

Description of the Cataract or Falls of Niagara

In the Month of July 1785 accompanied by my friend
 M^r Hunter I arrived at the Fort of Niagara after a tedious
 & fatiguing Voyage in an open Bateau from Montreal to Lake
 Ontario, which we coasted to Oswego and from thence to Niagara
 The River St. Lawrence presents the greatest variety of romantic
 and picturesque scenery that can be conceived and my Journal
 details much interesting information as well as local description

Having brought Letters of introduction to Major Campbell
 the Commandant and to M^r Hamilton a Merchant we enjoyed
 all the advantages of their protection and services - the latter
 called upon us on the morning of the 12th with Horses to conduct
 us to Fort Stampet near which place the Cataract is situated -

Our Route was on the banks of the river which takes its
 name from the Falls and is generally from 1/4 to 1/2 miles broad -

The Current is very rapid, but having great Depth for Nine Miles
 is navigable for Vessels with a strong Northwesterly Wind - here is
 the Landing place and the cargoes are hoisted by Machines to
 the summit of the Steep Banks & from thence conveyed in

Waggons to Lake Erie - the remaining course of the River for
 about Nine Miles to the Falls, is one continued tumultuous Rapid
 forcing their way over masses of Rocks, the appearance of which is

at once grand and terrific; we were amused with this until we
 arrived at M^r Stedman's House, this gentleman farms from

the government the exclusive privilege of transporting Stores &
 Merchandize from the Lake Ontario to Lake Erie, we were entertained
 by him with great hospitality and highly gratified with his
 conversation and the variety of anecdotes connected with the localities of
 the place.

July 13th - We were roused from our Chambers very early in the Morning
and before the Sun had risen - our party proceeded to the River Side
which is several Miles wide, interspersed with a number of beautiful small
Islands covered with a variety of Forest Trees, we pursued the course of
the River for 2 miles, until we came to a Dam Mill, from which we
commanded a full view of the tremendous Rapids, arising from the
strong current of Water which forcing itself against immense masses
of craggy Rock produce billows of White Foam that can only be
compared to the agitation of the Sea in a Storm, we continued our
Route for some time through the Forest, occasionally procuring some
Magnificent Views of the River, the Islands & the Country at a Distance
Suddenly on emerging from the Wood, we came in sight of the
Cataract - it is impossible to describe the impression it made on
my Senses, for some Minutes I remained in silent admiration
and astonishment and no language can convey an Idea of the
grandeur & sublimity of the scene before me - recovering from
the sensations produced, the Mind was more at Liberty to
investigate each part of the varied objects, which offered themselves
for examination, the first and most striking was a Column of
Spray or Vapour arising from the Basin or Vortex into which
the Water are hurled, with inconceivable power & rapidity - the
height of which causes them to rebound near half the height of
the Falls and as they rise the Vapour becomes less dense and
finally represent a light Cloud - the Weather was so serene
an Azure Sky, the Sun had not long risen above the Horizon
and the Rays illumined the Column with the prismatic
colours of the Rainbow, in addition the small globules were
transformed into facid & sparkling diamonds, if not so
valuable as the real brilliant - it far exceeded the effect
produced by the Green Jewels of the Mountains of the Rockies

As the Sun ascended, the Rays acting on the local position of (3)
the Waters, produced three distinct Rainbows - one on the surface
of the Basin below at least 180 feet, the others on the column, but
these were dispersed as the Sun became more elevated, leaving only
a beautiful Cloud, which has been seen from 50 to 60 Miles distance.

Our attention was next taken up with the general appearance
& shape of the Cataract from the position we were in, and which
resembles an irregular course from the rising ground we occupied
on the eastern Shore and within a few yards of the Upper Fall, for
it is so distinguished from the larger which is concealed by an
Island that separates their streams - This small fall which is
so only comparatively small it is near $\frac{1}{2}$ mile in extent, supplied
by a vast body of Water, in a white Foam and precipitated 150 feet
perpendicular fall, with a noise like Thunder - our servants had
brought some strong Cordage, which was fastened to the Trunk
of a Tree, by holding of which we descended about 50 feet to
ledge of Rocks and from thence 100 feet more until we got to the
base of the Fall - this descent is at once fatiguing & perilous, we escaped
with a few bruises and a copious Shower Bath - the different
appearances & beauties of the romantic scenery we behold cannot
be described - the pen cannot do justice to the scenes I saw, the
most impressive is looking from the edge below to the body of Water
that menaces destruction and which would inevitably be in our
case if it was not diverted, at the moment you fear to be

overwhelmed - by striking against an enormous Rock which
diverted the current into the Whirlpool that received it -

After passing sometime in the contemplation of these wonders
as novel as they were extraordinary, we returned with our
hospitable Landlord and regaled & refreshed ourselves at
his plentiful board, which was soon relieved of its contents for
our appetites had been increased by our Mental & Physical
exertion.

