

# NORTHWEST NEW YORK STATE

By Ken McNaughton

The 17<sup>th</sup> Annual Niagara Celtic Heritage Festival & Highland Games were held in Olcott, New York. During the annual general meeting of the Clan Macnachtan Association Worldwide I was privileged to be recognized and added to the Clan Macnachtan Honor Roll.

Olcott is a small fishing village on the southern shore of Lake Ontario (Fig 1). I spent three nights at the Old Olcott Beach Firestation Guestrooms & Suites. The plain cinder block building has had many incarnations, including a church, but had been used by the Olcott Fire Company for nearly a century. It is now owned by Bob Stedman, who is in the process of converting it into a tourist center, with bar, restaurant and accommodations.



FFigure 1. In three days I was able to see a bit of Olcott, Lockport, Buffalo and Niagara Falls [1].



Figure 2. Two fishermen try their luck in the estuary of Eighteen Mile Creek.



Figure 3. The Olcott Lighthouse bears the date 1873.



**Figure 4. Lakeview Village Shoppes at Olcott.**

Eighteen Mile Creek empties into Lake Ontario at Olcott, which also boasts a lighthouse and the Lakeview Village Shoppes (Figs. 2-4). The Festival was held at Krull Park. Opposite the park, in Lake Ontario, some cormorants have found a secure home on a concrete platform with one tree (Fig. 5).

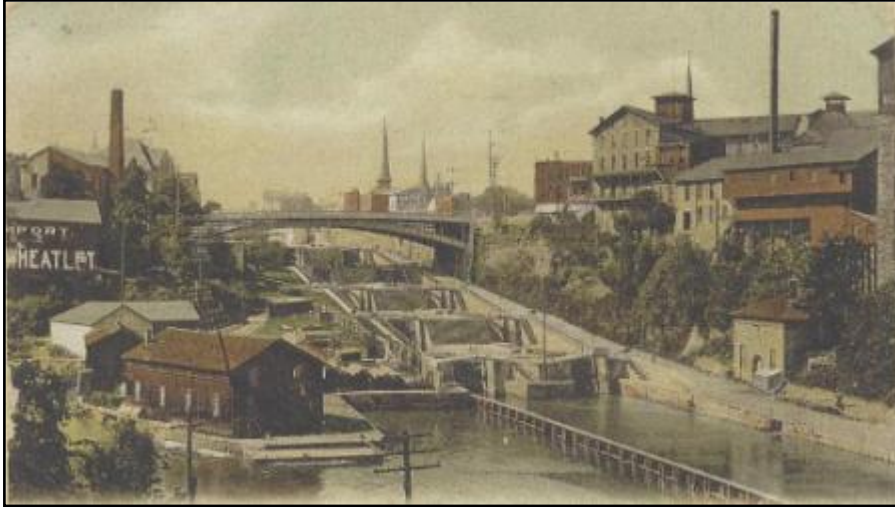
**Figure 5. Cormorants find a home in Lake Ontario on a concrete platform with one tree.**

From Olcott, Route 78 follows Eighteen Mile Creek south. On Friday 15 September 2017 I passed through Burt to have dinner at Gordie Harper's Bazaar in Newfane, a restaurant with eighty unique craft shops adjacent. The car park was littered with apples from the orchard to the south. To the east, a vast field of pumpkins stretched away to the horizon.



On Saturday I drove further south to Lockport on the Erie Canal. The Erie Canal was North America's most successful and influential public works project. Built between 1817 and 1825, this 363-mile-long canal (584 km) was the first all-water link between the Atlantic Seaboard and Great Lakes. It stretches from Albany on the Hudson River, which flows into the Atlantic Ocean, and winds westward, below Lake Ontario, to drain into Lake Erie at Buffalo. Originally four feet deep and forty feet wide, it cut through fields, forests, rocky cliffs and swamps; crossed rivers on aqueducts; and overcame hills with eighty-three lift locks. The locks were ninety feet long and fifteen feet wide, with a boat capacity of thirty tons. Passengers traveled from Albany to Buffalo in five days instead of two weeks in a stagecoach. Freight boats carried mid-Western produce from Buffalo to Albany; most continued on to New York City's seaport down the Hudson River. Freight rates fell ninety percent compared to ox-drawn wagons. The Erie Canal carried more westbound immigrant than any other trans-Appalachian canal.

