Rethinking the Niagara Frontier
A report on the continuing bi-national forum

The Urban Design Project
School of Architecture and Planning
University at Buffalo, State University of New York

Robert Shibley and Bradshaw Hovey, Editors

The Waterfront Regeneration Trust
Toronto, Ontario
Canada
Rethinking the Niagara Frontier
A report on the continuing bi-national forum

Robert G. Shibley and Bradshaw Hovey, Editors

Project Directors:
Beth Benson
The Waterfront Regeneration Trust
Toronto, Ontario

Robert G. Shibley, AIA, LEED AP
The Urban Design Project
School of Architecture and Planning
The University at Buffalo
State University of New York
Acknowledgments

A publication of the Urban Design Project and the Waterfront Regeneration Trust
April 2001

The Urban Design Project
Robert G. Shibley
Richard T. Reinhard
Bradshaw Hovey
Anne E. Conable
Lynda H. Schneckloth
David Herzberg
Michael H. Frisch
Jessica A. Jaminetz

The Waterfront Regeneration Trust
Beth Benson
David Crombie
David Carter
Irene Rota
Lisa Ohata

With the generous support of:
The Margaret L. Wendt Foundation
The Niagara Parks Commission
The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Environment Canada

Contents

Overview 5
Participants 6
A Good Regional Dialogue 12
Two nations, one region 13
Precendents and possibilities 14
Talking together 16
The way forward 19
Good People, Good Programs, Good Ideas 20
Brian Merrett on the Niagara Parks 21
Mary Means on Heritage Development 24
Robert C. O’Dell on Tourism Investment Opportunities 28
John Farrow on Successful City Regions 32
The Niagara Frontier: Border Zone or “Middle Ground”? 36
David Herzberg
With a preface by Michael H. Frisch

Precedents From Other Regions: Lessons In Boundary-crossing 56
Bradshaw Hovey

Learning from other regions 57
Recovering the stories of the borderland 58
Regenerating the cradle of the American Industrial Revolution 65
Restructuring an old industrial district 66
What we can learn from these cases 70

Contents 3
Rethinking the Niagara Frontier
A report on the continuing bi-national forum

Overview

Rethinking the Niagara Frontier is a bi-national effort to stimulate conversation, re-imagining, and collaboration, toward making the most of opportunities at hand for the future of this region that straddles the Niagara River.

The term "frontier" suggests an edge, a boundary. In fact, an economic and cultural urban region extends across this boundary, encompassing Western New York State and southern parts of the Province of Ontario, and stretching from Lake Erie on the south, to Lake Ontario on the north.

There have been times of conflict during the long period of European inhabitation of this "frontier." But these incidents must be seen as brief interruptions in a much larger history of cultural and trade relationships connecting the two sides of the river. These centuries of cooperation and exchange are the foundation on which we seek to build in rethinking the possibilities of the Niagara Frontier.

The potential for generating greater prosperity and improving the quality of life in the region is great. There are special opportunities in promoting the growth of heritage and cultural tourism, the improvement of the built and natural environment, creative redevelopment of former industrial lands, investments in trade and transportation, and development of knowledge-based industries.

Dozens of organizations — in government, business, education, environment, philanthropy, and community advocacy — have joined with the original instigators — the Urban Design Project of the University at Buffalo and the Waterfront Regeneration Trust of Ontario — to explore the possibilities.

Initial meetings during the Winter of 1999-2000 were followed by a major bi-national forum in March 2000. Much of the material in this publication originated from that forum. Discussions continued throughout 2000, including a November "Roundtable" in Lewiston, NY. Work is now directed toward preparations for a major Fall 2001 event to focus on natural and heritage development.

There is no "czar" for this region or this enterprise. Rather, the goal of participants in Rethinking the Niagara Frontier is to stimulate action and promote collaboration among autonomous agencies and across national and sectoral boundaries through communication, critique and celebration. Interested parties are invited to join the conversation and work together with us in realizing our shared vision of one bi-national region of interrelated attractions, employment opportunities, and superior quality of life for its citizens.
Participants

The following is a cumulative list of participants, including those taking part in the December 1999 “Brainstorming Session” in Buffalo, the February “Roundtable” in Fort Erie, the March 2000 Forum in Niagara Falls, Ontario and New York, and the November 2000 “Roundtable” in Lewiston, New York.

Name, Organization

Karl Alvarez, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Darcy Baker, Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority
John Barr, Regional Municipality of Niagara
Lisa Basil, Conax Corporation
Jeffrey Belt, New Millennium Group of Western New York
Beth Benson, Waterfront Regeneration Trust
Thomas Blanchard Jr., Empire State Development Corporation
Helen M. Booth, Jordan Historical Museum
Henry Brodowski, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation
Ian Bromley, Ontario Ministry of Economic Development & Trade
Dave Brown, Brock University
Clinton Brown, Clinton Brown Co. Architecture
Gary Bruno, Fort Erie Economic Development Corporation
Noel Buckley, Niagara Falls Tourism
Gary Burrough, Lord Mayor, Niagara-on-the-Lake
Karen Cairney, Burk & Associates Ltd
Peter Cammarata, Buffalo Economic Renaissance Corporation
David Carter, Carter International
Michael A. Casale, Niagara County Planning
Botty Chetney, Alice King Rosan & Fleming, Inc.
David Colligan, Buffalo Green Fund
Kevin Collison, Buffalo News
Joe Collura, City of Niagara Falls
Anne Corrable, Arts Council of Buffalo and Erie County
Bill Cormor, Niagara Economic & Tourism Corporation
Lucy Cook, Gateway Development Corporation
Max Coyle, Niagara Waterfront Revitalization Task Force
David Crombie, Waterfront Regeneration Trust
Don Davidson, Royal Bank
Ron Deland, International Performing Arts For All
Tom DeSantis, City of Niagara Falls
Tracey Desjarlins, Economic Development and Tourism Services, St. Catharines
Douglas Dimitroff, New Millennium Group
Michelle Doncaster, Waterfront Regeneration Trust
Paul Dyster, City Council, City of Niagara Falls
Participants
Irene Elia, Mayor, Niagara Falls, NY
Robert L. Emerson, Old Fort Niagara
Patrick Fagan, Arts Council in Buffalo and Erie County
John Farrow, Canadian Urban Institute
John Farrow, Empire State Development Corporation
Ken Forgeron, Regional Municipality of Niagara
Jocelyn Forsey, Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority
Dorothy Furtney, Office of Assemblyman Paul Tokasz
Andrew Galanneau, Buffalo News
Dennis Galucci, Buffalo, NY
Kate Gardiner, Town of Fort Erie
Dave Gillis, Niagara Parks Commission
Kerry Grant, University at Buffalo
Ron Guido, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Tom Gwitt, Office of Assemblyman Paul Tokasz
Chris Hayward, Niagara Regional Conservation Authority
Mary Jane Heintzman, Waterfront Regeneration Trust
Alex Herlovitch, City of Niagara Falls
William K. Hinkle, New York Power Authority
Randy Hodge, Ontario Ministry of Economic Development and Trade
Bradshaw Hovey, Urban Design Project, University at Buffalo
Chris Jacobs, Erie County
Nancy Joseph, City of Niagara Falls
Daniel Kokundtz, Canadian Consulate General
Mike Krasner, Erie County
David Lacki, Greater Buffalo Convention and Visitors Bureau
Corey Larocque, Niagara Falls Review
JoAnne Loughry, Buffalo Place Inc.
Florence Luhr, Buffalo Niagara Enterprise
Tija Luste, Waterfront Regeneration Trust
Mary Catherine Malley, Hodgson Russ Andrews Woods & Goodyear
Michael Malley, New Millennium Group
Amanda Mason, Western Erie Canal Heritage Commission
Thomas McCormack, Strategic Projections, Inc.
Alec McGillivray, Ontario Ministry of Economic Development and Trade
Don McGregor, Canada Information Office
Mary Means, Mary Means Associates
Randy Meears, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Kathy Monney, Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority
Brian Morrette, Niagara Parks Commission
Tony Nilani, Waterfront Regeneration Trust
Robert Miller, Greater Buffalo-Niagara Regional Transportation Council
Mark Mistretta, Wendel Engineering
Kerry Mitchell, Canadian Consulate General, Buffalo
Mark Mitskovski, Peace Bridge/ Columbus Park Association
Sue Morrison, Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation
Willie Moskowitz, BorderNet Alliance
Rino Mostacci, Town of Fort Erie
Svitlana Nalyavako, Burk & Associates Ltd.
David Oakes, City of St. Catharines
Robert C. O’Dell, Robert C. O’Dell Management, Inc.
Lisa Ohata, Waterfront Regeneration Trust
Amy Oinasak, Institute for Local Governance and Regional Growth
Christine Peters, Margaret L. Wendt Foundation
April Petrie, Niagara Parks Commission
Gary D. Praetzel, Niagara University
Richard T. Reinhard, Urban Design Project/State of the Region Project
Ron Rienas, Town of Fort Erie
Linda L. Rix, Regional Municipality of Niagara
Ross Robinson, Oh Canada Eh? Dinner Show
Renato Romanin, Regional Municipality of Niagara
Irene Rota, Waterfront Regeneration Trust
Two Nations, One Region

If we were to stop thinking about the Niagara River as a boundary that divides two nations and start thinking of it as the center of one bi-national region, what would we think about? And if we were to think about this bi-national region as one of the world's most attractive places to live, as well as one of its most popular visitor destinations, what would we do?

These were exactly the kind of questions that more than 75 US and Canadian leaders worked hard to answer at Rethinking the Niagara Frontier: a Bi-national Forum, held in Niagara Falls, New York and Niagara Falls, Ontario, on March 30 and 31, 2000.

The forum featured a series of small group discussions focused on several of the key opportunities available to the region. These included heritage and cultural tourism; trade and transportation; brownfields redevelopment; the natural and built environment; and the development of knowledge-based industries.

The discussions were propelled by expert presentations about what is already happening in the region—in regard to parks development and tourism investment—as well as what might be possible in heritage and cultural tourism and the development of “competitive city-regions.”

Overall, the event helped to create a broader awareness of the value of thinking in terms of a bi-national region, form a clearer picture of the challenges and opportunities facing the Niagara city-region, generate increased enthusiasm for working together, and provide a real impetus for future cooperative bi-national work.

Origins of an Idea

Rethinking the Niagara Frontier was not the brainchild of a single person, but the result of a coming together of thinking and working across a range of topics and sites. Part of the immediate inspiration came from work engaged by the Waterfront Regeneration Trust, including the International Brownfields Exchange (IBE), they sponsored in the Fall of 1999. Meanwhile faculty and students at The Urban Design Project of the University at Buffalo, working in support of the IBE, focused a studio investigation on the idea of a “City in the Park” from lake to lake along the Niagara River.

More broadly, however, the forum—indeed the entire movement—can be seen as the result of the convergence of broader efforts. These include investments in Niagara Parks Commission venues, economic development planning by NET Corp. in Ontario, new investments in visitor facilities in Niagara Falls, Ontario; redevelopment planning in downtown Niagara Falls, NY; cultural tourism marketing work undertaken through a committee combining Buffalo-Niagara area arts organizations and the hospitality industry; redevelopment of Niagara Falls International Airport; continuing development of the Buffalo Riverwalk; and even such far-flung efforts as the South Buffalo Redevelopment Plan.

Taken all together, this work suggested that the time was ripe to expand our thinking about the potential of this region defined by the Niagara River and to engage issues of economic development, community improvement, and environmental repair and protection as part of a larger interconnected process.

This phase of the work began in December 1999 with a meeting at the University at Buffalo to discuss the possibilities for a symposium on “A Park of the 21st Century.” As the conversation continued, however, it emerged that the notion of a park might be too limiting, even mis-leading, about the shape of the idea.

By the close of a subsequent meeting in Fort Erie in February, the concept had broadened considerably. Interest in the transformation of brownfields, and in the idea of the “City in the Park” as the core of a heritage tourism strategy, remained. Concerns about trade and transportation and the development of knowledge-based industries were also incorporated.

It might be possible, it seemed, to imagine the region and rethink its future in relation to national and global trends and the local integration of eco-
nomic, environmental, and community interests. Under the leadership of the Urban Design Project and the Waterfront Regeneration Trust, and with financial support from the Margaret L. Wendt Foundation, Environment Canada, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the Niagara Parks Commission, a broader table of stakeholders was set and the discussion continued.

Precedents and Possibilities

Seldom is a thing done for the very first time; there are always precedents for action. For example, people in other places have already worked to regenerate brownfields, to develop tourism by celebrating local heritage, and to build collaboration on a regional basis and across intervening jurisdictional boundaries. Indeed, some of this is already happening here in the Niagara city-region.

The March 2000 conference brought together a series of provocative speakers to address relevant precedents and possibilities, as well as to talk about what is already happening in the region. A background paper on regional and interjurisdictional efforts to celebrate heritage, grow tourism, and improve the natural and built environment was also prepared. Following the forum, the Urban Design Project commissioned the creation of an historical essay to explain the broader experience of cultural and economic connection between New York and Ontario.

The Jewel of the Region

Brian Merrett, chair of Ontario’s Niagara Parks Commission (NPC) led off the presentations in March with a review of ongoing development of park properties that are the leading attraction of the region. Merrett called the falls and the park the “catalyst for tourism and stimulant for economic growth.” (See page 20).

Visitations to the falls is growing rapidly. By 2002 Merrett expects 2.0 million people will visit annually, up 23 per cent over the last three years. One study estimated 25,000 new jobs will be created on the Canadian side alone by 2003.

Merrett said the Parks Commission faces the challenge of developing new attractions that will bring tourists and economic wealth while preserving the quality of parklands at the same time. The “greening” of NPC assets has begun with new off-site bus parking, recycling, and composting.

Other major projects are ongoing, including a peoplemover to connect visitors to a range of destinations and to ease traffic, parking, and pollution problems in the park; an expansive new golf complex at Chippawa; reuse of old power buildings in Victoria Park; a new marina upriver, and more.

A Platform for Collaboration

Mary Means, a noted U.S. planner and an expert on cultural heritage corridors, talked about how the heritage corridor concept has provided a platform for boundary-crossing collaboration in dozens of settings. (See page 24).

Many regions around the United States have used the “heritage corridor” framework to develop, interpret, link, and promote a wide range of historical, cultural, architectural, natural, and other attractions for the benefit of visitors and local economies alike.

The key, Means said, is to connect a large number of individual attractions to make a comprehensive regional destination — in short, to make the whole much more than the sum of its parts. In this regard, the Niagara Falls region has far more to offer than other places, even before considering the Falls itself.

Beyond the immediate benefits, heritage corridor development has provided a non-threatening point of entry into the otherwise difficult work of multi-jurisdictional cooperation. Heritage corridor development here could lay the organizational groundwork for other binational planning and development initiatives.

Six Million Dollars Invested

Robert C. O’Dell, a regional planner who has consulted with the Niagara Economic Tourism Corporation (NET Corp.), made the case for putting tourism development front and center in the broader effort toward economic development in the Niagara Region. (See page 28).

O’Dell outlined roughly $6 billion (CDN) of current or planned investment in visitor facilities and related infrastructure on the Ontario side of the river and outlined the demand for nearly half again as much in hotels, entertainment centers, and retail.

Tourism, he said, is the largest and fastest growing economic sector in the world. With one of the planet’s great natural wonders at the center of the region, Niagara should expect to win more than its share of that growth. Visitor traffic is expected to rise sharply, with employment and revenues in the tourism industry growing space.