14 We had the pleasure of being introduced to Cap. Jones who was
the senior officer commanding Fort Snopce, nothing could exceed the
polite and obliging manner, he communicated a variety of local
information - he like any of us had seen much of the World and we
enjoyed the communication to each other of what we felt interesting
he had been much with the Indians, several of whom belonging
to the Six Nations - he introduced to us - but here my Journal must
be closed to - as I must continue my subject - Cap. Jones in order
to save us time and ^{the} inconvenience of returning to Niagara Fort to
cross the River to the Western Shore - ordered a Military Boatman
with Six Soldiers to convey us to the opposite bank of the River
which is about 3 Miles distant, but the current is too strong to
permit passing in a direct line, for fear of being drawn into the
Rapids, where many have perished by imprudence & temerity -
The Soldiers besides Oars, were furnished with long Poles, with Iron
heads or Spikes, with which they ascended some rocks the One
Side, when from a certain point of land they take to their Oars
which they pull with all their force and then with difficulty
made the entrance of Chipaway Creek - this is the manner
that all the Rivers of America are navigated, when there is
no Tide - it is impossible to believe the labour it requires to
stem the currents & Rapids of the River S. Lawrence, my Journal
gives a minute account of each days progress to Lake Ontario
here I may also remark, the effect of the ground swell of this
Lake, which sometimes without any violent Wind or Storm, will
be troubled and agitated until the surface assumes the
appearance of the Ocean in a Tempest, the Boatmen are
from experience aware of this effect & danger and creep along
the Shores so that they may land when necessary -

(5)

We landed at Chippaway upon the estate of
M^r Birch, a loyalist who had ^{staid} located here since the
War - he had made a considerable progress in the
clearing the land from the immense Timber Trees
which here & in most parts of America are of
enormous size - he showed me a Musket Ball
which he had extracted from near the centre of one,
by counting the circles formed by the annual rising
of the Sap, he ascertained the age of this Tree
to be at least 120 years - by this it is evident the
Indians made use of Gunpowder and I found
several Tumuli or Mounds where the Savages

staid - We procured a guide to conduct us through
the Forest and we occasionally got a glimpse of the
River - we arrived at the House of M^r Shworth a loyalist
who has cultivated the land to the edge of the great
Fall - he took us to a point, being on a level with
the River Edge, from which we commanded the
most extensive, as well as sublime Scenery I have
ever seen - the impression we received from the
Eastern Shore, was only preparatory to that we
felt on the Western situation we were placed
I shall first observe we commanded the whole
of the two Cataracts & the Island which separates

6) them - the larger Fall is in the shape of a Horned Hoe
 and might measure by following the Curve about
 1/2 mile - its height 175 feet - The vast body of Water
 discharged here cannot be computed - but we
 may form an Idea from examining the size ~~and~~
 of those Island Seas or Lakes and I have been
 so fortunate as to have their Dimensions well
 ascertained by Commodore Beaton who since
 the conquest of Canada has commanded and
 navigated them -

Independent of all the Rivers and Lakes
 to the West & North West, which communicate with
 Lake Superior I shall confine myself to the
 following.

Lake Superior is	350 miles	long	250	Broad
Lake Michigan	290	—	60	—
Lake Huron	230	—	180	—
Lake Erie	330	—	75	—
Lake Ontario	190	—	70	—

The above Lakes and their Waters except Ontario
 are precipitated over the Cataracts of Niagara with
 a power of Velocity & Weight that cannot be calculated
 the Water rebounds near 80 feet, producing a Spray
 which when acted upon by the Wind has the effect
 of a Shower of Rain and is felt at a great distance
 the Vapor & Cloud is similar to what I have described.

(7)

with this difference we saw here at the same moment
four distinct Rainbows - The colour of the water
in the centre of the Horse Shoe Fall is a clear green
and on each side a white foaming foam, the
contrast of which has a great effect - at the end
of the curve, the water runs in a right line for
about 100 yards, when you come to the Island, which
is clothed with most luxuriant foliage from the
variety of trees which are found in this climate
as also innumerable flowering shrubs particularly
the Azalea of varied colours - the extent of this
Island in front of the River is near $\frac{1}{2}$ mile, and
you then arrive at the Small Fall $\frac{1}{2}$ mile more.

