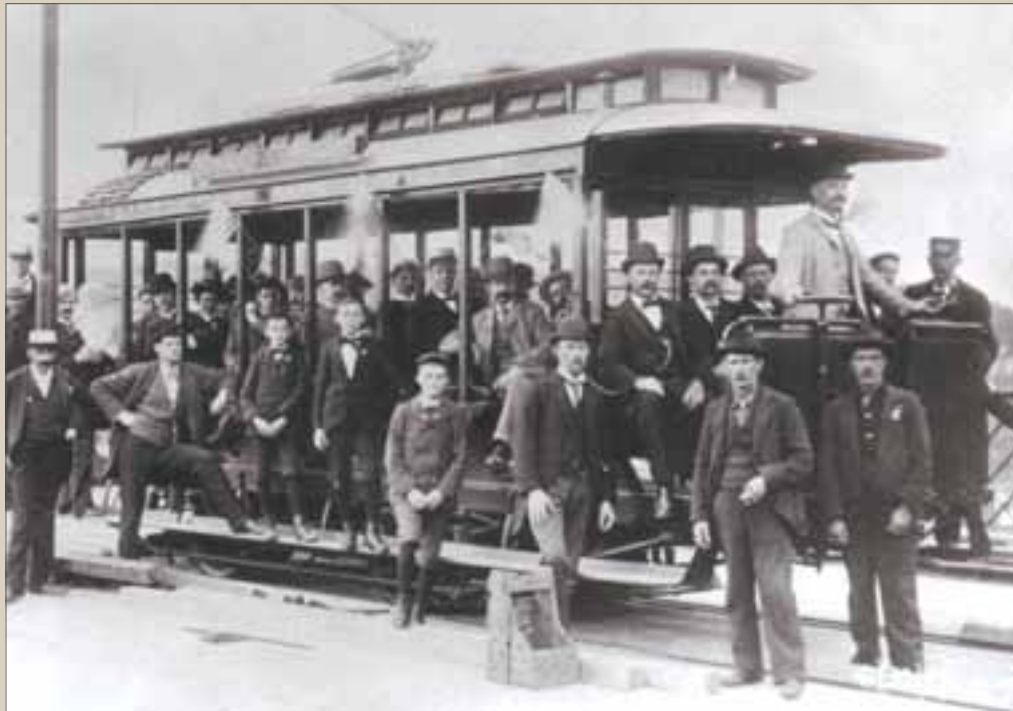


Kwanis Collection, Niagara Falls Public Library (Ontario)

TAKEN IN 1894, a year after the school had opened, this Niagara Falls Collegiate Institute class photo was taken in front of the main entrance to the building.



Welland Tribune (Welland, Ontario), May 16, 1890



Niagara Falls Heritage Foundation Collection, Niagara Falls Public Library (Ontario)

IT'S JUNE 30, 1898, and the first streetcar has just crossed the newly opened Falls View Bridge. The conductor is standing in the background at the far right. Only one woman is visible in the crowded car.

FERRY STREET, looking west from Ellen Avenue, as it appeared in 1900. The hitching posts as well as the horse and buggy in the distance are reminders that this was the pre-automobile era. Note the dog standing on the wooden sidewalk at the right.



Francis J. Petre Collection, Niagara Falls Public Library (Ontario)



