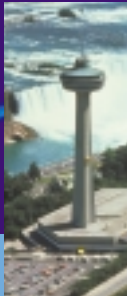
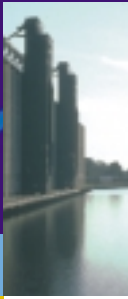


Rethinking Niagara



Heritage Tourism on the Bi-national Regional Agenda

October 23 and 24, 2001

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Colleen Blake, Managing Director, The Shaw Festival
Richard Geiger, President, Buffalo Niagara Convention and Visitors Bureau



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Leaders put heritage on the bi-national agenda

Nearly 200 leaders representing government, business, the arts, historic preservation, and education gathered on October 23 at the Victoria Park Restaurant in Niagara Falls, Ontario, and October 24 at the Castellani Art Museum at Niagara University to put heritage development at the top of the bi-national regional development agenda.

This *Rethinking Niagara* symposium was the third in a series of bi-national meetings to bring attention to the opportunities that exist for heritage tourism development and to put the spotlight on current work and best practices.

“My vision is a true cross-border heritage tourism experience,” Allan Gotlieb said, “one that celebrates the region, capitalizes on our common threads, showcases our differences and adds to the successful heritage tourism of both New York State and Ontario.”

Gotlieb, chair of the Ontario Heritage Foundation, and former Canadian Ambassador to the United States, said preserving our heritage should be not only an engine of economic growth, but also the basis of *reconnection* and identity for citizens in a global economy. To achieve that, we must work together in new ways.

“There is no denying that we have a shared history,” Gotlieb said. “Neither of us can tell our story without reference to the other. But before we can celebrate our shared history, we must first preserve it and understand it.”



Father Hennepin, first European to see the Falls.
Source: Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society.



The Niagara River defines a single region in two countries.
Source: The Urban Design Project/University at Buffalo, & Regional Municipality of Niagara.

Moving the Heritage Agenda Forward

- Tim Hudak, Ontario Minister of Tourism, Culture and Recreation indicated Ontario's support for heritage tourism development and announced \$100,000 funding for a new Niagara “Doors Open” pilot project to be co-ordinated by the Ontario Heritage Foundation. New York State colleagues have since accepted Minister Hudak's invitation to join their Ontario partners to launch a bi-national Doors Open program.
- Terrence D. Moore, a senior heritage planner for the U.S. National Park Service, discussed the results of a recent “reconnaissance” study recommending Congressional consideration of a feasibility study for a *Niagara Heritage Corridor*.
- Debbie Zimmerman, Chair Niagara Region, announced the Region's commitment to undertake a feasibility study for the Welland Canal Heritage Park.

Brian Akley, Deputy Commissioner of Empire State Development Corp. for Marketing, Advertising, and Tourism, noted tourism is already the second largest industry in New York State, employing 750,000 people and generating \$37 billion a year in revenue. But heritage tourism provides an opportunity to achieve even more.

“We need to make better connections with the 20 million people who visit this region each year,” Akley said. “We need to

provide them with activities and events that will keep them here for two days, three days, or longer.”

To do that, symposium organizers said, we need to invest in stories of world-significance – the Erie and Welland canals and the opening of the American West and Canadian hinterlands, the birth of hydroelectric power, and the Underground Railroad – and to preserve and develop the sites that best tell those stories.



The Welland Canal, Ontario.
Source: NETC

Heritage Tourism After September 11

In the wake of the devastating terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001, several speakers underscored the importance of recommitting ourselves to investment in heritage tourism development, to a new collaborative marketing effort, and to the establishment of a safe and efficient border crossing.

“The economic disruption and the psychological scars are going to take a long time to heal,” Brian Akley said. “But we are a resilient industry, and we will rebuild and be better and stronger than before.”

Part of that process, said Hon. Tim Hudak, Ontario Minister of Tourism, Culture and Recreation, will be in moving decisively to deal with cross-border security issues and to assure all travelers that our region is safe.

“A fence will be going up as it should,” Hudak said. “Security is paramount. It has already started. We as Canadians have a choice, to be inside or outside the fence. We’d rather be inside the fence.”