I must now proceed to mention that the Basin
into which the waters are hurled is land locked
or appears so and may be compared to an immense
Cauldron and if I may be permitted to speak
figuratively appears as if the waters were heated by
a volcanic or subterranean fire - as the outlet is
the River Niagara, before the water enters, it is whirled
round the Basin ^{it} and forms a Whirlpool - I have
seen trees of the largest size, go over the Cataract
& disappear for a length of time in the Abyss
below and finally thrown on the shores which
bound the Basin - by degrees the waters flow by
the River into Lake Ontario & to the Atlantic -

8 Our attention had hitherto been confined to the
Cataract from which we were diverted by other
Scenes, combining one of the most varied and
magnificent Views that was ever contemplated.
You see the course of the Rapids above the Falls
for many Miles, interspersed with Islands and
Rocks - the foaming B. flows resemble the agitation
of the Waves of the Ocean in a Tempest and no
language can describe the effect - On the Eastern
Shore you see Mr. Sedman's plantations & Farm,
Fort Sturges and the Shipping - beyond these
the Mountains & Forests ascend to a distance
which can no longer be seen even with the aid
of the Telescope - We reluctantly quitted
this interesting station, which on a ledge of Rocks
projects many feet over the base and seems formed
for the indulgence of the sublime objects that
are, as I have attempted to describe, superior
to anything we have a knowledge of from
the observations of Travellers in any part of the
World - My mind & feelings at this moment
are engaged in the recollection of my impressions
which can never be effaced - I have seen all
the wonders of Nature & Civilization - but they are
nothing in comparison, with the Scenes in Canada
I saw that country ~~was~~ a Wilderness, it is now
inhabited by Thousands of industrious Farmers.

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Our Guide conducted us for about a Mile upon the edge of the Cliff or Rocks, which form the boundary of the Basin - in this walk many highly interesting & beautiful prospects presented themselves, whereas we saw was on a scale of such magnitude that all other Scenes were insipid, nor can one reflect seriously on the great & sublime Works of the Creator in America, without feeling the might & power of Him - who is the author of all things, I have never felt a more fervent & religious Sensation ~~and~~ stronger impressions of that Power than in the admiration of his Works whether Celestial or Terrestrial Objects - We arrived at the opening of the Rocks which leads to a narrow defile through which the Indians pass to reach the River Niagara and certainly thought I have in my extensive Tours among the wildest Scenes in Nature seen many singular parts & objects, I have never found one like that I am entering upon.

In descending the Steep Banks, we were obliged to hold by the branches & Roots of Trees in a tedious Meandering course. In half an hour, we came to the foot of an immense Tree, where we rested, we saw great many Names carved on the Bark of the Beach Tree, we added ours & continued to descend until we came to a large Rock; which impeded our progress

10) We were however indebted to the Indians for the means
of descending its perpendicular sides at least 40 feet.
They had erected a kind of ladder by placing two
straight Trees, which were fastened to the Rock &
they had cut holes or steps in each, so that by
placing your feet & hands in succession you arrived
at the base - from hence & in many places - the
Indians had been obliged to hollow or make openings
among the ^{Roots of the} Trees - through which like Rabbits you
were obliged to creep - in this manner for above
an Hour we struggled until at length we came
to the shores of the Bayou, where the Rocks at
low water are Bonehard tougher than Lead, arising
from the fragments constantly falling from the
Cliffs - after resting a little we put on our
Flannel Jackets and proceeded towards the Great
Cataract - we had to encounter the most difficult
part of our undertaking for we are obliged to creep
on our hands for the best part of a Mile over
these fragments of Rocks many giving way and
often bruising us, we encouraged each other and
persisted in pursuing our Route, yet there was
something terrific in the Rocks which hung
& projected over us, knowing that those we were
upon had fallen, the Season was favorable to us
for it is only on the breaking up of the Ice and
Winter - that these Rocks descend -

(11)

We arrived at a small detached Fall of Water, that is separated from the great Fall about 20 to 25 yards broad - it was necessary to pass through this on our hands & feet - (my flannel jacket protected my skin a little, for I can only compare this sheet of water to large Hair & descending 180 feet - the power & weight was excessive distressing - we had then to encounter another which being effected we advanced to the foot or base of the great Cataract -

P.S. I sent the description of this Cataract of Niagara to Mr Bowdler your landlord and I perceive he has not returned two sheets - which has obliged me to copy & write from page 5 to page 11 - the last sheet was preserved from page 13 to 15.