Ongoing, planned and recommended investments are part of a broader strategy for economic development in Ontario’s Niagara Region. NET Corp., a private entity designated by provincial government to map regional development strategy and action, has identified five priority areas for investment: telecommunications-dependent sectors such as call centers, data processing, and distance learning; high-tech manufacturing; specialized agriculture, and adult lifestyle communities. But tourism remains the key.

The Border as an Asset

John Farrow, President of the Canadian Urban Institute, shared some of his recent work about successful city-regions. At a minimum, Farrow said, to see the opportunities for the Niagara region we need to stop focusing on the border and start looking at a region that encompasses two jurisdictions. (See page 32).

The region’s conventional assets are significant. Toronto-Buffalo-Rochester is the fourth largest urban region in North America and the second fastest growing. It has a world-class attraction, and an international “brand name” in Niagara Falls. Geography is a funnel for economic activity — whatever travels between Southern Ontario and the eastern U.S. must come through this region.

The region also has some unconventional assets. Farrow urged the group to see the differences between the U.S. and Canada in tax and regulatory regimes, educational and medical systems, wages rates and skill packages as opportunities rather than barriers.

“If we create a region that crosses the border we begin to create the type of tension that, if used properly, leads to the type of innovations that create value and then wealth. The goal is to be world competitive, to be world class.”

An Historical Reconsideration

Following the March conference, The Urban Design Project commissioned University of Wisconsin historian David Herzberg to explore the body of historical writing about Western New York, Southern Ontario, and the border region, with an eye toward better understanding the long-term precedents and patterns of bi-national relations. (See pages 36).

What Herzberg found was a long history of dense and active connections across the river punctuated by brief episodes of conflict. We remember the conflicts, the French and Indian War, the War of 1812, and the 1866 Fenian invasion of Canada, among them. But we tend to forget the more peaceful, productive, and much longer periods of interaction and exchange.

The two banks of the river, the river itself, and especially the incredible wonder of the Niagara cataract have served mainly, not to divide Ontario and New York, Canada and the United States, but to draw the people of the region towards each other. Like Blondin the Great, Niagara’s first daredevil, we are drawn to cross where it seems least likely.
While last theatrical, the contemporary impulse to make new connections across the river is potentially far more consequential. Herzberg reminds us that bi-national cooperation in pursuit of economic gain or provision of a better quality of life would be consistent with the long flow of history, not a departure from it.

Experiences from other Regions

As noted above, we have much to learn from the experiences of others in the process of integrating tourism development, heritage preservation, environmental repair, and economic development efforts in regions that straddle borders. Bradshaw Hovey, Associate Director of the Urban Design Project, prepared a background paper for the March forum detailing three such experiences — along the Texas-Mexico border on a river running through Massachusetts and Rhode Island, and across a welter of local municipalities in Germany.

Los Caminos del Rio is the name of a 200-mile-long cultural heritage corridor along the Texas-Mexico border upstream from Brownsville and Matamoros. An unusual international not-for-profit agency brings together elected leaders, agency officials, and community members from both states, a river to preserve and celebrate the unique architectural heritage of the region, repair the environment, and promote these attractions to the world. (See page 58)

In the Blackstone River Valley of Massachusetts and Rhode Island, a nationally designated heritage area operates under the auspices of the National Park Service. A bi-state, public-private board oversees the preservation, redevelopment, and interpretation of historic sites, as well as efforts to improve the health of the river and the attractiveness of the valley environment. State agencies, municipal government, business and citizen groups work together and a Blackstone Valley Institute has taken on a planning and economic development agenda inconceivable just a few years ago. (See page 62)

In Germany’s Ruhr Valley region, a government sponsored “International Building Exhibition” has provided a platform for an aggressive combination of industrial heritage preservation, economic redevelopment, and dialogue. (See page 66)

Talking Together

On the afternoon of the second day of the March 2000 bi-national forum, participants sat down together in small groups to talk about the specific needs of and real opportunities for regional cooperation.

Each of the nine small group discussions focused on one of the topics — heritage and cultural tourism, improvements to the natural and built environment, development of trade and transportation, redevelopment of brownfields, and development of knowledge-based industries. Facilitators took very good notes — the full text of those notes is available at the Urban Design Project internet website (www.ap-buffalo.edu/urbandesignproject) and summaries of those conversations are provided below.

Heritage and Cultural Tourism

Participants in two sessions on heritage and cultural tourism argued the region has a rich and diverse array of assets — arts, performance, entertainment, architecture, history, nature, industry, sports, recreation and more — that beg to be linked, developed, interpreted, and marketed as a single destination.

A number of obstacles were noted. However, not all of the potential players in development are equally ready to participate. There is a lack of coordination in many areas, a lack of political cooperation and consensus, and a lack of popular support, funding, local pride, and local understanding of the region. While coordination is needed, there is a need to balance that against the demand for diversity.

The potential benefits to heritage and cultural tourism development, however, were clear: attracting more visitors, getting them to stay longer and spend more, will create more jobs and support a better quality of life for residents, while improving the self-image of the whole region.

Two strategies for pursuing the opportunity emerged from these discussions. First, participants suggested creation of a bi-national organization to provide leadership, coordination, and information toward bi-national planning and development. Such an organization should include representatives of government, culture, tourism, marketing, education, corporate, environment, and other private sector groups.

Second, participants recommended conducting an inventory of assets as the first step toward a master plan. There is a need to identify and evaluate sites and possible thematic groupings of attractions, as well as to assess current cross-border marketing efforts, leadership, and information, and to strategize pursuit of funding from public, private, and philanthropic sources.

Other provocative ideas that came out of the discussion of strategies included formation of a bi-national youth leadership group, creation of a regional historical organization, and work on establishing standards of quality in heritage and cultural destinations.

Natural and Built Environments

Participants in one discussion saw a great opportunity to consider the natural and built environments as related to economic development, to link the environment with cultural heritage and history, to capitalize on tremendous resources, and to “re-imagine” the region.

Those in another group described the opportunity more in terms of the great assets of the region, including the river, the region’s geology and climate, as well as a host of human-made assets — grain elevators, hydroelectric plants, canals, historic architecture, transportation links, “real cities” and “quaint hamlets.”

There was strong sentiment in both groups, however, that regional planning is a key strategy for improving the natural and built environment. Some participants called for a comprehensive inventory of resources, existing plans, land uses, organizations, jurisdictions, and economic sectors as a means of building from ongoing work.

Participants also emphasized the need to develop clear principles for a regional plan in order to emphasize diversity, ecosystem thinking, sustainability, and appropriate development. The plan should work to make the region a world-class destination, build on existing assets of river, parks, and green infrastructure, and link people parks and attractions to each other in “one region.”

Some participants cited the importance of green infrastructure in a plan, but stressed its inter-jurisdictional nature and the potential for a heritage corridor. A possible role for the “State of the Region” work was also identified.

Specific recommendations from the discussion groups included:

- Placing the focus on investment in Niagara Falls, NY. Participants emphasized investment in the U.S. side of our bi-national city as a key to any regional development strategy. The region can’t be great if Niagara Falls, NY is wanting.
- Making a determination to re-imagine the region. By focusing on different images of the region — for example, as a region of organic and specialty agricultural production — we can begin to enlarge the possibilities for the future.
- Cultural, heritage, and natural assets are all part of this process of re-imagining.

Trade and Transportation

Participants in two sessions outlined a range of strategies for fulfilling the region’s opportunities in trade and transportation. Attention was drawn to the need to use technology more effectively to speed the transit of people and goods across the border. The use of data bases, computerized identification techniques, telecommunications, etc., to “pre-clear” or otherwise speed up the
crossing, was suggested. Participants also identified the need to study the "border business," drawing on the ideas of other regions where borders play a major role in the movement of goods and people. How do they do it? How can they teach us to do it better?

The need to coordinate planning for development of a number of transportation corridors was also emphasized. Participants identified a need to work on them as multimodal facilities, including pedestrian, air, and rail, as well as truck and auto, and to make sure the planning is bi-national and multi-agency. It was also proposed that planners conduct a comprehensive inventory of visitor attractions that need to be linked as easily to new investments in transport facilities. Other specific proposals included:

* Building a people mover that will span the river, connecting visitor attractions with visitor accommodations and travel hubs like the Niagara Falls International Airport, Greater Buffalo/Niagara International Airport, or downtown Buffalo. Similar strategies for non-auto, non-truck transportation were outlined in both sessions.

* Promoting "green alternatives." The second group offered a range of ideas for reusing old bridges ("Ponte Vecchio") on the old Peace Bridge, pedestrian on the CP Rail bridge, new bridges (pedestrian or bike crossings from Grand Island to Ontario) and re-configuring existing connections (such as the Robert Moses Parkway) for environmentally friendlier uses.

* Creating a take port in Niagara County, NY to receive ferry traffic carrying trucks to and from the Greater Toronto Area. One participant suggested this as a way to make the trip faster, and to take the load off existing corridors. The business value of this idea remains to be shown, and U.S. highway ties to the port would need to be upgraded.

Brownfields Redevelopment

There are many parts of the Niagara Region where soil and groundwater quality has been impacted by previous industrial uses. Participants identified the obstacles to reuse of these properties and sketched a framework for action for improving their attractiveness to investment.

Overall, participants saw in the reuse of old industrial lands a combined opportunity, not only to improve the environment, but to create new jobs, restore local tax bases, and develop a new sense of place by celebrating local heritage and reconnecting dislocated persons to surrounding communities.

They stated a number of key premises. There is a lot of scope. Much of it is strategically located on waterfronts and served by infrastructure. These sites offer the opportunity to pursue economic, environmental, and community goals simultaneously. The regional economic situation (NAFTA, tourism, recent investments, etc.) offers new potential to trigger action on these sites.

There are a number of issues to resolve. "Brownfields" sites are often cheaper to develop because of legal issues attached to brownfields. The real estate market in Erie and Niagara counties is weak, so there is little stimulus for redevelopment. A comprehensive, visionary strategy — integrating economy, ecology, and community — could attract the new capital we need.

Each of two suggested strategies had a distinct focus, but both emphasized the need for defining a common vision, creating a regional plan, and making incremental progress. Specifically, it was recommended that we:

* Work to improve tools for transformation — regionally — with plans that integrate economic development, ecological improvement, and community objectives. That means providing financial incentives such as tax credits, job training, and Zoning designations, while making the decision-making process transparent and geared to build consensus.

* Implement demonstration projects using "brownfields" as a nucleus for new possibilities. We need to frame the vision, make a plan, inventory sites, prioritize innovative ideas for reposition and reuse, address the legal barriers, coordinate action, and make sure the public knows about the successes.

Knowledge-Based Industries

Participants in the discussion on knowledge-based industries saw the opportunity to make knowledge the key-value adding component of the regional economy and a generator for new job creation. They suggested we could use our problems as a resource in the sense that problems help us produce knowledge as we work to solve them.

Pursuing this strategy would mean working to link universities, corporations, government, and communities in this process. It would also mean making quality of life a key issue, as a way of drawing and keeping brainworkers, and as something these new industries would help produce. The proposed next steps were simply to "go to work."

If we start working on the problems at hand, everything we need to decide about partners, processes, organization, implementation and more, will fall into place.

Included in the specific strategies for developing knowledge-based industries were:

- Creating a "brownfields institute," and market ourselves as "the guys who solved Love Canal," establishing a cross-border university or an alliance of institutions to begin to organize the knowledge that comes from working on indigenous problems; developing industry-specific knowledge, such as the knowledge that comes out of the region's wine-making industry; developing and making marketing knowledge about the "border business"; and establishing a "peace institute" or siteing a unit of the United Nations here.

The Way Forward

A report on the March forum in newsletter format was sent to all participants and is available from both the Urban Design Project and the Waterfront Regeneration Trust. A full report of the March forum is available at the website of the Urban Design Project at the University at Buffalo — www.urban designproject.org.

The response to the collaborative, bi-national approach was enthusiastic, and people were eager to participate directly. Planning for a follow-up conference began over the summer, and working groups met on both sides of the river. Out of these discussions emerged the idea that the enterprise needed a strategic focus. "Natural and heritage development" was chosen.

The selection of a strategic focus was not intended to eliminate the other themes. Rather, a focus on natural and heritage development was understood to be a way to focus on immediate efforts on achievable goals. At the same time, natural and heritage development could be seen as a point of entry to issues of environmental quality (built and natural), recreation of industrial lands, trade and transportation, and even knowledge-based industries.

Indeed, a number of projects were already moving forward by that time: a tourism marketing study for the U.S. side, a cross-marketing project for arts and cultural organizations in Western New York; discussions about an international people mover for Niagara Falls; continuing work on both sides of the Falls to improve park infrastructure, broader bi-national cooperation on transportation, and much more.

In November 2000 more than 70 participants reconvened in Lewiston, NY for a "Roundtable" on the natural and heritage development theme. It was agreed then to move aggressively on building the theme toward a major action-oriented event in 2001.

The approach to Rethinking the Niagara Frontier assumes that public conversation, exchange of information, celebration of good ideas, and the sharing of success stories together provide a kind of coordinating power for action across a bi-national region.

Whether participants act alone within their area of responsibility, collaborate informally with other organizations, or participate in more formal federating structures is not the crucial issue. More important is whether or not they participate in the process of defining a publicly shared vision of the region and acting upon it.

A good regional dialogue 19
Good People, Programs, and Ideas

Special Presentations from the March Forum

Discussions at the March forum got a jump-start from four inspiring, knowledgeable speakers: Brian Merrett, the director of the Niagara Parks Commission, responsible for stewardship of the core scenic assets of the region; Mary Means, a noted U.S. planner and expert in heritage and cultural tourism development; Robert O’Dell, an economist and planner deeply involved in the effort to direct strategic investments to the Niagara Region; and John Farrow, President of the Canadian Urban Institute, and a student of “competitive city regions” around the world. Their presentations are recorded here in text.

Niagara Parks and The Niagara Tourism Industry: Rich History, Bright Future

Brian Merrett

Niagara Parks Commission

We feel a great deal of excitement about the future of Niagara’s parks, the City of Niagara Falls, and about Niagara’s tourism industry in general. I’ve been blessed personally to have been given an opportunity to lead the Niagara Parks Commission in a time of unprecedented growth. We have worked hard to contribute to this growth. We look to the future of the city and the region with more confidence than ever before. Because of all of this we can say without doubt that the Niagara tourism industry has truly come of age.

It’s time to take a “sneak peek” into the thoughts and dreams of the Niagara Parks Commission as we plan and work to make our parks the very best they can be. Close your eyes and let your imagination take you along as we dare to look into the future.

But before we go too far, we want to give due attention to what has come before in the distinguished 115-year history of the Niagara Parks Commission. As we move forward into the new millennium we have the awesome responsibility of upholding a long tradition of good planning, development, and stewardship.

We also have a new and evolving impact on the economy of our cities and region, province and nation. Today, the NPC acts as a catalyst for tourism and a stimulant for economic growth. We have what people want to see, not only in the natural wonder of the Falls, but in our lush green parklands, and our proximity to the arts, shopping, fine dining, attractions, and gracious guest services.

The decision to create a Parks Commission was visionary. When the NPC was created, unbridled commercialization threatened the beauty and majesty of Niagara Falls. Anyone who wanted to see the Falls was forced to pay a fee. Tourists were swindled and harassed. But the new organization set about to fulfill its mission to preserve and enhance the Falls and the Niagara River for the enjoyment of all visitors. The NPC was granted a mandate to acquire land along the Niagara River. Property was acquired and buildings were knocked down to make room for Queen Victoria Park, a splendid 154 acres, which opened on May 24, 1888. Subsequent administrations have continued to build on that original achievement.