That will mean harmonizing rules and coordinating customs procedures to create a common North American security perimeter. The Canadian-American economic relationship depends on it.

“We’re already partners across this border,” Bruce Fisher, Deputy Erie County Executive, said.

“We’re demanding of ourselves, as long-time marriage partners, that we think like new lovers. We’re committing ourselves to become more interesting and more attractive to one another. We’re asking ourselves to renew our vows.”

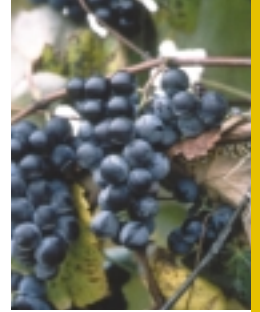
Clyde Burmaster, chair of the Niagara County Legislature, put the point even more succinctly: “If you look across and see a river between us, you’re looking the wrong way. We need to lift up our chins, look up, and see the beauty of this great region that we’re fortunate to live in.”



The Niagara Gorge — a unique attraction for hikers, birders and naturalists.
Source: Foit-Albert Associates.

Participants: Brian Akley, Empire State Development; Jim Alexander, Friends of Fort George; Olivia Ardit, Institute for Local Governance and Regional Growth; Mike Ball, Buffalo Economic Renaissance Corporation; Gary Burroughs, Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake; Peter Cammarata, Buffalo Economic Renaissance Corporation; August Carlino, Rivers of Steel, Homestead, PA; Robert Carr, Carr M Trust; David Cronin, New York Council for the Humanities; Elaine Cryer, Baird Foundation; Peter Cutler, Eric Mower & Associates; Ron Dale, Parks Canada; Jane Davies, Tourism For All Associates; Ken Forgeron, Regional Municipality of Niagara; Tim Foster, OEB International Public Relations/Public Affairs; Eugene W. Frett, Dragon Associates, Inc.; Michael Frisch, Foundation; David R. Granville, Buffalo Arts Commission; Jan Gray, Ontario Heritage Foundation; Patty Liss Greenspan, Eli Mundy and Associates Ltd.; Neal Grise, Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Recreation; Bill Kingsley, Gray Line of Niagara; Paul E. Knab, New York State; George Kostyk, C3PG; Carrie Laney, USA Niagara Development Corporation; Niagara Parks Commission; Kerry Mitchell, Canadian Consulate General, Buffalo; Carl J. Montante, Uniland Development Co.; Terrence D. Moore, U.S. National Park Service; Sue

A Thematic Framework for Bi-national Heritage Tourism



Source: NETC

How do we make the most of our potential? Conference organizers Bob Shibley and Beth Benson suggested the bi-national heritage development effort needs a thematic framework to organize our heritage stories and sites, identify priorities, and make them meaningful to residents and visitors.



Fort George, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario.
Source: Niagara Economic and Tourism Corporation (NETC).

Organizing the diverse array of heritage attractions by theme can simplify the picture for tourists, assist with innovative and engaging interpretation and make the region more accessible.

Five themes were suggested:

The Landscape – “the table on which all our other gifts are spread” – the natural history of two Great Lakes, the River, the Niagara gorge, the Falls, and the Niagara Escarpment.

The Bounty of Nature – the stories of grapes and wine, and the other products of orchards and fields, as well as the great ethnic, contemporary, and country

cuisines of the region, food festivals and farmers markets.

Stories of War, Peace, and Freedom – all of the tales of conflict along the frontier, from the French and Indian wars, to the war of 1812, the Fenian raids, the stories of freedom seekers of the Underground Railroad and beyond to an era of friendship and cooperation.

The Wealth of a Region – stories of innovation and industrial achievement in our region including two great canals that shaped the region and the continent, the birth of hydroelectricity, shipping of grain, and production of iron, steel, nickel, chemicals, automobiles and aircraft.

Enterprise in the Arts – encompassing all the riches of the bi-national region in theater, festivals, music, and visual arts, from The Shaw Festival to Shea’s,

from The Art Gallery of Hamilton to the Albright-Knox, from ArtPark to Buffalo’s Thursday in the Square.