March 26th - My dear Sir,

I have felt a little indisposed to day and remembering your wish to see some of my Manuscript Remarks on Canada I have been searching among them - I have been induced to fill up the Gap as explained above relating to the Cataract of Niagara in order that you might be fully acquainted with my opinions of that interesting Scenery I wish the description was better worth you

person - When I recollect in the 1785 when
I visited Canada after the Peace that there
were no Settlements except Forts & Indian
Trading stations and that I witnessed from
25 to 30,000 Men Women & Children driven
from the United States to seek the protection
of the British Government, who generously granted
Lands in Upper Canada & the River St. Lawrence
above Montreal - that I saw the Military who
had fought our Battles convert their Swords
into Tools of Husbandry - I can never forget
the impression which I felt in contemplating
these Thousands in the midst of Forests that
had never been cleared from the Creation,
cutting the Trees, constructing Wigwags of the
Boughs for shelter until the Log Hut was
fashioned as a first accommodation and I am
told now you can travel from Montreal to
Ontario & Erie, through cultivated Farms &
good Roads and that the Wilderness has
been converted into a Paradise of Plenty and
all this within 35 Years - I cannot but feel
more than I have now time to express -

I am Yours truly. Joseph Madsfield.

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from 130 feet high - the effect on my skin was like to that I could
suppose would be occasioned by a hail storm, however unaccountably I
pushed until I arrived at the second small Fall - but which was
much greater & more severe than the other. I had endeavored for
the purpose and weight had nearly overcome my powers of
resistance - having passed it I soon came to the base of the
summitous Cataract - it is necessary here to explain that the force
& impetus with which the Water is hurled from the summit, gives
it an oblique or rather descends an inclined plane - leaving a
considerable aperture between the Rock and the Water, I had heard
of the body of Water being so great as by its density to become
opaque - I was determined to prove it. I entered boldly and might
advance from ¹³⁰ 20 feet or a little more, I did ~~not~~ remain long enough to
ascertain it for I found the heat to be so intense my breathing
became difficult - a violent perspiration I caught the

opening and was happy to breathe freely again - I must here
remark that notwithstanding I had the full power of the Sun's
rays acting on the body of Water and from my situation the
Water between that Summit and me I could not perceive any
light, all was dark as if I had been entombed in a cavern.

It is unnecessary to enlarge here upon what we did in our
return we met with the same obstacles and more fatigue
with less strength to climb the steep ascent - we exerted it after
having been upwards of six hours actively employed in this
enterprise - I met with nothing worth noticing as a
Mineralogist except a kind of calcareous earth, which is called here
the White Stone - its properties & formation are singular - the White Stone
is mixed with earthy particles, conglomerates and by exposure to
the air becomes hard - its appearance is like Derbyshire Spar, when

when immersed in water, it assumes the quality of hard Soap but not greasy - yet is made use of to cleanse & purify clothes - It may be melted by heat and when cool becomes a solid mass it is very light and something like Cassia tones, though closer grain - The specimens I brought to England have often puzzled the learned Society of Naturalists -

There are many Snakes in this trade & unacquainted with serpents - The Rattle Snakes, several of which were killed and sent of the Rattles, which are found at the extremity of the Tail - They reckon their Age by the number of Rattles, the largest I have destroyed had fourteen, which I brought to Europe

There are a vast variety of the species of Snakes in America as well as Reptiles & Insects - of the former the most curious I have heard of is called the Horn Snake it is seldom more than 2 or 3 inches in length and very rarely found - it has a small horn on the top of the head, like the spur of a Wren's tail cock - it ascends Trees which it selects near a path frequented by animals, it casts itself into a crotch, suspends itself on a projecting bough, which is perpendicular to the path - when the animal is passing - the Snake by a sudden jerk, pounces on its prey and by the same act, forces the horn or tube into the flesh - a subtle poison is emitted through the tube which soon insinuates into the blood vessels and causes the death of the animal - I have often seen in the course of my Travels, the power of ^{Snakes in} fascinating Birds and even animals such as Squirrels and Frogs - this fact has been denied by some but there cannot a doubt exist for many to my knowledge have seen it and I remember in my youth, with others having seen a dark, fascinating young ^{Snake in} _{at} _{the} _{house}

After refreshing ourselves at Milsworth we mounted our
Horns and after a pleasant ride arrived at a late hour
at the barracks of Bullisburg crossed the River and once
more found ourselves in that hospitable garrison -

Portrait of
Madame

1785

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A H 1912

(2)