The Parks went through a period of unprecedented growth in the 1930s under the chairmanship of T.B. McQueston. Despite the Depression, the commission undertook extensive acquisition, restoration, and development projects such as Fort George in Niagara-on-the-Lake; the William Lyon Mackenzie homestead in Queenston; Queenston Heights; Old Fort Erie; the Niagara Gorge stone wall, and the School of Horticulture. All was done with a keen eye on preserving and enhancing the historic and natural.

We face a similar challenge today in working to balance preservation of the wonder and beauty of the Falls and its surrounding parkland with the demands of the growing tourism market. It is a balance we can achieve. Likewise, we have a rare opportunity to build our dreams upon the legacy of the past. We can do that, too, and still maintain our stance as financially self-sufficient. We are all committed to move into the future while remaining true to our past.

Today, the Niagara Parks Commission is North America’s most completely maintained parks system. We have preserved 4,250 acres of parkland and gardens along the river, encompassing a rich collection of heritage sites from Lake Erie to Lake Ontario. Fifty-six kilometers of recreational trails traverse this shoreline. We are, in a sense, a city within the cities. We have our own police force, maintenance services, transit system, garbage collection fleet, snow removal and road salting trucks. These services, and a vast assortment of free attractions for visitors and residents, are made possible by our revenue-producing operations.
The economic impact of the Niagara Parks — present and especially future — is extraordinary. The Bank of Montreal study “Outlook for Niagara” (January 2000) indicated the total number of visitors to Niagara may increase to 20 million by 2002. Visits to the region have increased by 23 percent over the past three years. This makes Niagara the second most visited location in Canada, behind Toronto and ahead of Vancouver and Montreal. At this rate, the total number of visitors may double by 2010. These numbers translate into jobs for Niagara — lots of them. The Bank of Montreal study projected that by 2002, 10,000 new jobs could be created in the period 1999-2003, many of them driven by growth in tourism. The Province-wide strategy of using tourism as a catalyst for economic growth seems to be paying off.

The economic impact on the NPC itself has also been significant. For the third consecutive year, we had record attendance and revenues. The overall impact of our visitors climbed 17 percent last year, up to $910 million. The NPC paid almost $1.5 million in grants-in-aid of taxes, up $238,000. Our own employment is at 1,700 people and growing. All of this growth means we have more revenue than ever before to reinvest in the parks, but the challenges we face are also greater than before. We are leaving nothing to chance. Extensive planning is being conducted. Preservation and “greening” remains a cornerstone of planning.

As we proceed to plan for rapid growth, we maintain a steadfast commitment to two principles. First, we are committed to balance development pressures with equal attention to preservation and stewardship of our park. Second, we will endeavor to give visitors a quality experience. It is clear, as we proceed with planning, that we have the opportunity to develop more attractions — and at the same time — to develop and preserve more parks and lands. One doesn’t have to look at the experience of the other. Indeed, one helps us maximize the other. The more revenue we generate, the more money we can channel into conservation. The wherewithal to develop and steward the parks and lands is to be maximized.

The School of Horticulture offers a variety of programs and certificates in the park. A full 28-hole putting green is growing in quite nicely, continuing the tradition of the Whirlpool Golf Course just down the river. The golf academy features a 360-degree practice range and a full 28-hole putting green. The entire complex is equipped to host international golf events and provide the centerpiece for the Niagara “Destination Golf” marketing campaign. The Chippawa Battlefield site is adjacent, with interpretive centers, walk-in re-enactments, and historic site activities.

In Chippewa there is a new, world-class, 24-hole golf complex and training center. By 2005, it is growing quite nicely, continuing the tradition of the Whirlpool Golf Course just down the river. The golf academy features a 360-degree practice range and a full 28-hole putting green. The entire complex is equipped to host international golf events and provide the centerpiece for the Niagara “Destination Golf” marketing campaign. The Chippawa Battlefield site is adjacent, with interpretive centers, walk-in re-enactments, and historic site activities.

Further along, the marina has had a facelift, making it a hub for sport fishing in the upper Niagara River. With respect to nature, sport fishing can provide still another tourist market, drawing aficionados with fishing deberes and sport fishing experiences. Historic Fort Erie continues to host events such as the Highland Games and historic re-enactments, making it a true gateway to the park from the south.

The opportunity to construct tourist packages is extraordinary, linking world-class golf, wine tours, theater at the Shaw Festival, entertainment at Casino Niagara, sport fishing and a variety of special events including concerts in the park and at the amphitheater. Historic festivals, boat- ing, fishing derbies and much more.

All of these dreams are ambitious — but they are within our grasp. With prudent fiscal management, strong partnerships and community input, they are all not just possible, but probable. With a continuing balance between development and stewardship, these dreams will be beautiful ones. It will be an exciting future. But we must remember, the true source of the excitement comes from the Falls itself. When we first heard the low rumble and saw the first hint of mist, and as we approached, saw a deafening thunder, a rainbow, and finally the sheer majesty of the most beautiful waterfall anywhere — that’s the show down-the-season excellence that must never be lost.
Heritage Development From a Planner’s Perspective
Mary Means, Mary Means Associates

What is meant by “heritage development?” A way of planning, thinking, and approaching communities and regions. More than traditional planning or economic development, it is asset-based community development. The word “development” associated with “heritage” implies an active, rather than passive, role for heritage assets. These assets can be grouped in two categories. Some are place-based or physical, such as main streets, neighborhoods, small towns, and infrastructure – roads, rivers, or other linkages. Others are socio-culturally based – living traditions, cultural practices, arts and music.

Heritage development components include economic revitalization, growth management, recreation, cultural conservation, storytelling, and celebrating.

As an approach, heritage development crosses boundaries. Sometimes the boundaries are geographic, for the common heritage of a region often reaches beyond jurisdictional lines. Almost always, heritage development initiatives involve a melding of two or more arenas of community activity, such as transportation and recreation, or economic development and the preservation of historic buildings. Thanks to a booming interest in heritage tourism, many heritage development initiatives also involve investment in enhanced visitor attractions, providing quality of life benefit and increased community pride among local residents as well as visitors.

In the United States, examples of heritage development range from large regional projects like Pennsylvania’s Delaware & Lehigh Canal National Heritage Corridor (340 miles long, five counties, scores of local jurisdictions, museums, heritage and recreation groups participating), to geographically more concentrated efforts like the city of Lowell, Massachusetts, considered the cradle of the American Industrial Revolution.

Several states have active heritage area programs and provide matching funds for planning and early implementation efforts. These include New York, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and South Carolina. On top of those, there are now nearly 20 regional efforts that have achieved federal designation as National Heritage Areas or National Heritage Corridors. In the nationally recognized areas, federal funds are also available to stimulate planning, implementation, and management.

The best way to understand the potential for heritage development is to look at some of the wide variety of community-based projects being undertaken around the country. Generally, revitalization involves efforts to bring life and greater activity back to main streets and older neighborhoods. In the U.S., main street revitalization programs have helped hundreds of traditional town centers find new roles and compete in the marketplace, meeting new needs in older buildings adapted with respect for their historic character.

Revisited mill villages are a central feature of the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor in Massachusetts/Rhode Island. Once the center of the textile industry, these villages had seriously declined and residents had limited opportunities. A decade of regional effort in heritage development has led to hundreds of revitalization projects, including reuse of many of the large architecturally excellent mill buildings for a wide variety of contemporary industrial and commercial uses.

Increased tourism and economic life leads to healthy small businesses that meet local needs, providing visitor services that also add to the economic web. Examples include art galleries, bicycle rental shops, and restaurants in the tiny villages along the towpath trail in the Cuyahoga Valley Recreation Area (between Cleveland and Akron). Even a spandex-clad cyclist can carry a platinum American Express card, and have the painting shipped home.

Baltimore’s innovative water taxi service is an outstanding entrepreneurial response to heritage tourism. For $3.60 a visitor can get on and off all day, and with an easy-to-read map and discount coupons, comfortably explore neighborhoods that might otherwise be too off the beaten path to feel safe. The water taxi is a vital part of how the economic activity of
Rethinking the Niagara Frontier

Baltimore’s Inner Harbor attractions is being dispersed into surrounding areas.

Lancaster, Pennsylvania is at the heart of a newly emerging regional heritage area encompassing most of Lancaster and York Counties. Known for its association with the Plain People, Old Order Amish and Mennonites. Here, efforts to focus development and re-use in town centers is an emphasis on conserving the rich agricultural lands that are part of the region’s character.

Many communities struggle to grow in ways that reinforce their community character. Somewhat heritage development as a concept can help foster greater understanding of the potential for achieving prosperity while serving countryside. Heritage development acknowledges the need to avoid over-development. It also provides a context for planning ways to avoid character-destroying development patterns or loss of valuable agricultural lands through sprawl.

Trails, parks, greenways, and rivers are critical assets and serve as links in many regional heritage areas. With closer water, canals and rivers provide popular recreation and nature tourism experiences. The scenic byways movement (given backing through ISTEA) is stimulating creation of a web of popular driving and bicycling routes. And, in a growing number of places, such as along the Seaway Trail through Pennsylvania, New York and Vermont, driving/cycling routes provide the skeleton for packaged itineraries that attract 60,000 visitors. Waverly, Iowa (population 1,200) holds a draft horse sale that attracts big-regional tourism. The scenic byways movement is the corollary to conserving the rich agricultural lands that are part of the region’s character.

Heritage assets are more than buildings and landscapes; they also include the people and culture side of community. Music, arts and craft traditions are an important part of how we live, expressions of cultures that remain strong links. Ethic pride and identity is an important asset, more so for the community itself, but sometimes for visitors too. And, don’t think cultural expressions are always something from the past. In Baton Rouge, a long-standing tradition of holiday lighting continues in modern times. Baltimore’s Inner Harbor attractions is being dispersed into surrounding areas.

A major component of heritage development, as contrasted with traditional approaches to planning, is the emphasis it places on understanding what happened, what shaped this place, who we are, and why it matters. The technical word for it is “interpretation,” but storytelling says it all. Through exhibits like one on Maine’s lobster fishing industry, or story panels dispersed throughout an area (there is a particularly nice one from Birmingham, Alabama explaining the neglected pig iron works), visitors (and residents) encounter the past. A particularly evocative example is the recreated dining room in one of Lowell’s boarding houses, where hundreds of young New England farm girls lived and worked in the mills. Today, the visitor’s presence triggers a hidden sound system: girls’ voices (reading from diaries) and the sounds of breakfast china provide a haunting remembrance in another time.

Storytelling can be included in a variety of public settings, including streets and sidewalks. On Atlanta’s “Sweet Auburn” Street, artists and landscape architects collaborated with the community to produce sidewalks with inscribed quotes, panels, and artworks commemorating the stories of struggle and everyday living in the segregated black community. Even unused boarded-up buildings provide opportunities to tell the story. And, the story is a powerful one with deep meaning for us today. As exemplified by a family photo opportunity in front of Martin Luther King’s birthplace.

Storytelling can take many forms and can even be told separate from specific places. Iowa’s Silos & Smokeshack’s National Heritage Area produced an engaging series of audio cassettes similar in format to an NPR feature. Voices of famous farmers (Herbert Hoover, Billy Sunday and others) are mixed with descriptions of farms and life in small towns. The Silos tapes have been very popular with visitors and residents.

Festivals, special events and activities provide reason to invite the public, but they are also an important part of the community’s own heritage. Galesburg, Illinois has grown its popular “Railroad Days” into a three-day annual celebration that attracts 60,000 visitors. Waverly, Iowa (population 1,200) holds a draft horse sale that brings inners from all over America. Being there is very special experience. Since it is not really a “tourism attraction.” That is likely to change, as the New York Times travel section did a feature on this several months after this trip. And, celebrations can bring a lot of heritage development together. At a waterfront festival on the Chesapeake Bay, a high school class was proudly displaying the beautiful replica of a Hooper Island Drake Tilt they had built, continuing a tradition of regional boat building.

Perhaps the most important quality of heritage development is the fact that it touches on so many dimensions of community life, and in so doing, affords an invaluable opportunity for working together, collaborating to craft for the larger regional vision, then planning and taking many actions over time.

Heritage development is not “the true path,” if such a path really exists. What the asset-based approach to community development does is provide missing links between what the community was, and what it is going to become in an era of global change, between its traditional economy and its emerging one; between old town centers and new corners, between those who hold to the past and those who seek to change it; between citizens and their elected leaders; between professional planners and historians and “just folks.” Heritage development offers conversation among residents, planners, and developers.

Heritage development is a way to provide context and larger purpose to important public initiatives. It is also a way to build wider and deeper constituencies. It is a way to build bridges between the known past and present and to show the unknown opportunities that will emerge in the future.

What could be a more fitting place to undertake a heritage development initiative? With a world-class festival in the Falls, dramatic natural surroundings on both sides of the border exciting, robust history, abundant recreation, and extensive visitor services, the question really is: why has it taken so long?

As you start thinking about how these heritage assets can be better connected, packaged and Freighted, it might be helpful to consider the pinball machine as a metaphor. Everyone has played pinball and knows that the objective of the game is not to shoot the ball into the hole quickly. Rather, it is to keep the ball in play, using flippers, each time adding up points, until the ball finally drops through the hole. The successful pinball player racked up a huge score, lights and bells go off on the scoreboard. To return to heritage development, the visitor is the ball. The attractions are more than individual attractions—museums, sports facilities, parks, etc. They are also flipper keepers. Keeping the visitor busy moving around, staying longer and spending more money—this is how you rack up a big regional score. So, thinking about where the flippers are located, how they relate to each other and to visitors, thinking about how to network work to keep the ball in play, thinking about links between probable behavior and economic impact—this is how one thrives strategically as a heritage developer.

The opportunities inherent in the Niagara Frontier region are truly world class. Yes, there are differences on both sides of the border. Each country has its strengths, each its weaknesses. The platform of a regional heritage development initiative could enable the strengths of each side to become more apparent, and might even lead to finding strength in what are now perceived as weaknesses.
The Niagara city-region has one of the world’s greatest natural assets – Niagara Falls – in one of the world’s fastest growing economic sectors — tourism. The opportunities for fruitful investment and productive cooperation in this area are enormous. We hope that some of our recent experiences on the Ontario side might be useful in helping us create a model for working together in “rethinking” our bi-national region.

Ontario efforts to develop the tourism industry have been part of a larger effort by the Provincial government toward economic renewal in the Niagara Region. In 1995 the Ontario Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism appointed the Niagara Economic Tourism Corporation — NET Corp. — to be the facilitating organization in a process of strategic planning for that renewal. In 1998, NET Corp. published the results of that process in “Niagara Renewed: An Economic Framework for the Future.”

Tourism was only one element in that regional strategy. The framework also included four other priority areas for future investment. These were defined by the intersection of regional assets and resources with high-growth potential industries:

1. Telecommunications and call centers, especially in relation to data processing and distance learning.
2. High-technology manufacturing, focused on re-engineering of existing industries and making use of telecommunications in robotics.
3. Agriculture, especially including existing strengths in cut flowers, wine, tender fruit and horticulture, and,
4. Adult lifestyle communities, taking advantage of regional assets such as the spectacular setting, a large and varied array of things to do, and easy access to U.S. and Canadian urban centers.

But tourism, perhaps, is the most promising sector. Robert C. O’Dell Management Inc. was privileged to contribute to the work on the Tourism Investment Opportunities Report. We took a short term look — through the year 2002 — and a longer term look — from 1996 to 2016 — to understand what were the global trends in tourism investment and how these might apply to the Niagara Region. What we found was impressive, to say the least.