Development of the heritage themes has been accompanied by a mapping project undertaken by the Regional Niagara planning department and the Urban Design Project. The new maps show both sides of the river, designated green spaces and potentially protected areas, as well as an inventory of heritage sites across the five themes.

Shibley and Benson suggested a three-part strategy for developing our heritage resources: tell the stories by investing in interpretation and preservation; implement strategic projects like the Welland Canal parkway and the U.S. Niagara heritage area; and continue working together to market the whole region.



Buffalo’s Bennett grain elevator was part of what remains a unique ensemble of great industrial structures.
Source: Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society.

“Step by step, a simple four-week festival grew into an eight-month theater season that draws hundreds of thousands of visitors per year.”

Colleen Blake,
Managing Director,
The Shaw Festival

The heritage development initiative is well under way

The symposium demonstrated that many people are already involved and committed to heritage development initiatives in the bi-national region. Some of the initiatives are long standing and have demonstrated clear benefits for community development, such as The Shaw Festival and its transformation of Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario. “Step by step”, Colleen Blake said, “a simple four-week festival grew into an eight-month theater season that draws hundreds of thousands of visitors per year.”



Erie Beach, Fort Erie, Ontario. Source: NETC.

Some benefits have been long awaited. Mayor Irene Elia of Niagara Falls, NY, noted that her city has reviewed the good planning work of two decades and has rededicated itself to reconnecting Niagara Falls to its waterfront, mitigating the barrier of the Robert Moses Parkway, completing a waterfront pedestrian trail, and creating new heritage tourism attractions including a Niagara Falls Family Museum.

The Niagara Parks Commission continues to build on its legacy of 19th and 20th century parks preservation with new projects that celebrate heritage – preservation of the Chippawa battlefield, construction of a new monument there, acquisition of buffer lands, and development of a broader

area as a golf course. Commission chair Brian Merrett noted that the projects are funded with reinvested revenues, not tax-payers' money.

Work is moving forward to cross-market festivals of all kinds



The road to freedom on the Underground Railroad traveled through the Niagara region. Source: Motherland Connexions Inc.

in Western New York and the Niagara Peninsula. Arlene White, of the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, and Patrick Fagan, President of She's Performing Arts Center, said marketing festivals in both countries can develop larger crowds for each event, and cut across the boundaries between offerings in the arts, history, and ethnic culture.

Buffalo Mayor Anthony Masiello said the Erie Canal and Inner Harbor project will be developed as an authentic heritage attraction along with developing Buffalo's part of the story of the Underground Railroad. Masiello said he sees work on Buffalo's waterfront, downtown, and neighborhoods as closely connected with efforts to develop heritage attractions.



Memorial at the Chippawa Battlefield Heritage Park, Niagara Falls, Ontario.
 Source: The Niagara Parks Commission.

“I see work on Buffalo’s waterfront, downtown, and neighborhoods as closely connected with efforts to develop heritage attractions.”

Buffalo Mayor
 Anthony Masiello

The Art Gallery of Hamilton is building partnerships with cultural and tourism attractions across the region – including the Burchfield Penney gallery in Buffalo – to increase visitation and stretch tight marketing budgets, Lorna Zarenda, Senior Development Officer, said.

At Fort George and Fort Niagara, British and American soldiers were actually dining together when the War of 1812 broke out. Fort George superintendent Ron Dale said the two forts are building on those long-standing ties with contemporary cooperative programming and marketing ventures.

Fort Erie, Mayor Wayne Redekop said his city is working to implement its “international gateway” plan – reclaiming waterfront for public access, improving public infrastructure, and investing in recreational facilities, heritage sites, and improvements in the urban environment.