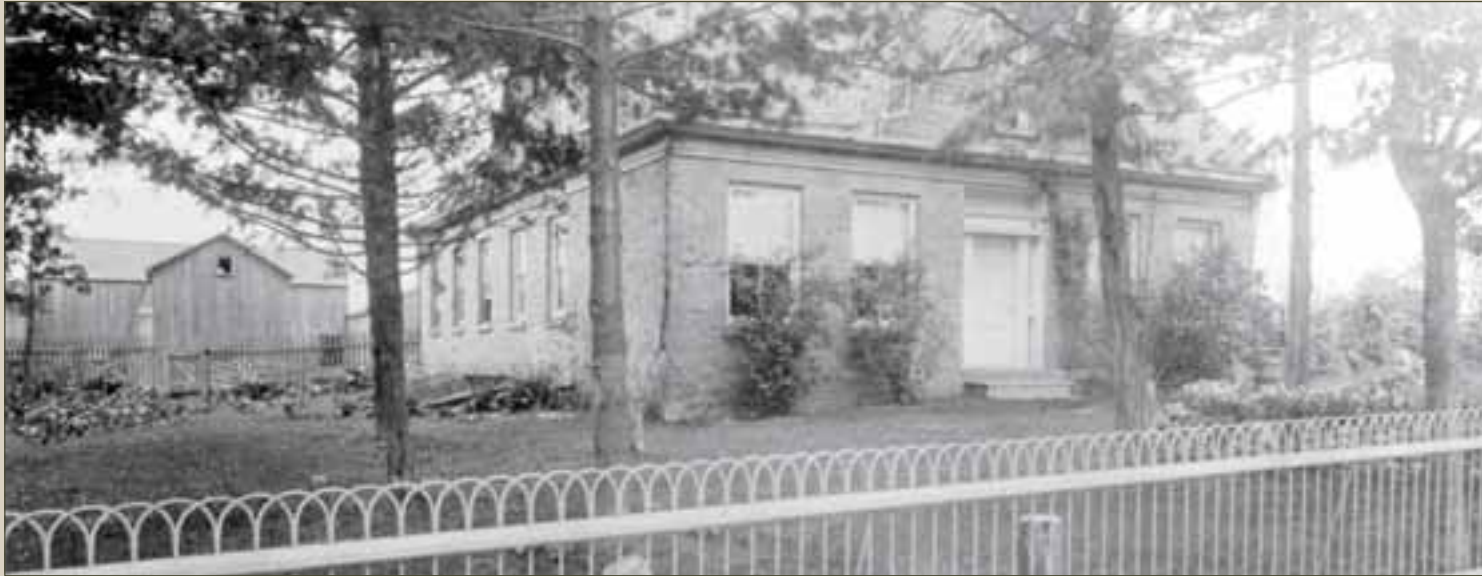
Lundy's Lane Historical Museum



Francis J. Petre Collection, Niagara Falls Public Library (Ontario)

GEORGE ELLIS' ERIE AVENUE DRY GOODS STORE was packed with merchandise when this picture was taken around 1895. Note the husbands at the left patiently waiting for their wives who are seated front and centre at the counter.

A NUMBER OF MERCHANTS and other local residents lined up to pose for this circa 1885 photo, showing the west side of Erie Avenue between Park and Bridge. The building on the corner in the foreground was William Cole's Bakery and Restaurant. Cole, wearing a white apron, can be seen standing in front of his business. Moving down the block, there was Joseph Macartney's Drug Store (note the large mortar and pestle hanging in front of the building), George Buckley's Flour and Feed Store, M.S. Bradt's Grocery Store, a tobacco shop, and a millinery owned by a Mrs. Ellis. The three-storey building at the end of the street was the Albion Hotel, operated by the Buckley family. A glimpse of the Grand Trunk Railway (now VIA) Station on Bridge Street can be seen at the right edge of the picture. Looking carefully, you can notice a lady standing on the roof of the one-storey building. This was Mrs. Havelock Buckley who was hanging out her washing. None of these Erie Avenue buildings remain. This is now the site of our inter-city bus terminal.



Francis J. Peirre Collection, Niagara Falls Public Library (Ontario)

HUNTER'S COTTAGE, which was on the southeast corner of Victoria Avenue and Morrison, was built by Hermanus Crysler about 1841. This picture dates to about 1900, by which time both Crysler and his wife had died. The house was torn down in 1928 to allow for the construction of the T. Eaton store. This is now the site of the Victoria Avenue Library.



Niagara Falls Ontario Public Library

AMONG THE PROMINENT HOMES built in pre-1904 Niagara Falls was the Bush mansion, which stood on the escarpment, above the north end of present-day Queen Victoria Park. It was demolished in 1938. This photo of the property was taken around 1900.