In general, tourism is the world’s largest and fastest-growing industry. Ten percent of all jobs in the world are in tourism, nearly 200 million workers. Industry revenues are $1.5 trillion a year worldwide. From now through the year 2010 the annual rate of job growth in tourism is projected to be 2.6 percent. Even if the Niagara Region weren’t the home to the world’s most popular and best-known tourist attraction, tourism would be a primary engine of regional economic growth.

In Canada, the picture is similar. Tourism spending is growing faster than the Canadian economy as a whole. From 1987 through 1998 tourism spending by Canadians increased 77 percent and by foreign residents by 136 percent. From 1997 to 1998 alone, international trips to Canada increased by 6.9 percent, U.S. based trips by 8.3 percent, and overnight visits by 11.1 percent. In 1998 total revenues from tourism were $47 billion.

Tourism looms large as an element of the Ontario economy, too. Forty percent of the Canadian tourism industry is in Ontario with greater revenues than lumbering, petroleum, agriculture, mining, or telecommunications. Four hundred thousand people in Ontario work in the tourism sector drawing $6 billion in export revenues annually.

Yet, in relative terms, Ontario tourism has been sliding. Since 1988 the province has lost about half of its global market share. We’re growing but others are growing much faster. In response, the new Ministry of Tourism designated the Niagara Region as the key to a turn-around and the new focus for investment.

Clearly, the Niagara Region is the key for Ontario tourism. The largest volume of both domestic and foreign visitors traveling to Ontario go to
Planning is key—in two ways. First, there needs to be a master plan that reflects the commitment by all parties—public and private—to a clear development strategy. Second, there must also be an achievable financial plan for the project. Given solid plans, developments need to be carefully timed so they come together to create a “critical mass” of new attractions.

Finally, continuous positive media coverage is important. It is also important to begin with some kind of significant, intrinsic resource—a water front or a major airport—to serve as the anchor for development. If you can start with one of the Seven Wonders of the World, so much the better.

More specifically, our informants told us that:

- The organizational means for effective planning and implementation were vital, including public-private partnership mechanisms, creation of a public-private sponsored master plan, creation of a coordinating committee of key stakeholders, and formation of a facilitation team to expedite approvals and agreements.
- Communications—internal and external—were also deemed important. They stressed the key elements of success keeping organizational partners informed about development priorities, promoting investment opportunities to the development community, and putting on a coordinated marketing program.
- Investment priorities were also stressed, including the identification of infrastructure requirements and responsibilities, ensuring that public recreational amenities are part of each project, establishing government support policies, identifying funding sources, and providing incentives other than financial ones.
- Finally, our informants stressed quality, including the need to set quality standards for project elements, and to coordinate design, signage, and programming.

We are ready to move forward with public and private stakeholders on a number of specific projects in the near future. More generally, we see the great potential of Rethinking the Niagara Frontier, particularly in terms of constructing the “comprehensive international tourism experience” that can revitalize our environment and our community as well as our economy.
Rethinking the Niagara Frontier

Successful City-Regions — Some Recent Lessons
John Farrow, President, The Canadian Urban Institute.

The recently completed Canadian Urban Institute study of successful city-regions around the world offers some powerful lessons for what could be an internationally competitive bi-national region stretching around the western end of Lake Ontario from the Greater Toronto Area, through Hamilton, across the Niagara Peninsula to Buffalo, and beyond to Rochester.

This region is the fourth largest and second fastest-growing urban region in North America. Its component cities may already compete — more or less — on an international scale, but the untapped potential is enormous. What is missing is a competitive regional strategy, and specifically a strategy tailored for a bi-national region.

What is a competitive regional strategy? Nothing more than a systematic process for organizing and concentrating superior resources against competitors to ensure survival and long-term wealth creation. In the case of the region that spans the Niagara River, this means understanding our available resources in new ways.

But first, we need to understand the environment in which we might seek to compete. City-regions around the world are being redefined by changing economic realities and relationships.

We already know that corporate competition has become global with the search for both capital and markets crossing all boundaries. A city-region’s chief competitors might be anywhere in the world. Such competition is increasingly demanding.

The search for strategic skills has become more critical. Workers with specialized knowledge and creative talents have become more important to processes of development, production and marketing. Such workers are highly mobile, but they can also afford to be highly choosy about where they go. Regions with the quality of life to attract such workers will prosper.

Highly competitive industries are also rapidly-changing ones. Firms need to locate in efficient labor markets in order to reduce the risks associated with quick transformations. The regional employment pool must be both deep and diverse in order for firms to be able to quickly hire new kinds of talent. Firms must innovate to survive the competition. They must “re-tool” to meet the demands of innovation.

Finally, we see that technology, among other major forces, is breaking down the traditional boundaries between city, state, and nation. Some examples of successful city-regions in Europe demonstrate the different ways this might play out.

In Hamburg, Germany they created a city-region plan that both spanned state boundaries and reached beyond the nation. The plan targeted growth in high-tech fields. Despite high regional unemployment they advertised overseas for 50,000 specialized workers, requiring accommodation for both immigrant and native workers.

In Brussels, Belgium the city sponsored creation of its own venture capital funds to spur growth. In the Île de France — where Paris is located — they created a regional strategy to invest in post-secondary education and research to support...
growth in high-value-added economic sectors. The European Union itself has worked to promote cross-border economic development.

These cities already know what we must come to understand: the border is not a barrier. It is a stimulus for opportunity. We can begin to capitalize on these opportunities as soon as we stop focusing on the border and start thinking about a whole region. It just happens to encompass two national jurisdictions and fortuitously includes an international border which is a catalyst for innovation.

The other assets of the region are very substantial. The region including Toronto, Hamilton, St. Catharines, Buffalo, and Rochester, and two cities each named Niagara Falls, is larger in population (about 9 million total) than all of the urban regions in North America except Mexico City, greater New York City, and megalopolitan Los Angeles.

It is one of the fastest growing regions on the continent. This fact is all the more remarkable because that part of the region that lies within New York State is among the slowest growing areas on the continent.

Niagara Falls itself provides the region with worldwide name recognition. Toronto is a well-known international city. But few place names are as widely known as Niagara Falls. Nor are there many individual visitor attractions anywhere that rival its durable popularity.

Within a somewhat narrower frame, the geography of this part of the continent serves to funnel activity toward the Niagara region. Any kind of surface traffic from Southern Ontario to the eastern United States or vice versa must go through the region and across the Niagara River. This is an asset waiting to be captured.

Finally, the U.S.-Canada border is highly permeable, relatively speaking. The North American Free Trade Agreement will make it more so as the years advance, and technology promises to ease remaining logistical impediments to trade.

However, if we create a region that crosses the border, we begin to create the type of tension that, if used properly, leads to innovation that creates value and therefore wealth. Though relatively permeable, the border is still sticky enough, and the two nations dissimilar enough, to demand innovation to deal with it.

The specific opportunities include the differential between two tax regimes governing personal, corporate and research income; two educational systems; two medical systems; two sets of professional bodies; two sets of competition; two prevailing wage rates; two regulatory regimes for pharmaceutical testing and performance standards for equipment; two medical systems; two sets of professional bodies; two sets of competitiveness; two prevailing wage rates.

Given these productive tensions, it is possible for this city-region to become one of the world's leading centers for economic and technological innovation. It is possible for the region not only to survive, but to flourish. But if this is the opportunity, what specifically is the approach?

The first step is to test the concept. This means acknowledging the need to create this bi-national region. While the Ontario part has been relatively more successful in recent years than the New York State part, there is no justification for either complacency or despair. The global economic environment is changing so rapidly that today's winners can be tomorrow's losers, and vice versa. We need to make use of our combined strength.

We also need to acknowledge the existing relationship. We are, in a sense, married to each other. We live in the same house. The question is whether we're going to meet the international market hand in hand or go our separate ways. Again, circumstances argue for us to join hands.

There are risks in this kind of bi-national collaboration. Given the dynamic, even turbulent, global environment, however, it seems the risks of trying to go it alone are even greater.
The Niagara Frontier:
A Border Zone or “Middle Ground”?
An Historical Reconsideration of Bi-National Regional Relations
David Herzberg

Preface
Michael H. Frisch
Professor of History and American Studies
University at Buffalo
State University of New York

The story traced in these pages is wonderfully rich and complex, fascinating in its detail and in the diversity of its themes. These all speak to our region’s unique character and identity, and to its equally unique opportunities at the start of a new century. To help make this story an even more usable resource, let me step back from the vivid detail traced here, in order to comment briefly on three broad themes the narrative shows running through our history from the beginning to the present, themes that can be applied in approaching the questions we face today.

There are really three distinct stories told in these pages. Each is true and crucial in its own way, but they are not at all the same story. They both do and don’t overlap. They are at once consistent and yet in profound, energizing tension with one another. In sum, it is the individual evolution of these stories, and their intricate intertwining over time that has defined the history of our region — and that will shape our future in this sense, it may prove worthwhile for readers to use these as organizing tools for holding in focus the whole of the rich narrative presented here.

The first story is the story of the border as such — as something real, meaningful in both law and culture, something evolving over time. The story begins in the days before the Niagara River was an international border, and then follows how it became and then evolved as one— from the time of the French and Indian War through the American Revolution and the War of 1812, to dramatic moments of international conflict at the time of the Caroline incident and the Fenian raids, and to the modern era where the border has been embodied mainly in trade policy from Reciprocity Treaties to NAFTA, and in the complex relationships of immigration law and policy. In this story, the connections across this border have been many, and important — but the border has always marked two distinct societies, and its unfolding meaning traces the evolving story of their complex relationship and interaction over time.

The second story is the story of a region in which the concept of border is more a hindrance than help. This is a story of the intimate connections and intertwined relationships, especially in economic life and geography, which have always defined this area as a trans-border region. This is a story of competition and cooperation, but above all of interdependence and interaction, however different the forms this has taken over the centuries. From this vantage, what is important is understanding how the region has always existed, historically and certainly must approach its future now, as a middle ground defined by place, and its connection to other places and economic regions. It is a story that has seen the successive re-imaginings of time, space, and regional relationships driven by history itself.

From the complex international diplomacy of the Iroquois, to the way the Erie and Welland Canals reshaped the meaning of geography and connection throughout North America, much less the Niagara Corridor, to the coming and then the decline of heavy industry and the dawning of a new identity as trans-national regional hub in a global economy, this is the story it is now crucial to tell: the story of a region whose breadth, depth, and fundamental character only become clear when we get beyond the blinders that the international border almost necessarily imposes on any vision of the region, from our vantage here, let alone from outside.

The third story touches both of the first two but comes at their relationship from a very different angle. It is the story, or stories, of how various peoples over time have experienced both the border and the region that transcends it. This begins with the Native Americans, who have continued to live in a world in which the international border has very limited meaning, and whose unique status in some way anticipates the kind of trans-border economic, cultural, and legal identities others are seeking to develop today. It includes African Americans and a range of immigrants, for whom race, identity, and culture have been intertwined with border and the
opportunities of our region in distinctly different ways at various points in history. And it includes visitors and tourists who have been drawn to the area for almost two centuries now by Niagara Falls, but whose interests and experience have not been narrowly limited by that phenomenon or fixed by the patterns or relationships of a particular time period. This, too, in other words, is a dimension within history, and with its own, still-evolving history.

Imagine these three stones as overlapping rings or circles, for almost any of the moments described in the narrative touches at least two of them: Border as Real, Region as Real, and People experiencing both Border and Region in wonderfully diverse, evolving ways. Does this way of mapping the complexity of the past not also describe our moment in the present? Does it not speak to the many futures that could evolve from this point, depending on how we understand this past and the choices it can help us to see and empower us to make in the present?

The Niagara Frontier: Border Zone or Middle Ground? David L. Herzberg

The Niagara River does nothing by half measures. It hardly can. Think your "in-box" is full? Imagine this: after descending only 30 feet along the 1,000-mile stretch from Lake Superior to Lake Erie, the entirety of the water collected by the 87,000 square miles of the four upper Great Lakes then pours into the Niagara, where it plunges the next 325 feet to Lake Ontario in the river's scant 35-mile length. And even this rapid journey is telescoped, with the last 160 feet or so of descent accomplished in one spectacular leap at Niagara Falls. This is not just a river. It is a brute fact carved upon the landscape, an elemental force that animates and defines the region around it.

It also divides that region. Indeed, the easiest way to imagine the Niagara River is as a natural border given added symbolic power by the thunderous and impasurable majesty of the Falls. Certainly the history of the United States and Canada, with conflict and punctuated by the occasional war, offers much to support such a vision. But this perspective, tempting as it is, captures only one element of the complex and dynamic history of the Niagara Frontier. If the river is a border, it is also a crossroads, a place of connections. Its roaring waters make the Niagara a potent symbol of separation — but why are the waters roaring? Because the river links the vast Great Lakes watershed to the Atlantic Ocean. What divides also connects. With a little imagination, one looks at the Niagara and sees not a border, but a nexus — a "middle ground" where cultures, economies, and even geologies have encountered each other, creating a unique regional identity. This is the great opportunity presented by borders: when different peoples come into contact, they do not necessarily compete with each other for dominance in a zero-sum game. Rather, something new can be created, something that represents not a victory of one side over another, but a joining together of efforts to achieve common goals that could not be reached — or perhaps even imagined — separately.

Of course, encounters between peoples do not always produce cooperative middle grounds. They can be destructive as well. The Niagara River is no exception. It has witnessed its share of bloodshed. But the Niagara Frontier's best moments have occurred when the people living on both sides of the river have pragmatically recognized their common stock of cultural, economic, and environmental problems and opportunities. Some of these have been obvious, such as tapping the potential of the river for power, industry and tourism, or building canals and railroads to establish the region as a center of trade and transportation. Others have been more subtle, such as building upon regional solidarity to foster a durable and surprisingly peaceful international zone of cultural and economic interdependence. Each instance represents a successful effort to transform shared problems into shared opportunities through cooperative effort — to imagine the region as a middle ground instead of a border zone.

The Niagara Frontier today faces a slate of issues that do not, in some respects, differ so much from what has always confronted the region: how to reap the benefits of a unique cultural heritage, how to further facilitate trade and transportation, how to adapt to economic and technological change by re-using old industrial sites ("brownfields"), how to take advantage of the region's many natural and built attractions, and how to encourage the growth of new industries, especially in the arena of information technology. These are facts of endeavor that call for region-wide action. They are problems that become opportunities if conceived from the vantage point of the middle ground. As the recent Peace Bridge controversy illustrates, the prevailing tendency today is to pursue separate processes even when goals are essentially the same. Nonetheless, the history of the Niagara Frontier is one of cooperation hard-won against just such backdrops of tension and conflict. It offers hope, and concrete precedents, that can sharpen our vision of today's opportunities for collaboration even as we recognize the realities of division.

As you read the next pages, keep in mind this final image of Niagara Falls in 1859. The waterfall is monumental — it will be decades before any water is diverted for hydroelectric power. It is only seven years before a renegade band of Irish Americans will actually launch an invasion of Canada from Buffalo. And yet, what do we see at the Falls themselves? If we jostle through the thronging crowds close enough to feel a glimpse? Jean Francois Gravelet, better known to his audience as "Blondin the Great," walking on a tightrope across the gorge from one to the other — on a high wire.

In 1859. Jean Francois Gravelet, "The Great Blondin," was the first of many daredevils to attempt a path across the gorge from one to the other — on a high wire.
The Niagara Frontier

The line dividing Canada from the United States is only the most obvious evidence that the Niagara Frontier sits upon a crossroads. Other borders have run through the region in the past, and even in modern times the area has been primarily shaped by its location at a nexus of cultures, economies and geographies. Indeed, the central defining theme of the Niagara Frontier’s history can best be characterized as ‘connections’—on the one hand, the destructive and often bloody encounters of antagonists; on the other, the trade, transportation, and communication that have been the main engines of the region’s development. When conceived as two sides of the same coin, these two kinds of connections have defined the Niagara Frontier, for better and for worse, since the beginning of the region’s recorded history.