The region possesses hundreds of important heritage sites.
 Source: The Urban Design Project/University at Buffalo, & Regional Municipality of Niagara.

on & Visitors Bureau; Carl Burgwardt, Pedaling History Bicycle Museum; Chris Burke, Ministry of Economic Development and Trade; Clyde Burmaster, Niagara County Legislature; I Connor, Niagara Economic & Tourism Corporation; Lucy Cook, Gateway Development Corporation; Nancy Croce, Niagara Symphony; David Crombie, Waterfront Regeneration Erie County; Bob Farrow, Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture & Recreation; Maureen Fayle, Albright-Knox Art Gallery; Bruce Fisher, Erie County; Bonnie Foit-Albert, Foit-Albert h, Eric Mower & Associates; Yann Girard, Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Recreation; Carolyn Goldstein, Lowell National Historic Park, MA; Allan Gottlieb, Ontario Heritage am, Royal Botanical Gardens; Allan Jamieson; Maureen Kellick, Niagara Falls Convention and Visitors Bureau; John Kernahan, Niagara Parks Commission; Patrick Keyes, Arts lveen, Niagara Parks Commission; Brian Meilleur, Niagara Falls Redevelopment LLC; Marjorie Mercer, Ontario Heritage Foundation; Ros Mercio, Fox UTV Buffalo; Brian Merrett, y, Niagara County Tourism; Maureen Ormsby, Office of Sen. George D. Maziarz; Dan Patterson, Niagara College; Lorrie G. Pella, Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Recreation;

The art of interpretation

Symposium attendees had an unusual opportunity to learn about best practices in heritage tourism development from leaders of four of the United States' oldest, best known, and most successful heritage areas.

“Unless people reconnect with their own heritage – from grade school on – there is little hope that they can teach others about their most compelling stories,”

Howard Gillette,
Professor of History
at Rutgers University,
Camden campus

Perhaps the most important lesson offered was that attracting heritage visitors is the end result of a process that starts with people learning the real stories of their own communities and preserving the places that tell those stories.

“Unless people reconnect with their own heritage – from grade school on – there is little hope that they can teach others about their most compelling stories,” said panel

organizer Howard Gillette, a Professor of History at Rutgers

University, Camden campus.

It is just as important, however, to preserve the places that tell the stories. Fort Ticonderoga on Lake Champlain in New York State is in many ways the original American heritage site, instructing generations of visitors about part of the meaning of “becoming Americans.”

It had “a distinguished history in two 18th century wars for empire and freedom,” said Nicholas Westbrook, director of the fort. But it has also had a two-century history as a premier heritage attraction. And that depended on preserving the place, first by private interests in the early 19th century, and then by the government at the beginning of the 20th century.

Successful heritage interpretation also requires careful thinking

about what stories to tell and how to tell them. The Lowell National Historical Park in Massachusetts commemorates the stories of that city’s famous textile mills – of capitalist revolutionaries, machine technology, waterpower, workers, and the birth of the urban industrial city.

But park planners have struggled with questions about whose story to tell and how, curator Carolyn Goldstein said. Is the story about famous people and leaders or ordinary people? Is it a story for the nation or just the community? What they have learned is that there are many stories, some of them conflicting, and the means of telling them need to be updated often as both scholarship and technology advance.

Heritage interpretation also needs to allow for the fact that history is



Visitors tour the Duquesne Blast Furnace near Pittsburgh. Source: *Rivers of Steel National and State Heritage Area*.

Christine A. Peters, Roycroft Inn & East Aurora Tourism; Gary D. Praetzel, Niagara University; Cindi Ptak, The National Road Project, MD; Luke Rich, Empire State Development Corporation; Michelle Rudnicki, Buffalo Museum of Science; Ed Rutkowski, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation; Ellen Ryan, Carnegie Art Center, Niagara; Rita Scagnetti, Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Recreation; Linda Schineller, Music Niagara; Lynda Schneekloth, Urban Design Project, University at Buffalo; Keri Schul Sherman, Friends of the Buffalo and Niagara Rivers; Robert Shibley, Urban Design Project, University at Buffalo; Kristina Sigurdsson, Niagara University; John R. Simon, Niagara D. Bruce Timms, Regional Niagara; Megan Toohey, Canadian Consulate; Roger Trevino, Niagara Falls Redevelopment Corporation; Thomas Trimble, Buffalo Olmsted Parks Corporation; Leah Wallace, Niagara-on-the-Lake; Steven Watchorn, Urban Design Project, University at Buffalo; Nicholas Westbrook, Fort Ticonderoga; Arlene White, Mini Development Corp.; Ted Wlazlo, Heritage Thorold LACAC; Lorna Zarenda, Art Gallery of Hamilton; Aubrey Zidenberg, Casino Amusements Canada; Deborah Zimmerman, Regi-

alive. Pittsburgh's Rivers of Steel heritage area celebrates "the rise of the second industrial revolution." But many people there still make their living in steel and coal, or harbor with hopes that lost jobs will return. They often don't want old workplaces turned into museums.