Between 1836 and 1862 the canal was deepened to seven feet; locks became 110 feet long and 18 feet wide; boat capacity increased to 240 tons; and twinned-chamber locks enabled boats to travel in both directions at once. Between 1905 and 1918 it was upgraded to the New York State Barge Canal System with a minimum depth of twelve feet; electrically powered locks passed boats 300 feet long. When in 1959 the St. Lawrence Seaway opened, allowing ships to go from the Great Lakes directly to the Atlantic Ocean, commercial traffic declined on New York canals. But the Erie Canal still operates to this day.



**Figure 6. An old postcard shows the Flight of Five locks at Lockport [2].**

One of its unique features, the “Flight of Five,” is at Lockport. This lowered easterly and raised westerly boats sixty feet (18 m) to

overcome the Niagara Escarpment. Today, the northerly Flight of Five stills operates, while the larger locks of the New York State Barge System operate on the southern side (Figs. 6-7).

**Figure 7. Flight of Five at Lockport on right, original steps center, and the New York State Barge System locks at left.**



There is an 1897 photograph of Lockport lock tenders sitting on these steps (Fig. 8). A local sculptress, Susan Geissler, has been commissioned to bring this photograph to life in bronze (Fig. 9). Over the next three years, she will cast each of these figures, seat them on the steps, and add a bronze camera in front.



**Figure 8. An 1897 photograph of Lockport lock-tenders sitting on the steps [3].**

**Figure 9. Sculptress Susan Geissler.**

To get some idea of how remarkable this project is [you can visit Susan’s](#)



[website](#). Check the eleven stages of the Foundry Process to understand what she will go through for each of the figures and look at some of her Installations to see how realistic these lock tenders will appear.

**Figure 10. Ken and Sean Pogue conversing at the Clan MacNaughton tent [3 photos by S. Geissler].**



**Figure 11. Sean and Ken ham it up for sculptress Susan Geissler**

Sean Pogue is commissioner for the northwest section of eastern USA for the Clan Macnachtan Association Worldwide. He convened the association's tents at the Celtic Festival with the help of his wife and extended family. I was talking with Sean by the MacNaughton tents when he became aware we were being photographed from behind. The photographer was none other than the famous sculptress herself, Susan Geissler. We convinced Susan we didn't mind being photographed and



Sean even showed a bit of leg. We corralled the chairman of the Clan Macnachtan Association Worldwide, Peter MacNaughton, to illustrate three different MacNaughton tartans (Figs. 10-12).

**Figure 12. Sean in the Dress Tartan, Ken in the Ancient and Peter MacNaughton in the Weathered Tartan.**

After the festival I drove to Buffalo and stayed at Oscar's Bed & Breakfast on Linwood Avenue, in the Wright Suite. The city of Buffalo boasts five homes and other structures designed by the great architect Frank Lloyd Wright, including one of his most ambitious structures, a home for his friend and confidant Darwin Martin, President of the Larkin Soap Company.



**Figure 13. Sitting room in the Wright Suite at Oscar's Bed & Breakfast, Buffalo.**

Wright also designed the company's Larkin Administration Building, which was razed in 1950 and led to the preservation movement in Buffalo. The Wright Suite is characterized by references to the influences on Wright's vision—Asian cultures and his Prairie Style. It

has a sitting area (Fig. 13), a side room, queen size bed, and a full bathroom with a leaded glass window.

**Figure 14. The Great Lakes.**

The Great Lakes form the largest group of freshwater lakes on Earth by total area, containing 21% of the world's surface fresh water by volume (Fig. 14). They began to form at the end of the last glacial period around 14,000 years ago, as retreating ice sheets exposed the basins they had carved into the land, which then filled with melt-water. The lakes are connected by rivers or gorges. Water from Superior and Michigan flows into Huron, which flows into Erie. Water from Erie flows north into Ontario via the Niagara River. Water from Lake Ontario flows into the Atlantic Ocean via the St. Lawrence Seaway.