The First Middle Ground: Native Americans and Early Europeans

When Louis-Joseph, first led the French into the Niagara Frontier in the second half of the 17th century, a terrible and bloody war waged by the Iroquois Confederacy (which had armed itself with advanced weapons through trade with the Europeans) was driving out Hurons, Algonquins, and other native tribes from the area they had shared around Lake Ontario. This calamity struck peoples whose numbers had already been devastated by European diseases. The refugees headed west, where they eventually formed an alliance with the French that successfully put an end to the Iroquois war effort in the late 1690s. The alliance was premised on something new in the region’s history. The middle ground at least temporarily survived, however, as the result of Pontiac’s Rebellion in 1763. In that year Siouans and Chippewas led by Chief Pontiac occupied all the British forts in the area except Niagara, Detroit, and Pitt. The ensuing military stalemate gave Pontiac the leverage he needed to force the British into a role similar to the one previously held by the French.

The next chapter in the Niagara Frontier’s history is brutal and all too familiar. During America’s Revolutionary War (1775-1783) many Indians fought alongside the British, and as a result were treated as conquered or ‘to-be-conquered’ enemies by the new nation. The new cash-poor American government sold land that it barely controlled, if at all, to restless and aggressive backcountry settlers whose hunger for lands ensured constant conflict with local Indians. Despite heroic efforts by such famous Native American leaders as Red Jacket, Cornplanter, and others, most of New York State save a few reservations had come under the ownership of U.S. nationals by the end of the century.

On the Canadian side of the river, the Mississaugas fared little better. After having been relatively untouched by European encroachment in the sparsely settled Niagara peninsula, their territory was suddenly flooded by British loyalists fleeing the newly independent (and somewhat vengeful) United States. These loyalists established the peninsula’s first townships, small farming outposts like Niagara, Queenston, Chippawa, and Fort Erie along the Niagara River. Despite the Mississsaugas’ official protection under British Royal Proclamation of 1763 (the Indian rights document that brought an end to Pontiac’s Rebellion), the tribe was negotiating from a position of weakness and ceded nearly all of its land to the incoming loyalists. Ultimately the Mississaugas retained only small reserves and fisheries at the mouth of the Twelve and Sixteen Mile Creeks and the Credit River.

A New Borderland: Canada, the United States, and the Economic Middle Ground

The complex world constructed by the French, British, and Native American peoples had fallen apart, but the Niagara Frontier still remained a place of encounters and connections. The Niagara River, the new border between the United States and Canada, lay at its heart. And as European settlement continued to stretch westward, the Niagara Frontier became an important nodal point in the trade routes connecting the great resources of the Midwest with the great business centers of the east. Over the next century and a half, the region would once again witness both successful efforts to create a peaceful and profitable middle ground, and troubled times when conflict and division temporarily derailed the cooperative spirit.

The most well-known rupture in these relations was the War of 1812. When President Madison declared war on Britain that year, his bravado masked a profound military weakness in the United States. Utterly不堪一击 of waging war directly against Britain, American nationals eyed a closer land—to their minds—easier target: Canada. Since America outstriped Canada in population (25 to 1), militias (9 to 1), and regular soldiers (7 to 5), and three out of every five settlers in Canada were Americans from New York, Pennsylvania, and Connecticut, the conquest seemed to former U.S. President Thomas Jefferson “a mere matter of marching.” But all...
after a failed invasion launched from near Niagara Falls and a series of hand-fought but ultimately inconclusive battles, the war ended with no change of territory, but with great devastation on both sides. In the Niagara region the hopeful young cities of Niagara, Ontario and Buffalo, NY had been burned entirely to the ground in December 1813.

This picture of division and antagonism should not, however, be over-emphasized. Why did the American invasion north of Niagara Falls fail? Many reasons, but for our purposes one in particular stands out. The New York militia refused to join the U.S. regular army in crossing the border. Contending that they had volunteered only to protect their homes, not to undertake invasions, they simply watched as their nation's army was pulverized on the other side.

Ironically, this act of apparent respect for the international border in fact reflected a deeper, more pragmatic local understanding of interdependence across that very boundary. Since the onset of American settlers to the Niagara Frontier after 1783, the area had witnessed the efflorescence of a “borderland economy” characterized by strong ties between American and Canadian frontiersmen. Far from the developed markets in the East, residents in this frontier land depended upon each other for markets, friendship, and family alliances. Borrowing heavily from America's Enlightenment-derived philosophy of “natural rights” and free trade, pioneers in the Niagara Frontier worked hard to keep the border free of harassing customs officers, restrictions, and legal complications in the conveyance of their goods across the river. These efforts were embodied early on in such documents as Jay's Treaty of 1794, which called in principle for free trade between America and Canada. And literally days after the detection of hostilities in 1814, citizens of the two nations eagerly returned to the whirling mechanics of a regional economy, hiring each other, selling to each other, and following each other's culture and fashions. The very elements that, in some situations, were a recipe for war—different peoples encountering each other under conditions of hardship and necessity—had instead served as a catalyst for creativity and productive interconnections. Ironically, the War of 1812, fought over free trade and shipping rights, was itself an unwanted impediment to free trade in a Niagara Frontier already committed to interdependence and cooperation.

This mostly informal regional solidarity almost plummeted the United States and Canada into a second war nearly three decades later. In 1837, Canadian Scot William Lyon Mackenzie led a failed revolution against the British government in York (Toronto). After he and his followers were routed, Mackenzie fled to the Niagara River and was smuggled across to Buffalo. There he gathered sympathetic Buffalo men and, under the benevolent blind eye of Buffalo officials, took his new 100-strong army and occupied Upper Canada’s Navy Island and proclaimed a provisional government. Events took another lurch toward war when the British sank the American steamboat Caroline, which, in the tradition of “innocent” American ships, had been brazenly transporting American volunteers for Mackenzie's Patriotic Army to Navy island all day.

This situation threatened to escalate to all-out war until President Martin Van Buren dispatched Major General Winfield Scott to Niagara to defuse the crisis. Despite its quick settlement, the brief skirmish continued to echo through the region in the following years. Mackenzie supporters formed secret societies called Hunter Lodges along the waterfront, and the U.S. and Canada fortified the border against each other at Fort Niagara (U.S.) and Fort George (Canada). It was this same pattern again: obvious divisions separated but linked to informal but powerful bonds of solidarity.

The Canal Era: The Economic Middle Ground Ascendant

Shortly after the end of the War of 1812, it became clear that New York State would finance a canal to connect the Great Lakes with the eastern seaboard. Such a project would instantly transform a situation of hardship and necessity into one of enormous potential—another recipe for conflict. Indeed, the famous competition between Black Rock and Buffalo over who would receive the terminus of the Erie Canal reveals just such dynamics. But this competition was not destructive. Instead, it spurred Buffalo men to come together in a broadly based community effort to dredge Buffalo Creek and create a harbor so that the city would be more attractive to the canal designers. And across the border in Canada, canal-building dreams of plenty produced more anticipation of increased prosperity than jealousy. Just as the U.S. side of the river and Buffalo in particular, grew astronomically in economic activity and importance after the 1825 opening of the Erie Canal, so did the Canadian side. Evidence suggests that many Canadians, especially businessmen, were perfectly aware of the source of their windfall. The “borderland economy” that had sustained and perhaps even caused the pioneer days would now, all hoped, make them rich.

That they expected to benefit from the Erie Canal did not detract from a healthy competitive spirit among Canadians. Determined not to allow the Niagara peninsula to become a mere adjunct to a successful Erie Canal corridor, William Hamilton Merritt of St. Catharines shepherded the construction of the second great waterway construction of this era, the Welland Canal, which connected Lakes Erie and Ontario to the west of the Niagara River. The Canadian canal builders, who completed their project in the winter of 1829, relied heavily on American inspiration, know-how, and ultimately for capital. They also emasculated, correctly, that the Welland would boost the already thriving north-south trade with the United States. Americans agreed, applauding any development that would increase trade and trading opportunities in the region. Indeed, U.S. investment along the Welland Canal in the decades to come would be so heavy that some observers later in such as “an American industrial outpost in Canada.” These American regional boosters, like their Canadian counterparts, recognized that trade was not a zero-sum game. Instead of focusing on the potential competition the Welland opened up between the Lake Ontario-St. Lawrence channel and the Erie Canal, they chose to view the new waterway as expanding the regional economy. Even though the Welland had been spurred by competition across the border, its builders were ultimately thinking about addition, not subtraction.
tion. The Weiland extended the reach of the system north, as well as west and south, to the ultimate benefit of the region as a whole.

They were right. The canal years rank as one of the Niagara Frontier’s glory periods, when, with Buffalo as its “Queen City,” it established itself as a regional center of trade, navigation, and communication between the heartlands of North America and the great economic centers of the East. The transit shipment of grain was a major engine of this development, especially after Buffalo’s Joseph Dart invented the steam-powered grain elevator in 1842. In 1836, the first year that Ohio’s grain production outstripped New York’s, Buffalo relayed 1.2 million bushels of oats, barley, corn, wheat, rye, and soybeans. As the American Midwest continued to grow into “the world’s bread basket,” grain shipments grew at a fantastic rate: 5.6 million bushels by 1842, and 22 million bushels in the early 1850s. Along with the grains came a torrent of other raw materials, transferred from Great Lakes barge to canal boats: wood, pork, bacon, beef, whiskey, lumber, tobacco, lead, oil, hemp, furs, sugar, potatoes, iron, leather, ashes, lard, butter, cheese, cotton, wool, beans, fish, tallow, cranberries and more. The city’s role as a link between east and west was highlighted in 1850, when W.G. Fargo and Henry Wells merged their operations. (The young partnership that could succeed them was housed in a building designed by Frank Furness in 1858.)

On the Canadian side of the river growth was less explosive but still measurable. St. Catharines, the premier Weiland Canal city, housed a growing trade of grain, apples, nuts, salt, fish, pearl, glass, and virtually anything else that could fit in a barrel. Meanwhile the tiny settlement of “Aqueduct” on the canal transformed into the small mill town of Merrittville in 1847, and in turn became the City of Welland in 1858. Still no metropolis, it plied the canal trade with sawmills and brick and cloth factories working from regional raw goods. Meanwhile, in the 1830s the Shawickena family continued a Niagara peninsula tradition with their famous boat-building operations. (The first Great Lakes steamer, the Well-In-Water, had been built there.) Outside those and a few other proto-industrial outposts, the Canadian Niagara peninsula continued to rely on its healthy farming and fruit agricultural base.

As heavy manufacturing (especially iron processing) began to join in grain storage and shipment in the regional economy, the built environment of the Niagara Frontier began to take on a new and distinctive look. In constructing the grain elevators, factories, warehouses, and processing plants that kept the engines of trade humming, local architects established a new vocabulary of enormous, forthright, and “functionally honest” building styles. Graceed with an undeniable purity and authenticity, these massive structures of the new industrial economy helped shape the stylistic vocabulary of modernist architecture. Indeed, the buildings have in more recent years been recognized as one of North America’s highly successful and internationally influential native art forms along with modern dance and jazz.

The hum of activity and innovation led to a rapid growth in population in the Niagara Frontier. By 1855 Buffalo alone had 74,000 residents, up from 2,500 in 1825. The Canadian side posted less spectacular but nonetheless solid growth as well. St. Catharines, for example, more than doubled its population from 1,700 to 4,000 between 1828 and 1851. Welland grew from a few hundred to more than 2,000 residents by 1885. Much of this growth was due to a surge of immigration, as well as Americans seeking cheap power, it has fundamentally shaped and defined the communities that surround it. And the Niagara Frontier, best exemplified by the spectacular world of Niagara Falls, is perhaps the best evidence of the region’s economic benefits. Ultimately, the region as a whole has held true not only for the cities that grew up on its Canadian and American edges, but for other regional locales which, for example, have advertised “come to Buffalo and see the world’s bread basket.”

Rathburn, the preeminent capitalist and urban pioneer who essentially created Buffalo’s downtown business district and its hardworking Manhattan Street, went bankrupt and actually landed in debtor’s prison. Four years later, in 1841, the county legislature took over a bankrupt Welland Canal, merged with the 1830s Caledonia Canal to form the Caledonia and Welland Canals, and the trade figures for both American and Canadian canal regions leaped up over the years as more or less friendly competition spurred improvements in both waterways. Much of this economic elasticity was due to a regional phenomenon easy to overlook amidst the flood of transcontinental commerce that flowed through both American and Canadians on either side of the Niagara River. This local economic activity continued to provide a bedrock of common interests and common profits.

Ultimately, Canada and the United States recognized the synergistic potential of the region’s trade in the Reciprocity Treaty of 1854. This agreement, which lasted until America’s Civil War, provided for limited free trade, American access to the provincial fisheries, and American navigation of the St. Lawrence River and the Canadian canal system. The benefits were immediate and obvious, particularly on the Canadian side, where a slow but steady growth quickly accelerated into an economic boom powered in part by a thriving cross-border cotton and timber trade. (St. Catharines’ first cotton mill opened the same year as the Treaty). The “borderland economy” had, it seemed, come of age with the Treaty. A formal acknowledgment of aspirations long held by Niagara Frontier peoples, it marked an era of exponentially expanding trade between the two nations.

**Niagara Falls: Spectacle and Power**

The Niagara River’s dual role as the dividing border and uniting heart of its region is perhaps best exemplified by the spectacle of Niagara Falls. As a tourist attraction and as a source of endless cheap power, it has fundamentally shaped and defined the communities that surround it. And this has held true not only for the cities that grew up on its Canadian and American edges, but also for other regional locales which, for example, have advertised “come to Buffalo and see the...”
Niagara Falls today remains one of the most-visited tourist spots in the world, receiving nearly 20 million visitors yearly. And yet, planner Ernest Flumerfelt argues, Niagara Falls has been poorly exploited as a tourist destination. Relying solely on the carefully staged drama of the falling water itself, little effort has been made to place the cataract in the context of a broader narrative that could sustain a visitor’s experience beyond the two months that it mesmerizes the average tourist. This has not always been so. Before transportation improved with the advent of the Erie Canal in 1825, the Falls’ incomparability gave it an air of exotic profundity, and early horticulturists often spoke of their visits there as pilgrimages to an otherworldly realm where anything at all seemed possible. For decades afterwards, the cataract maintained its mysterious and magical aura for visitors. The awful and terrifying spectacle of the so-called “River of Death” invited contemplation of the sublime, of the meaning of life, and of the frailty of human accomplish­ments, and, perhaps most profoundly, the meaning of death. At the same time, of course, the same-feeling acrobats like Blondin and Fanny Kemble drew crowds by braving the horrors of the Falls seemingly flimsy rope. Ultimately, historian Patrick McGreavy argues, horticulturists were drawn to the liminal boundariespace where the ordinary rules of everyday life might be suspended for the equally otherworldly rituals of passion.

The Falls also inspired other dreams, no less grandiose but certainly less otherworldly: dreams of electric power and the tortures that could be won with it. The majesty and profundity of the cataract had already suffered the degradation of commercial exploitation as businessmen took every advantage of the spectator’s growing tourist value in the post-Erie Canal era. The “attractions” that had elbowed right up to the precipice were swept away by popular movements to recapture the natural beauty of the Falls. But ready to take the place of those merchants were the dreamers and speculators of an economy that had just begun its meteoric rise through industrialization. Rather than seeing a sublime statement about the nature of existence, men like Edward Dean Adams, president of the Cata­ract Constructor Company of Niagara Falls, New York, saw “a power almost limitless, constantly wasted, yet never diminished – gazed upon, wondered at, but never hitherto controlled.”