Kivans Collection, Niagara Falls Public Library (Ontario)

THE WARREN SPENCE CARRIAGE WORKS on Barker Street presents a busy look in this circa 1880 photo.



Lundy's Lane Historical Museum

IN 1900, Niagara Falls' public transit service was changed from horse-drawn to electric-powered. At the same time, the streetcar tracks were extended from Main and Culp (the former southern terminus) out to Loretto Academy. This circa 1902 photo shows the tracks and a very muddy Main Street at Murray, looking south.

**CARRIAGES,
CARRIAGES,
CARRIAGES.**

FINE LINES OF—

**BUGGIES,
DEMOCRATS,
ROAD CARTS,**

With the LATEST IMPROVEMENTS of the
age.

—ALL MY WORK—

Can be Seen in the Rough,
and thoroughly inspected before painted.

—

None but First-class Work allowed
to leave the shops.

—

THREE SECOND-HAND HACKS, in first-
class running order, FOR SALE AT A
BARGAIN.

—

Warren Spence,
Niagara Falls Village, Ont.
(1881)

Welland Tribune, July 25, 1880



Sherman Zavitz



Kiwanis Collection, Niagara Falls Public Library (Ontario)

NOW IS YOUR TIME
FOR
GOOD PICTURES
AT
ENGLAND'S
New Photo Rooms
DRUMMONDVILLE.

HAVING BEEN AT A LARGE expense in erecting my new premises, I congratulate myself that, without a doubt, I have one of the best Photographic Rooms in Canada.

Also, in connection, Picture Frames, of all kinds and styles desired.

Watches neatly and cheaply repaired and warranted.

JOHN ENGLAND.
Drummondville, Feb., 1875. 1804f

Welland Tribune (Welland, Ontario), July 8, 1875

THERE ARE MANY POINTS OF INTEREST to be seen in this 1899 photo of the Table Rock area. One of the cars of the Niagara Falls Park and River Railway, an electric line, has just pulled away from Table Rock House, the building with the cupola. A portion of the railway's powerhouse may be glimpsed in the distance, just beyond Table Rock House. The Niagara Falls Waterworks plant stands alongside the river immediately above the Horseshoe Falls. Both Loretto and Mount Carmel can be seen on top of the high bank.



The Niagara Parks Commission



The Niagara Parks Commission



The Niagara Parks Commission

THESE LATE VICTORIAN ERA (circa 1900) photos show plenty of activity taking place in Queen Victoria Park. Opened in 1888, the park quickly became a favourite place for sightseers, picnickers and recreational activities such as foot races.



Mary Bell

SIMCOE STREET SCHOOL, established in 1857, is the oldest public elementary school in Niagara Falls. The original building was replaced by the current one in 1971. This class photo dates to around 1900.



Sherman Zavitz

THE TOP PORTION of a Doran Bros. Dominion Suspender Company invoice dated June 15, 1893. Considerable artistic license has been exercised here since neither of the buildings was as imposing as depicted. The Cantilever Bridge (in existence from 1883-1925) is also shown.



Lundy's Lane Historical Museum

RESPLENDENT IN THEIR EYE-CATCHING UNIFORMS, the members of the Drummondville Rescue Hose Company pose for posterity in this photo from about 1903. Although Drummondville had become the Village of Niagara Falls in 1882, the old name was still commonly used.



Kiwans Collection, Niagara Falls Public Library (Ontario)

THIS VIEW from about 1900 has a number of interesting details. In the foreground the Upper Steel Arch, or Falls View Bridge, can be seen. Opened in 1898, it stood close to where the Rainbow Bridge is now located. The four-storey building with the corner tower slightly to the left of centre was the Lafayette Hotel which opened in 1896. Next to the Lafayette you can see the ruins of the first Clifton House Hotel, destroyed by fire in June 1898. The two-storey white building immediately behind the ruins was the Clifton's concert hall. Oakes Garden Theatre now occupies the site of the two hotels. The area just behind the Lafayette and a bit to the right is where Casino Niagara now stands. Note the open fields and treed areas in the distance, a section of the city that has since become crowded with development.