The interpretive response, August R. Carlino said, was to interpret the history through the people living there today, relying on oral history to preserve the stories and employing residents themselves to tell them. Residents who didn't think their history was worth saving now take new pride in it.

Marketing and promotion are also important, but they can't get ahead of the development of sites and stories. The National Road Project seeks to tell the story of America's first major highway. The story is significant, although obscure, but sites to develop are few and far between on the post-colonial road from Baltimore to St. Louis.

"That road is what got this country off the coastline and out West," Cindy Ptak, project man-



Pittsburg was at the center of the "second industrial revolution" — advances in steel-making technology.
Source: Rivers of Steel National and State Heritage Area.

ager, said. But she admits there aren't yet a lot of places really worth stopping for. Until they develop those sites, she said, aggressive marketing can actually backfire.

"Many of you are dedicating your lives to realizing the vision of a unique international destination here. What we need to do now is to maintain that momentum and look for new ways to collaborate to tell our shared stories and celebrate our heritage."

David Crombie,
Founding Chair,
Waterfront
Regeneration Trust



The National Highway was first a tourist route in the early days of the automobile.
Source: The National Road Project.

Corp.; Roberta Rifkin, The Baird Foundation; Charlene Ritter-Lester, Erie County Office of Arts, Culture & Tourism; Sue Rockwell, Landmark; Renato Romanin, Niagara Economic & Tourism
er; Stan P. Rydelek, Niagara Falls Convention and Visitors Bureau; Irene Rykaszewski, Lewiston Council on the Arts; James Sandoro, Buffalo Transportation Museum; Nancy Sanger, Hastings
tz, Niagara University; Catherine Schweitzer, The Baird Foundation; Joshua Segal, Nordic Gaming Corporation; John Sheffer, Institute for Local Governance and Regional Growth; Kenneth
a County Industrial Development Agency; Mayor Richard F. Soluri, Village of Lewiston; Alan Stafford, Office of Assemblywoman Francine Delmonte; John Theisen, Thorold Chamber of Commerce;
nservancy; Sandra Tuck, Sanger Farms; Mark Turgeon, Riverside Inn & Greater Lewiston Business & Professional Association; Jan Van Harssell, Niagara University; Penny Wagborne, Ontario
istry of Tourism and Ministry of Economic Development & Trade; Glen White, Carr Marketing Communications; Deborah Whitehouse, Niagara Parks Commission; Michael Wilton, USA Niagara
onal Municipality of Niagara.

What happens next?

Now that political leaders on both sides of the mighty Niagara have put heritage tourism on the bi-national agenda, it is time for all of us to redouble our efforts to invest in heritage sites and the stories they tell.

As David Crombie suggested at the close of the symposium, the necessary work is already well under way.

“Many of you are dedicating your lives to realizing the vision of a unique international destination here,” Crombie said. What we need to do now is to maintain that momentum and look for new ways to collaborate to tell our shared stories and celebrate our heritage.”

Luke Rich, Regional Vice President for Empire State Development Corp., closed the conference with advice to pursue the heritage tourism opportunity with an eye on quality for heritage tourism in visitor attractions and experiences.

Toward these ends, the Urban Design Project has been charged with producing a summary and synthesis of what Rethinking Niagara has learned, discussed, and proposed to date as a means to illuminate the way forward.

Colleen Blake and Stan Rydelek, co-chairs of a bi-national tourism committee, will be reporting back to Governor Pataki and Premier Harris with recommendations for advancing the cause of heritage bi-national tourism development, building on the thematic framework presented at the symposium and recognizing the many new projects now underway.

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