By the end of the 1890s, several major electric companies had located in Niagara Falls. By 1909, there were 25. Meanwhile, development on the Canadian side had been stymied by a stubborn belief in steam power and the non-accidental ownership by American companies of the exclu­sive rights to develop electricity from the Cana­dian falls. It was not until after the great coal strikes of 1902 that Canada, made suddenly aware of its dependence on American coal, dug a tunnel under the Falls to generate hydroelectric­ power. By 1908, however, production on the Canadian side had surpassed that on the U.S. side, with Ontario Hydro advancing a public owner­ship model that was to set the example for organizations like the Tennessee Valley Author­ity.

Thus began Niagara Falls’ domination by indus­try and economy. Although some careful plan­ning was evident during that era – for example, the United States diversions were limited under Presi­dent Theodore Roosevelt in 1906, and a treaty with Great Britain similarly limited Canada’s siphoning – it was also a time of extravagance and excess. Humanity’s limitless imagination envisioned future utopias entirely powered by a conquered Niagara Falls. The popular American comic strip “Buck Rogers in the 25th Century,” for example, cast the fictional city of “Niagara” as the capital of the futuristic nation. For a good while, such visions were cut through careful plan­ning, and industrial pollutants invisibly poisoned a natural wonder that was already being under­sung and obscured by power and processing plants. In the mid-20th century, when the indus­trial strength of the region sagged, Niagara Falls would be bereft of transcendent meaning; no longer a meditation on the sublime, no longer an exotic outpost of the otherworldly, no longer the centerpiece of an imagined utopia, the Falls became simply a mass of falling water to be witnessed for as long as it entertained.

The Importance of the Border: Race and Nation

The national border marked by the Niagara River has meant many different things at different points in its history, but its most important role may well have been played out in the roughly seventeen decades between 1793 and the U.S. Civil War. In 1793 Canada abolished slavery, and while New York State was also slave-free from the early 19th century, U.S. law made escaped slaves fair game for headhunters even after they had reached free states. This state of affairs eventually helped propel the nation into Civil War, but in the meantime it ensured that freedom’s true home lay across the Niagara in Canada.

Although reliable documentation is difficult to find for the American side of the river, it is clear that one of the two main branches of the Under­ground Railroad directed escaping slaves through the Niagara region and over the river to Canada. Harriet Tubman, for example, crossed the Niagara River in 1851, and established a family home and base of operations among the thriving escape communities in Canada. She lived there for six years, working to finance her activities as a “conductor” on the Underground Railroad and attending the Salem Chapel BME Church on Geneva Street.

The role of Buffalo and other sites on the U.S. side of the river in the history of race relations was a more complex and ambiguous one at best. On the one hand, the Underground Railroad did undeniably pass through the region. On the other hand, Buffalo was never too congenial a home for abolitionist activity in the 19th century. Racial tensions were exacerbated by a history of eco­nomic competition on the docks between white ethnicities and African Americans, who, largely ex­cluded from white labor organizations, often had little choice but to accept work as strikebreak­ers. Like many other American cities, draft riots...
erupted in Buffalo during the Civil War. Immigrants from Germany and Ireland saw little reason that they should fight for the freedom of the same African Americans whom they felt threatened by on the docks. Perhaps for these reasons, or merely from the habit of secrecy, little in the way of reliable information about the Underground Railroad in the region survives.

The Civil War and its aftermath revealed that the border still mattered even during the heyday of the "borderland economy." While Canada maintained its neutrality during the conflict, at least some Americans did not return the favor. The Fenians, a group of Irish immigrants centered in Buffalo who hoped to invade and capture Canada and then ransom it for Ireland's freedom from Great Britain. On June 26, 1866 they invaded their northern neighbor from Buffalo while the U.S. army turned a blind eye. The flight was short and one-sided, as the Canadian army quickly repulsed the invaders. It would be the last skirmish along the Niagara border between the two nations, but it left a lasting imprint: Canadian defenses would be designed to foil U.S. attack until after World War II, nearly a century later.

The Civil War settled the matter of slavery in the States, but did not end the significance of the Niagara frontier for African Americans. When W.E.B. DuBois brought together black activists in 1905 to start a more international advocacy organization, he planned to hold the "borderland economy" While Canada remained its neutrality during the war, the border had been fixated on canal traffic, and the area easily adapted to the evolving economy. Still boasting the largest inland port in North America, and still conveniently located at the terminus of Great Lakes shipping routes, the Niagara Frontier was as attractive to railroad builders as it had been to canal diggers. A network of railroads linked Buffalo to New York, Philadelphia, and other points east that had formerly been served by the canal. By 1869 the city's railroad freight tonnage exceeded canal traffic for the first time, and by the turn of the century, Buffalo was second only to Chicago in the number of railroads terminating in the city. Railroad routes sprouted on the Canadian side, too: the Great Western linked Fort Erie to Detroit in 1854, the national "Grand Trunk Railroad" linked up to the peninsula's lines in 1882, and in 1903 tracks joined Toronto, Hamilton, and Buffalo.

Along with the railroads came a new industry: ironworks. Iron had long accompanied grains and other raw materials through the Welland and the transportation hub at Buffalo, but in the 1880s railroads connected the Niagara Frontier to coal producing regions. This made it significantly cheaper to process iron in Buffalo and vicinity. Two decades later, the iron deposits in Lake Superior began to be seriously exploited by entrepreneurs like the Goodyear brothers, and the influx of raw ore quickly transformed the Niagara Frontier into an industrial center ready to challenge Pittsburgh as the iron capital of North America. Soon the landscape was dotted with great ironworks, many of them seated on the river to Fort Erie, Canada, and founded the "Niagara Movement." In a decade, when it merged with white liberal activists, it changed its name to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and pioneered the powerful tactic of focusing on litigation and legal rights.

**Boom Times: The Steel Belt**

By the beginning of the 20th century, the Niagara Frontier had reached a point where its natural advantages, augmented by human efforts such as the canals, left it poised to become an even more important center of financial and transportation activity. The age of the canals had been short — as early as the 1850s. For example, the Erie Canal had ceased to turn a profit and railroads had begun encroaching on the shipping business. But despite the closure of those works not only on canal traffic, the area was still adapted to the evolving economy. Still boasting the largest inland port in North America, and still conveniently located at the terminus of Great Lakes shipping routes, the Niagara Frontier was as attractive to railroad builders as it had been to canal diggers. A network of railroads linked Buffalo to New York, Philadelphia, and other points east that had formerly been served by the canal. By 1869 the city's railroad freight tonnage exceeded canal traffic for the first time, and by the turn of the century, Buffalo was second only to Chicago in the number of railroads terminating in the city. Railroad routes sprouted on the Canadian side, too: the Great Western linked Fort Erie to Detroit in 1854, the national "Grand Trunk Railroad" linked up to the peninsula's lines in 1882, and in 1903 tracks joined Toronto, Hamilton, and Buffalo.

Along with the railroads came a new industry: ironworks. Iron had long accompanied grains and other raw materials through the Welland and the transportation hub at Buffalo, but in the 1880s railroads connected the Niagara Frontier to coal producing regions. This made it significantly cheaper to process iron in Buffalo and vicinity. Two decades later, the iron deposits in Lake Superior began to be seriously exploited by entrepreneurs like the Goodyear brothers, and the influx of raw ore quickly transformed the Niagara Frontier into an industrial center ready to challenge Pittsburgh as the iron capital of North America. Soon the landscape was dotted with great ironworks, many of them seated on the river to Fort Erie, Canada, and founded the "Niagara Movement." In a decade, when it merged with white liberal activists, it changed its name to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and pioneered the powerful tactic of focusing on litigation and legal rights.

**Hydroelectricty was invented in Niagara Falls, and the Schuylkill power plant was one of the first facilities to turn falling water into electric power. The wall of steel stands today Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society**

By the end of the 19th century, cheap and plentiful hydro power provided by the Falls made the region an irresistible location for processing all kinds of raw materials, not just iron. Industrial growth acquired its own momentum, and new industries, power-dependent and otherwise, began to congregate. Buffalo, for example, welcomed Ketcham Mowing Machines and Reapers, Forbush and Brown's Shoe and Boot Manufacturing, Gerhard Lang Company brewery, Kittinger Furniture, the Larkin Soap Company (situated in an office building designed by Frank Lloyd Wright), National Aniline Chemicals, Pierce automobile manufacturers, Conrad Steam Motor Carriage Company, and the list could go on.

Across the river, the Canadian peninsula was also seeing its most rapid growth, ironically, had been an unintended result of high tariffs during the 1890s.
which spurred American companies to expand onto Canadian soil to maintain their traditional trading patterns across the Niagara—an unlikely and unlooked-for benefit of the “borderland economy.”

Just as the canal era had been powered by the muscle of immigrants, so this industrial era relied on a seemingly endless stream of European migrants. Most poured into the American side, to Buffalo, adding the distinctive flavor of eastern and southern Europe—Italians, Poles, and Jews—to the city’s ethnic mosaic. After the turn of the century the Canadian side, too, witnessed an influx of immigrants, the first time in the overwhelmingly British peninsula that a substantial number of residents were non-English speakers. Once again, the region was reaping the benefits of its role as a middle ground—a place where the Old World and new met through immigration, where the North American heartland linked up to the eastern seaboard, where raw materials were transformed on their way to market, and where waterways, railroads, and communications lines intersected at the hub of a great web of connections. But this role had not come easily. The region had grown into it through active efforts to create, nurture, and sustain an infrastructure that capitalized on natural advantages.

The End of Boom Times

The good times were not to last. The Great Depression of the 1930s hit the Niagara Frontier hard, and federal support could only mitigate the disaster to a limited extent. What could a region reliant on manufacturing and trade do when factories stopped producing, goods stopped shipping, and people stopped buying? Go on federal government relief, was one answer, and many individuals and even the city government of Buffalo proceeded to do so. But the booster spirit was not entirely moribund. Buffalo, for example, landed a new Chevrolet plant that began production in 1938, right after Bethlehem Steel, modernized its facilities to produce steel for automobiles. The city’s workers, long active in the periodic waves of organizing and protest that accompanied industrialization, put together durable and powerful unions under the aegis of the New Deal’s friendly labor laws. Meanwhile in 1932 the Canadian ship building industry reached its apex with the opening of the Port Weller Dry Docks, which are still in operation.

Despite its troubles, therefore, the region was in good shape to welcome the worldwide boom that followed the start of World War II. The conflict jump-started both nations’ economies and flooded the industrial landscape with contracts and work. A series of trade agreements between the U.S. and Canada beginning in 1938 quickly erased four decades of high tariffs, the most recent of which had been levied in 1930. Hawley-Smoot levy by the U.S. that had devastated Canadian farmers. And, like all of the region’s other booms, the postwar expansion was accompanied by a new wave of immigration. This last one, the third, took place primarily on the American side of the border and constituted an intensification of a decades-old migration of African Americans from the South to the industrial centers of the North. But if the war was enough to re-inflate the Niagara Frontier’s economy, it was not enough to set the region on a path of long-term stability. Changes in technology, environment, and the economy were slowly but surely undermining the area’s hard-won position as a central node point for trade and communication. Interstate trucking, begun at a small scale in the 1930s, had continued to grow but now blossomed in the frenzy of highway building that followed the war. Unlike the railroads, these highways had no compelling reason to steer through the Niagara region. To make matters worse, the grain belt had been migrating southward even as early as the late 19th century, and the situation evolved to the point where it became economical to ship grain directly by truck or train instead of first sending it to Buffalo across the Great Lakes. Even the Welland Canal, improved to keep up with the times thrice since its inception, had its troubles: the 1903 improvement enabled ships to pass through without stopping, efficiently channeling the canal-based industries that had grown up along its banks. Manufacturing alone could not make up for the loss of the transshipment hub, as soon became clear. After the war, government contracts were canceled or not renewed, entire industries began to leave. Spencer-Kellogg, Curtiss-Wright, and Bell Aircraft Company led the way.

The final blow to the river region’s importance as a trading hub came with the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway in 1959. Like the Welland Canal, the Seaway had initially been conceived as a joint operation between the U.S. and Canada. But it was not to be. Railroad and private industrial interests, as well as Buffalo and other port areas that would be affected, lobbied hard against American involvement. During the Depression years they had been keenly interested away from international development schemes of that sort and toward internal opportunities like the Tennessee Valley project. By 1951, Canada had decided to act unilaterally, and in 1959 the St. Lawrence Seaway opened an alternate (and vastly superior) water route to the east. With no regional logic or cooperative imperative driving it, the Seaway dramatically upended the Niagara economy. Although the Welland Canal continued to service this route to the east, the antiquated and little-used Erie Canal—and its terminal city Buffalo—were now bypassed by water traffic. In the past, Buffalo had flourished because of the sh implied trans- ships that had occurred there, from Great Lakes barges to canal boats or railroads. The improved Welland offered no stopping point like this, and no new transshipment hub or manufacturing center sprang up along its banks to take Buffalo’s place. Indeed, very little shipping volume either originated or gained a destination in the canal.

Denuded of its historic role as a vital link between east and west, the Niagara Frontier saw its shipbuilding industry collapse and grain storage and milling contract. Other industries followed: most devastatingly Buffalo’s steel mills, and many residents left the area in search of jobs. In the wake of these departures, the region became better known for the poisonous fallout of industrial activity than for industrial opportunities itself. The biggest headline to come out of the area in the second half of the 20th century may well have been the Love Canal disaster, in which a school and neighborhood built on land contaminated by Hooker Chemical in the 1940s had to be evacuated in the 1970s.
Rethinking the Niagara Frontier

The Niagara Frontier - Border Zone or "Middle Ground"?

A report on the continuing bi-national forum

The Niagara Frontier today is beset with new challenges. In the Falls it boasts one of the world’s largest tourist draws, but the region around the falls is so under-interpreted and poorly presented that visitors are there and gone too quickly to influence the economy as they could. The area has a proud heritage of creativity and re-inventing itself as a nexus of trade and transportation, but still too often by changes in shipping patterns that happened half a century ago. A similarly noble heritage of adaptability is marked by a series of brownfields that testify only to decay, not rebirth. The environment features a wealth of truly remarkable natural and built wonders, but they are under-appreciated, under-marketed, and sometimes even dismissed for lack of apparent reason. And, finally, the region has been taking tentative steps toward re-imbuing itself as a communications hub in the new information economy, but no region-wide collaborative efforts in the Niagara Frontier’s historic style have been invited to propel these steps forward.

The irony of this failure of regional vision is that barriers to cooperation would seem to be lower now than at almost any other time in history. No barriers line the Niagara on opposing sides; instead, the U.S. and Canada are joined in one of the world’s most successful military alliances. No high tariffs block trade across the river, indeed, NAFTA far exceeds the 1854 Reciprocity Treaty as a facilitator of international trade. True, the controversy over replacement of the Peace Bridge has presented a thorny problem in international cooperation, but the very inadequacy of the existing bridge only underscores the volume of people and goods that constantly travel over the border.

If we conceive of the Niagara Frontier as a distinct bi-national region with its own unique and dynamic cultural, economic, and environmental history, then each of its problems suddenly presents itself as an opportunity: an opportunity to invest in heritage and cultural tourism, to implement new technologies and on-site facilities to encourage trade and transportation in the modern economy, especially across the border; to develop a new and purposeful sense of place by reusing old industrial brownfields; to integrate natural and built landscapes into a single, world-class destination; and to reinvigorate the region’s historic “economy of connections” by investing in knowledge-based industries. Considered from only one side of the border, or from one town or city, the logic that sustains these opportunities disappears. As always, the Niagara Frontier’s future will lie in large part be a nexus of trade and region, and especially in these times of peace we ignore at our peril.