**Figure 15. Goat Island from the north, with the American Falls on the left and the Horseshoe Falls on the right.**

Canada lies to the left of the Niagara River and the USA to the right. As water enters the Niagara Gorge, Buffalo is to the right. Just before the gorge narrows, Goat Island divides the flow. Water flows over the Horseshoe Falls on the Canadian side and over the American Falls on the USA side. But to get the best

view of the falls, we don't want to approach from the southern side, above the falls, we want to approach from the north, below the falls. In Figure 15, the American Falls are now on the left and the Horseshoe Falls on the right. Most of the water flows over the Horseshoe Falls.

**Figure 16. Wooden walkway, yellow poncho and Bridal Veil water rushing away at base of falls.**



**Figure 17. The American Falls, to the left of the Bridal Veil Falls.**



It's possible to view the American Falls from various angles. Moving from right to left as we face the falls, the Bridal Veil Falls are separated from the main American Falls, and look just like a bridal veil. The Cave of the Winds used to be a cave behind these falls, but it collapsed in 1909. The experience is now recreated when, in the spring, a team of six men, without the aid of any electrical equipment, build scaffolding around the Bridal Veil Falls so that a

visitor in the summer, protected by a plastic poncho, can enjoy getting very close to the water. In November, the men dismantle the wooden walkways before the crushing ice sets in. It's not easy to take photos so close to the falls, with the mist and spray, but Fig 16 shows some of the walkway, a yellow poncho and the turbulent water at the base. It was exhilarating to reach into the water and feel it rushing past my hand. On the Hurricane Deck I let out a scream of delight as I backed into the 70-mile-per-hour wind generated by the rushing waters.

**Figure 18. View across the top of the American Falls to the Observation Tower and Rainbow Bridge connecting USA and Canada.**



To the left of the American Falls (Fig. 17) the 282-foot high (86 m) Prospect Point Observation Tower (Fig. 18) affords an elevated view of the falls from the other side (Fig. 19).

**Figure 19. View of the American Falls from the Observation Tower.**



The Crow's Nest is another walkway that approaches the American Falls, on the opposite side from the Cave of the Winds. I was rewarded for this climb by a nice shot of a rainbow (Fig. 20).

**Figure 20. Rainbow from the Crow's Nest at left of American Falls.**

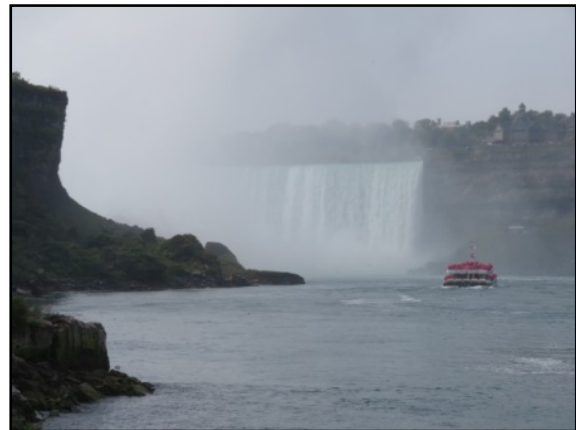
All that remained was to see the Horseshoe Falls, which carries 90% of the flow. We boarded the Maid of the Mist, this time equipped with blue ponchos (Fig. 21).



**Figure 21. Maid of the Mist heads from the American side to the Horseshoe Falls.**

**Figure 22. The Hornblower heads into the mist of the Horseshoe Falls from the Canadian side.**

I positioned myself at the bow. Soon we were surrounded by the Horseshoe Falls on all sides and shrouded in mist and spray from that mighty torrent (Fig 22). Because the water was rushing past us very fast, it was difficult to tell how speedily we were heading for the base. But I knew there must be whirlpools ahead. I was scared and turned to the person on my left, saying “I forgot to ask how dangerous this is.” It was another exhilarating experience, but I did feel a bit relieved when we turned and headed back. Again, it was difficult to record this experience on film because of the mist and spray, but it was unforgettable.



#### REFERENCES

1. Exxon Travel Vision Map of New York State, General Drafting Co., NJ, 1982.
2. Erie Canalway Map & Guide 2017, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior.
3. Cason, Rikki, “Tribute to lock tenders planned,” *Lockport Journal*, 28 April 2016.

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