Sources Consulted


### Time Line

#### Economy

- **1700**: The French-Native American "middle ground" fosters lucrative fur trade.
- **1750**: Seven Years War ends French presence in region, begins British dominance.
- **1780s**: "Borderland economy" of American and Canadian settlers flourishes.
- **1794**: Jay's Treaty calls for free trade between US, and Canada.
- **1825**: Erie Canal opens.
- **1842**: Joseph Dart invents steam-powered grain elevator; four million bushels of grain shipped through Buffalo.
- **1852**: 22 million bushels of grain shipped through Buffalo.
- **1854**: Reciprocity Treaty between US, and Canada provides for limited free trade and navigation rights.
- **1869**: Railroad freight out of region surpasses canal freight for the first time.
- **1870-80s**: Iron ore in Lake Superior mined and brought to Buffalo for processing; metalworking becomes major manufacturing base.
- **1890**: Lackawanna Steel and Iron Company locates south of Buffalo.

#### Politics and People

- **1687**: Louis Joncaire comes to Quebec, inaugurates French influence over Niagara Region.
- **1750s**: Seven Years War ends French presence in region, begins British dominance.
- **1776-83**: American Revolution ends formal British control over American side of Niagara.
- **1793**: Canada abolishes slavery.
- **1812**: War with England manifests itself in Niagara Frontier in failed invasion of Canada from Buffalo.
- **1813**: Niagara, Buffalo, and other area cities burned during hostilities.
- **1837**: "MacKenzie's Rebellion" against Britain in Canada nearly sparks war with the US, as the American ship Caroline is sunk by loyalists.
- **1842**: Joseph Dart invents steam-powered grain elevator; four million bushels of grain shipped through Buffalo.
- **1844**: Reciprocity Treaty between US, and Canada provides for limited free trade and navigation rights.
- **1850s**: Railroad freight out of region surpasses canal freight for the first time.
- **1869**: Railroad freight out of region surpasses canal freight for the first time.
- **1870s**: Second wave of immigration brings Poles, Italians, and Jews from eastern and southern Europe.
- **1890**: Lackawanna Steel and Iron Company locates south of Buffalo.

### Time Line

#### Politics and People

- **1900**: Buffalo second only to Chicago in number of railroad terminuses; huge growth in diverse manufacturing sector.
- **1902**: McKinnon Dash & Metal Works opens in St. Catharines.
- **1909**: Twenty-five electric companies located near Niagara Falls.
- **1912**: Bethlehem Steel Steel buys Lackawanna Steel.
- **1922**: GM buys McKinnon Dash & Metal Works.
- **1930s**: Great Depression.
- **1937**: "MacKenzie's Rebellion" against Britain in Canada nearly sparks war with the US, as the American ship Caroline is sunk by loyalists.
- **1940s**: Brief war-propelled boom.
- **1950s**: Due to declining government contracts, growth of trucking industry, and changes in railroad patterns, trade and manufacturing in region begin to decline.
- **1959**: St Lawrence Seaway dramatically upends regional economy, depriving it of any significance as a stopping point along the east-west trade routes.
- **1994**: After 7 years of preparatory work, the North American Free Trade Agreement takes effect.

#### Economy

- **1800**: Erie Canal opens.
- **1829**: Welland Canal opens.
- **1840**: Joseph Dart invents steam-powered grain elevator; four million bushels of grain shipped through Buffalo.
- **1852**: 22 million bushels of grain shipped through Buffalo.
- **1854**: Reciprocity Treaty between US, and Canada provides for limited free trade and navigation rights.
- **1869**: Railroad freight out of region surpasses canal freight for the first time.
- **1870s**: Second wave of immigration brings Poles, Italians, and Jews from eastern and southern Europe.
- **1900**: Lackawanna Steel and Iron Company locates south of Buffalo.
- **1902**: McKinnon Dash & Metal Works opens in St. Catharines.
- **1909**: Twenty-five electric companies located near Niagara Falls.
- **1912**: Bethlehem Steel Steel buys Lackawanna Steel.
- **1922**: GM buys McKinnon Dash & Metal Works.
- **1930s**: Great Depression.
- **1937**: "MacKenzie's Rebellion" against Britain in Canada nearly sparks war with the US, as the American ship Caroline is sunk by loyalists.
- **1940s**: Brief war-propelled boom.
- **1950s**: Due to declining government contracts, growth of trucking industry, and changes in railroad patterns, trade and manufacturing in region begin to decline.
- **1959**: St Lawrence Seaway dramatically upends regional economy, depriving it of any significance as a stopping point along the east-west trade routes.
- **1994**: After 7 years of preparatory work, the North American Free Trade Agreement takes effect.
Learning from other regions

The Niagara Frontier:
Ontario and New York

At first glance, there might seem something odd about a conference that engages the topics of heritage tourism, brownfields redevelopment, and global trade all together in one package. But on further examination it turns out it's anything but odd. In fact, in one form or another, projects combining these themes have already been undertaken elsewhere.

There are numerous examples of urban regions across North America and around the world working to come to grips with the challenges of developing, preserving, managing, and marketing regional assets in ways that cross boundaries of conventional thinking.

The intent of this section is not to catalogue the available precedents, but simply to suggest the range of possibilities through a selection of cases, and to stimulate thinking about our own situation.

In some ways, these cases are very different from each other.

Los Caminos del Rio, stretching from Laredo to Brownsville and Matamoros along the Texas-Mexico border, is, in a sense, a 200-mile long bi-national historic preservation district. Much of it is not urban at all.

Emscher Park, in the Ruhr District, Germany's "rust belt," is a densely populated urban region which is the subject of an ambitious restructuring program led by a special-purpose state agency in the guise of a "building exhibition."

The Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, covering 24 cities and towns in Rhode Island and Massachusetts, is one of a relatively new species of national park, in this case com-

memorating the history of this birthplace of the American Industrial Revolution.

In some ways, however, they are strikingly similar, and in ways that speak to our situation here on the Niagara Frontier. All three, for example, involve a river.

More profoundly, each of these cases works across boundaries: across the thematic boundaries of art and industry or nature and infrastructure; across the boundaries between public and private, between economy and environment; indeed, between our historical past and the future we are working to shape.

These cases do not, frankly, encompass many of the possibilities before the region. They tend to focus on economic development mainly as a matter of tourism development. They largely ignore issues of global trade and transportation infrastructure.

Nevertheless, perhaps we can learn something from these cases, and use them to spark our thinking.
Recovering the stories of the borderland

Los Caminos del Rio: Texas and Mexico

Sometimes a compelling local history and the determination of a single activist are enough to strike a spark for heritage preservation, regional development, and international cooperation.

One Man’s Brain-Child

Los Caminos del Rio — The Roads of the River — is a heritage corridor straddling the Texas-Mexico border and stretching 200 miles from Laredo/Nuevo Laredo to Brownsville, Matamoros and the Gulf of Mexico. It was the brain-child of a Cuban-born architect named Mario L. Sanchez who fell in love with the landscapes, the villages, and especially the stories of the lower Rio Grande valley.

Sanchez painstakingly researched and documented the architectural and historic resources of the valley, reconstructed the region’s compelling history, and outlined the strategy for designating Los Caminos as a heritage corridor and organizing its continuing development.

The concept was simple: ‘If restored and interpreted,’ wrote Sanchez, ‘the churches, ranches, public buildings, historic sites and river landscapes of the region have the potential to stimulate economic activity through increased tourism and preserve a common cultural heritage — a shared experience — unique to Texas and northern Mexico.’

Organizing the Concept

Throughout the early 1990s, Los Caminos del Rio made the transformation from book (A Shared Experience, edited by Sanchez), to ‘project,’ to State Interagency Task Force, to bi-national not-for-profit corporation, to heritage corridor jointly designated by Texas and Mexico.

The political and substantive complexity of the project might be illustrated by the image of one of the early survey projects, in which 28 people from 13 different U.S. or Mexican agencies and representing 15 different academic disciplines toured the valley to document its resources.

A Passion for the Stories

If the project was propelled by the passion of Sanchez and others, it seems their passion was inspired by the stories of the Rio Grande valley.

Augustine Celaya, president of Los Caminos’ bi-national board of directors, recites whole volumes of history with little prompting:

- How the region was settled by Spain in the mid 1700s to protect Mexico from incursions by the French, and how agriculture, ranching, and a lively riverboat trade flourished there.
- Or how future U.S. Civil War generals Grant and Lee, fresh out of West Point, tested new tactics on the battlefields of the Mexican War, and how Matamoros businessmen ‘cached in’ shipping cotton and guns for the Confederacy, and how the Mexican cattle culture made its way into the American West from the Rio Grande valley.
- More recently, how Pancho Villa held Matamoros under siege in 1916 during the Mexican revolution, or how that city thrived as an ‘entertainment destination’ during U.S. Prohibition.

A History of Cooperation

One might imagine bi-national cooperation in this context would be a tricky thing. But Celaya explains that the border has been made faint by years of intermarriage, business relationships, and mutual development. Brownsville, for example, was founded by businessmen from Matamoros. Laredo and Nuevo Laredo share a similar relationship.

‘From the very beginning,’ Celaya said, ‘people were going to the U.S., they were going to the other side.’

Instead, Los Caminos del Rio, the not-for-profit corporation, has served as a kind of common table: an ad hoc steering committee, for the consideration of a stream of projects funded by some combination of Mexican or U.S. agencies and municipalities and others.
Preserving the Past

Rachel Torres, executive director of Los Caminos, says current projects include restoration of los ejidos, the collective farms which were a legacy of the Mexican Revolution; reforestation of the river bed near Rio Bravo, including creating a new nursery; planning for a festival in Roma, Texas to celebrate the filming of the 1950s classic "Viva Zapata!"; and the $2 million restoration of a landmark suspension bridge which links Roma with Ciudad Miguel Aleman.

Near Brownsville, the Palo Alto Battlefield—site of four Mexican and Civil War battles, including the final battle of the Civil War—was recently named a U.S. National Park. In Ciudad Mier in Tamaulipas, an old prison is being restored for use as a library.

One of the most ambitious projects is taking shape in Matamoros, the cultural and economic hub of the region in the 19th century. There, in the formerly walled old city, 173 different structures have been qualified for Mexican national historic monument status. And, despite three-party political conflict, local and national administrations have committed to finance a 20-million-peso restoration.

Bilingual Board Meetings

Meanwhile, operating costs for the Los Caminos staff of five, including a full-time preservation architect, four field offices, and a legion of volunteers, are funded by annual contributions from municipalities in both nations along the corridor. Projects are funded from existing governmental and foundation sources on both sides. And, Celaya said, the meetings of the 20-member board "take place in both languages sometimes."

There are some snags, however. Los Caminos has applied for National Park Service designation as a national heritage area, and Texas U.S. Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison is a supporter. Torres said. But some of the property owners in the corridor are worried that official status will bring new regulations on their property—even though federal heritage corridor legislation protects against that.

Still Putting it Together

Celaya also admits that Los Caminos has yet to do what it needs to do in the way of marketing and promotion of the region. Most of the visitors are still "Winter Texans" vacationing from the upper Midwest, or hard-drinking spring breakers on the beaches of Brownsville.

Instead, they have concentrated their efforts on restoring or stabilizing historic buildings and other resources. That's the priority, Celaya says, because without that, they have nothing to market. The history — the story — is everything.

Telling the story presents a dual challenge for Los Caminos in the age of NAFTA. In the booming cities of Matamoros and Brownsville, the maquiladoras, and the busy border crossings of Laredo and McAllen, the trick is to preserve the physical heritage from obliteration by new development and population growth.

In the rest of the corridor, they need to rescue their heritage from simple neglect. Out there, Celaya said, "you would see the old river the way it was a hundred years ago. Those villages sort of stay back in time."

The explicit aim of Los Caminos was to create greater prosperity by connecting the fragmented historical attractions of the valley and packaging them for new tourists. But it is too soon to see a significant economic impact, Celaya said.

"We're still putting the corridor together."
Regenerating the cradle of the American Industrial Revolution

Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor
Massachusetts and Rhode Island

Telling the story means preserving the story

In New England’s Blackstone River valley, telling the story of an historically significant region has also meant working to preserve the architectural record of the story, create new recreational opportunities, assist in the biological recovery of the river itself, and to go against the pressures of contemporary development through cooperative regional planning.

The Blackstone is sometimes known as America’s “hardest working river,” and the birthplace of the American Industrial Revolution. In the 1790s there the cottage industry of weaving was transformed into the highly organized, large-scale, capital- and energy-intensive mass production industry of textile manufacturing.

Partnerships and Cooperation

In 1986 Congress created the Blackstone River National Heritage Corridor to “preserve and interpret” the factories, dams, mill villages, commercial towns, cities, and rural landscapes of the valley. At the time, the National Heritage Area program was in its infancy. Blackstone was just the second area designated.

The National Parks Service Commission for the area has no power to own or manage land or regulate land use. Its only strategic tools are public education and outreach, partnerships with local governments, private business or community based organizations, and a modest budget for targeted investments.

The Commission has developed a full array of brochures, maps and guidebooks providing information about the historic sites in the valley; trained volunteer interpreters; created the first in a series of wayside and traveling interpretive exhibits, and established three of four planned visitor centers/museums throughout the valley.

Their crew of park rangers, meanwhile, runs a program of guided tours on foot, by river boat, and by bus; conducts a lecture series; teaches orienteering and canoeing; and helped produce a series of television programs called “Along the Blackstone” for the History Channel.

The Commission also created a system of coordinated signage to identify historic sites and aid in wayfinding. But it was a challenge to negotiate the system across two states and two dozen local jurisdictions, senior planner, Nancy Brittain said.

The area encompasses 18 towns and six cities in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, stretching almost 50 miles from Worcester to Pawtucket. The Commission consists of 19 members representing cities, towns, and citizen groups throughout the area. The Commission also operates one conventional National Park, The Roger Williams National Memorial.
The story of the Industrial Revolution was also one of women working in the new mills. Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor

The designation also allowed for creation of a "river navigator" position — someone to survey conditions on the river and work with the community to develop priorities for action on environment, economy, recreation, and historic preservation issues.

Meanwhile, the Commission has also sponsored a project to stencil warnings on storm drains against dumping as a deterrent to "non-point" pollution from motor oil, pet wastes, fertilizers, pesticides and other pollutants. Students from Woonsocket High School are also assisting with a plan for river recovery — mapping the river, identifying pollution sources, testing the waters, developing best management practices, and conducting public education.

Preserving the Heritage

The Commission has joined with local partners to help save a wide range of structures and sites that express the story of the industrial river. Key preservation projects include historic mills, factories, churches, mansions, farmhouses, meeting houses, railroad depots, stores, and theaters.

Recently, the Commission led the way in saving the historically significant and environmentally sensitive Grafton Common farm district — 124 acres of hayfields, pasture, wetland and woodland. The Commission didn't buy the land — the town did — but hired a real estate specialist and put up $4,000 of front money to convince the local council the deal was feasible. The $1.5 million acquisition will be offset by a compact 17-unit residential development.

Other preservation projects in the works include an effort to save the Stanley Woolen Mill. The Commission has put up $20,000 for a feasibility study and is working with the state development authority, local council and industrial development agency, the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce, and a private developer to produce a redevelopment plan. A similar approach is being taken to rescuing the Bell Tower Mill in Slatersville, Rhode Island.

Planning for Preservation and Growth

The Commission has also taken a role in helping the communities of the valley use planning to "balance conservation and growth." With the Blackstone Valley's main limited-access highway, I-146, now connected to the Interstate Highway system from Providence to the Massachusetts Turnpike, additional pressures for sprawl development are expected.

The Commission's 1990 management plan laid the groundwork for a response to sprawl — providing an inventory of historical resources, design guidelines and standards, an interpretive plan, a land use management plan, and an economic assessment. The Commission also provides "strategic design and planning" assistance on an ongoing basis to communities throughout the corridor.

Last year, the Commission created the Blackstone Valley Institute as forum for region-wide education, discussion, and cooperative action. The institute hosted a program entitled "A Watershed Approach to Local Land Use Decisions." In March 2000 they held a conference on "The Blackstone Valley in an Emerging Economy: Fostering River Recovery" and an ongoing basis to communities throughout the corridor.

The Blackstone Valley Institute was one of the first ten years this Commission was in existence we were there solely to raise people's awareness of the historical significance of this area. Britain says such work has produced "a heightened level of awareness, in the economic development agencies and chambers of commerce, that good planning can mean good development."

The National Heritage Area law requires federal dollars be matched by partner dollars on a one-to-one basis. The Blackstone commission has decided a minimum two-to-one leverage is more appropriate. Over the coming ten years they intend to draw at least $10 million in partner investments with their own $5 million authorization.

The Commission was renewed by Congress in 1996 for an additional ten years. In 1997 three towns in Rhode Island, one in Massachusetts, and a large part of the City of Worcester were added to the corridor — at their own behest. With the organizational infrastructure now in place — not just the Commission and the Institute but a regional visitors bureau and tourism council — the role of the Commission is expected to expand with increasing emphasis on heritage tourism development and marketing.
Restructuring an old industrial district

Emscher Park
Ruhr District, Germany

In Germany’s “rust-belt” – the Ruhr District – they adapted the European tradition of the “building exhibition” as a framework for weaving together themes of ecology, economy, culture, and community for the regeneration of a dying coal-mining and steel-making region.

Impulses for Restructuring

In 1989 the state of North Rhine-Westphalia joined together with the cities of Dortmund, Essen and 15 other municipalities to create the International Building Exhibition (IBA, sub-titled “Workshop on the Future of Old Industrial Areas”) as a means to provide “impulses” for the restructuring of the region of about two million people.

In the 1980s the Ruhr District was in very bad shape. As coal mines, steel mills and factories shut down they left abandoned industrial facilities, a legacy of environmental destruction, and unemployment in excess of 25 percent.

Slag heaps and tailings were a prominent part of the landscape. The Emscher River, which runs through the region, was not just understood as “an open sewer.” It had been redesigned, channelized, and lined with concrete specifically to perform the function of draining industrial pollution.

During the ten year term of the IBA, which expired in 2000, state and local government, business and labor, environmentalists, planners, architects, and citizens worked at projects to expand and connect regional green spaces, regenerate the Emscher River, promote economic development, preserve the physical landmarks from the region’s heavy industrial age, build and renovate housing, and promote job training and grass roots development.

So far, about 3.5 billion have been invested (about 2.5 billion U.S. by current exchange rates), and roughly two thirds of that has come from public sources. These investments have made possible:

• Expansion and connection of green spaces in the region. The exhibition built on the 1920s-era German concept of green corridors, adding a number of new “landscape parks” and forming a continuous network of parks and trails, including 167 miles of bicycle paths and 80 miles of walking trails. Some new parks were developed on old industrial spoils or integrated with new office parks.

• Regeneration of the Emscher River system. The strategy has been to combine small scale repairs (rehabilitation of tributaries, small scale groundwater infiltration designs, and removal of the concrete river lining) with larger scale investments (construction of new sewers and decentralized treatment facilities). They expect to invest an additional $4.3 billion over the next twenty or thirty years.

• Redevelopment of old industrial sites and structures to create space for jobs in emerging economic sectors. Promotion of “working in the park” has emphasized mixed use developments, high-quality design, an ecological orientation, centralized marketing and provision of public transport, daycare and other social supports. A total of 22 sites with 1,235 acres have been developed for business start-ups, small business development, technology, and training schemes.

• Preservation of industrial monuments. The factories, power plants, collieries, foundries, tailing heaps, storage tanks, canal locks, and warehouses of the Ruhr District are its link to its industrial past. Many of these industrial monuments have been reused as community centers, arts facilities, exhibition halls, and for other public uses. One building was even restored to its original use as a transformer station, while others have been preserved pending new uses.

• Renovation of housing and neighborhoods. More than two dozen projects – some new construction, some rehabilitation of early 20th cen-
The projects have emphasized high standards of design, ecological compatibility, and user involvement. Some were built under the IBA "build simply and by yourself" program.

- Development of community social fabric through citizen involvement, grassroots development projects, employment and training programs, and a variety of other social initiatives.

Innovation and Implementation

The genius of the IBA was that it combined the tradition of innovation carried by the building exhibition format with the existing financing and implementation structures of state and local government, including the Kommunalverband Ruhrgebiet, a kind of regional council of governments.

The exhibition staff of 30 brought together architects, planners, designers, and academics with community members in symposia, workshops, and exchanges. These formats placed a premium on brainstorming, creativity, and innovation in the pursuit of the interwoven themes of ecological repair, economic restructuring, and community development.

But all the projects were carried out by existing authorities - agencies of the North Rhine-Westphalia government, constituent city governments, companies, or community-based organizations. All investments, upon IBA approval, came through existing aid programs. They feared having a new pot of money would lead to previously unfinanceable projects being "dumped" on the IBA.

Collaborative Governance

The IBA itself was a subsidiary of the state government. But the directors of the exhibition were mainly academics. A high-level board of trustees was expected to "promote" and "support" the exhibition. Project decisions and approvals, however, were made by a steering committee composed of members of state departments, and representatives of member towns, industry, trade unions, and from conservation, planning, and architecture associations.

The "big picture" strategy behind the exhibition was to anticipate long-term social and technological changes, determine future infrastructure needs connected with those changes, and make sure states and local government used the power necessary to make things happen.

One of the crucial decisions was to aim toward diversification in industrial sectors with higher technology and higher-value added products. Given the abundance of cheap sites and existing infrastructure, it would have been easy to develop low net output enterprises. But this kind of "bottom-feeding" strategy wouldn't provide the means to transform the old industrial landscape in the way they intended.

Industrial Heritage Tourism

Later on, the IBA turned its attention to developing tourism around the network of historic industrial attractions and new recreational amenities the exhibition has been developing. They have a sophisticated web-site that documents an extensive industrial culture tourism route.

At the expiration of its term, the International Building Exhibition was closed. The staff moved on to other assignments. A "place-holder" organization called Project Ruhr Ltd was created. A public debate was conducted over whether the Ruhr District should have an "organization for innovation" like the IBA. "Half said 'we want to continue.' The other half said 'let's go back to the standards of the 80s,'" said Michael Schwarze-Rodrian, an IBA staff member working for the Kommunalverband. On May 14, 2000 the Social Democrat-Green alliance that promoted the IBA was voted out of office. But public support and the record of accomplishment of the IBA was sufficient to convince the new government to let Project Ruhr Ltd continue the work.

For all of this progress, the Ruhr District has a long way to go. Unemployment in the region still runs to 17 percent or higher. In March 2000, another Ruhr coal mine was scheduled to close, idling an additional 6,000 workers in one fell swoop. But the landscape - institutionally as well as physically - has been changed.

"Ten years ago we only had visions and papers and so on," Schwarze-Rodrian said. "Now there is a tangible record of achievement. 'You can climb up on things.'"
What we can learn from these cases

Niagara Region
United States and Canada

What can we learn from these cases?

First, there are a variety of ways to put the puzzle together organizationally. But a combination of strong institutional base and robust cooperation seems a must.

Second, successful regions are “going with the flow” of economic restructuring, environmental repair, care for places, and attention to stories.

Third, we have an embarrassment of riches. The Niagara Frontier has all it needs to put these cases in the shade.

A Range of Organizational Modes

Each of the three cases presented relies on a different organizational mode, institutional structure, and political process. Taken together, they suggest there is no simple recipe for doing these kinds of projects.

Los Caminos del Rio uses an unusual binational not-for-profit corporation as the organizational centerpiece of their effort. But they also rely on the substantial financial and institutional power of state government on one side of the border, federal government on the other, and the willing cooperation of municipal governments up and down the Rio Grande.

In Germany, where the state is strong and public leadership still honored, government used the building exhibition format to focus and amplify the use of existing aid and investment streams on the project of regional restructuring. But the approach seems to have been anything but heavy-handed. The IBA worked closely with local governments, invited citizens to participate, and made public-private partnerships to get things done.

In New England, the lead agency seems to have taken an even lighter touch. The Commission does represent the federal government, but they have been loath to throw their weight around. Instead, they use their relatively modest resources to leverage the investments of other players, public or private. In their core business—telling the story—they work hard to involve local governments and communities. In the bigger picture business of preserving the assets of the valley from the pressures of development, they only whisper the word “planning,” but they do say it.

Yet, if there are a variety of approaches, there seem to be a couple of common denominators. Whether the lead agency is weak or strong, has lots of money or not so much, the process of developing, preserving, managing and marketing regional assets requires sophisticated multiparty collaboration. No entity can do it alone, and anyone that tries will earn the opposition of someone else.

At the same time, there needs to be an institutional base for such efforts. There needs to be an agency that can convene all the various players—the chambers of commerce, the mayors and council members, the state bureaucracies, and citizen groups of all kinds—to engage the inevitable collaborative tasks. Each of these cases had such an entity.

Going with the Flow

Although the approach and emphasis of regional projects differs from the Blackstone to the Emscher to the Rio Grande, all three seem resolved to “go with the flow” of major contemporary trends in economy, society, and environment.

Although they speak but little to issues of transportation infrastructure, all three projects respond, in one way or another, to the realities of an economic future that will be defined more and more on knowledge, information technologies, innovation, and global trade, and less and less on the forces that made them in the first place: water power, coal, and steel.

Likewise, they acknowledge that tourism is one of the great growth industries of the current era. In two of the cases, increasing tourism is at the center of the strategy. In the other, Emscher Park, more tourism is expected to be a happy but intentional by-product of environmental repair and economic redevelopment. All three
cases manifest an understanding that good places are crucial, not only to tourism, but to regional success in general. The quality of planning, design and development are central to the effort to making places attractive to tourists and satisfying for residents alike.

All three cases demonstrate how important it is — especially in an era of globalization — for regions to preserve, enhance, and highlight what is already distinctive about them. Why, after all, would you visit the Rio Grande Valley if it were just like Orlando?

In all of this, history is central. Each of these regions has its own story to tell. That’s what makes each worth visiting. Telling the story also has value for the residents, not only because tourism has economic benefits, but because the story gives meaning to their lives.

For all three, preserving the physical manifestations of the story goes hand in hand with telling the story. Indeed, they have all spent relatively more on restoring buildings and sites than they have on documentation and interpretation. In crude terms, this means that if you don’t have the goods, there is nothing to market.

At the same time, all three have worked hard to make the whole seem at least as large as the sum of its parts, to piece together the fragments, to connect the attractions, physically, with the development of routes and trails, and virtually, on attractive websites.

Finally, all of these cases have focused on preserving or repairing the natural environment. In some cases this has meant massive infrastructure investments, in others community tree plantings. Environmental regeneration is surely a biological necessity. It is also a possibility brought about by the changing structure of our economy. Crucial to this discussion is the fact that as time goes on, environmental quality will be increasingly important as a matter of regional competitiveness.

If your air, water, and land are polluted, people won’t want to live there and they won’t want to visit. But the good news is, every investment in environmental quality, every river regenerated, every brownfield restored, turns a regional liability into a regional asset.

an embarrassment of riches

Residents of the Niagara Frontier might have at least two reactions to these cases. One could be admiration for the obvious accomplishments these regions have made. But another would have to be that our region has a lot more going for it than any of these.

We possess, not only one of the great natural wonders of the world, but an extraordinary array of other attractions, existing and waiting to be developed. Live theater, sports and recreational attractions, visual and performing arts, historic architecture, nightlife, entertainment and casinos, rural landscapes, and much more are all here.

The Niagara Frontier also has story after story to be told — that are already being told — from the story of our colonial and military days to the emerging story of economic rebirth and everything in between. The first nations heritage, the Erie Canal, the birth of hydro-power, the story of the cataract, itself, the rise and fall of steel, the Underground Railroad, and many, many more need only to be gathered, highlighted, and told again.

As for our position relative to the emerging economy, little more needs to be said. The geographical position of the region, its infrastructure, its social assets, all speak to opportunity in knowledge-based industries and global trade.

And, of course, there is a wealth of land and water, some of it now on the liability side of the ledger, but with appropriate investments ready to be transferred to the assets column.

The possibilities are, indeed, enormous.

Sources

Los Caminos del Rio
Augustine Celaya, President, Los Caminos del Rio Heritage Area board of directors, interview, March 2000.


“A Shared Experience” internet website at www.nps.gov/biosl/index.htm

Blackstone Valley
Nancy Brittain, senior planner, Blackstone Valley National Heritage Corridor, interview, March 2000.

Blackstone Valley National Heritage Corridor internet website at www.nps.gov/biosl/index.htm

Emscher Park


The Waterfront Regeneration Trust is an independent, non-profit registered charity dedicated to meeting the challenge of protecting and restoring those elements of the waterfront that we value - ecological health, a sense of community, economic vitality - by bringing together people, ideas and resources for regeneration.

Since its inception, the Trust has established a strong reputation as an innovative organization that can build consensus, facilitate resolution of complex issues, and bring together the partners needed for implementation. Originally established in 1992 under Ontario provincial legislation to implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission on the Future of the Toronto Waterfront, the Trust completed its transition to independent status in 1999.

The Waterfront Regeneration Trust is committed to a philosophy that humans are a part of nature, not separate from it; that everything is connected to everything else; and that we are responsible for our actions to ourselves, to other people, to other generations, and to other species. The work of the Trust and its partners is guided by nine principles - that waterfronts should be clean, green, accessible, connected, open, useable, diverse, affordable and attractive.

For further information contact:
Beth Benson, Executive Director
The Waterfront Regeneration Trust
207 Queen’s Quay West, Suite 403
Toronto, Ontario M5J 1A7
Phone: 416-943-8080
Fax: 416-943-8068
E-mail: bbb@wrtrust.com
Web: www.waterfronttrust.com

The Urban Design Project is a center devoted to service, teaching and research in the pursuit of a critical practice of urban design. It was founded in 1990 by Professor Robert G. Shibley, and is located in the School of Architecture and Planning at the University of Buffalo, State University of New York.

The Urban Design Project seeks to serve the communities of the Niagara-Buffalo city region by bringing urban design students and faculty together with local governments, community based organizations and citizens in general, to engage the work of making better places and stronger communities.

The Urban Design Project also works to enrich the body of knowledge about the practice of urban design. Research conducted through the center is aimed at expanding our understanding, not only of the practice of urban design in general, but also about specific places, sites, neighborhoods, and districts in our city-region.

For further information, contact:
Robert G. Shibley, Director
The Urban Design Project
University at Buffalo, State University of New York
School of Architecture and Planning
3435 Main Street
Buffalo NY 14214-3087
Phone: 716-829-3489 x 218
Fax: 716-882-3722
Email: rshibley@ap.buffalo.edu
Web: www.ap.buffalo.edu/urban-design-project
Early 19th century depiction of the Niagara Frontier. The Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society