

# THE CITY OF Waterfalls

BY HELEN POWERS ■ PHOTOS BY JOSEPH HOLLICK & HELEN POWERS

**I**T OFTEN SURPRISES PEOPLE to learn that Hamilton, Ontario has dozens of waterfalls that tumble down the Niagara Escarpment as it winds through the city. From waterfall crests in any season, there are spectacular views down valleys and ravines but especially so in autumn when fall colours elevate the “wow” factor by several degrees. ►

Buttermilk Falls is one of many waterfalls clustered close together in Hamilton's east end. PHOTO BY HELEN POWERS





▲ Great Falls near Waterdown features a viewing deck very close to the parking area and several trails for longer walks. PHOTO BY HELEN POWERS.

In Hamilton, the Niagara Escarpment is known as “the mountain” and it defines the context of many neighbourhoods. It is a monumental point of reference for driving directions and major streets are named with “Upper” portions to help people find their way around town. The Escarpment’s influence in shaping the city is obvious but its waterfalls have also played an important role.

As early as the 1700s, settlers located near the waterfalls to have power for early industries such as saw mills, flour mills, and paper mills which operated with the force of falling water. Providing necessities and employment, the falls often became hubs of economic activity and communities that in time became part of Hamilton.

In this way, waterfalls have been a significant factor in Hamilton’s history. As watershed officer Jaime Tellier of the Hamilton Conservation Authority says, “The waterfalls

shaped the city that was to come later.” Tellier was the manager of an extensive inventory project carried out in 2014 that found a new record of 145 waterfalls within the city.

To be included in the inventory, waterfalls had to meet a number of criteria such as a minimum vertical drop of three metres and a minimum crest width of one metre. While the tallest, Tew’s Falls, is just a few metres shorter than Niagara Falls, the average size of Hamilton’s waterfalls is 10 metres high by four metres wide.

The conservation authority is using the inventory to sustainably make the most of these amazing areas. “The inventory helps us to balance the tourism opportunities with the protection of these natural resources,” says Tellier. “Knowing what’s out there and what may need protecting is very important.” In some cases, this has meant re-directing trails in order to keep people

safe and environmentally sensitive areas healthy.

Over half of the waterfalls are accessible to the public and the website, Cascades and Waterfalls of Hamilton, at [www.waterfalls.hamilton.ca](http://www.waterfalls.hamilton.ca), is full of detailed information to plan your trip. Directions, maps and amenities are listed for each waterfall. There are cycling and walking routes or, if you drive, you can find out how many parking spots there are and how long it takes to walk from your car to the falls.

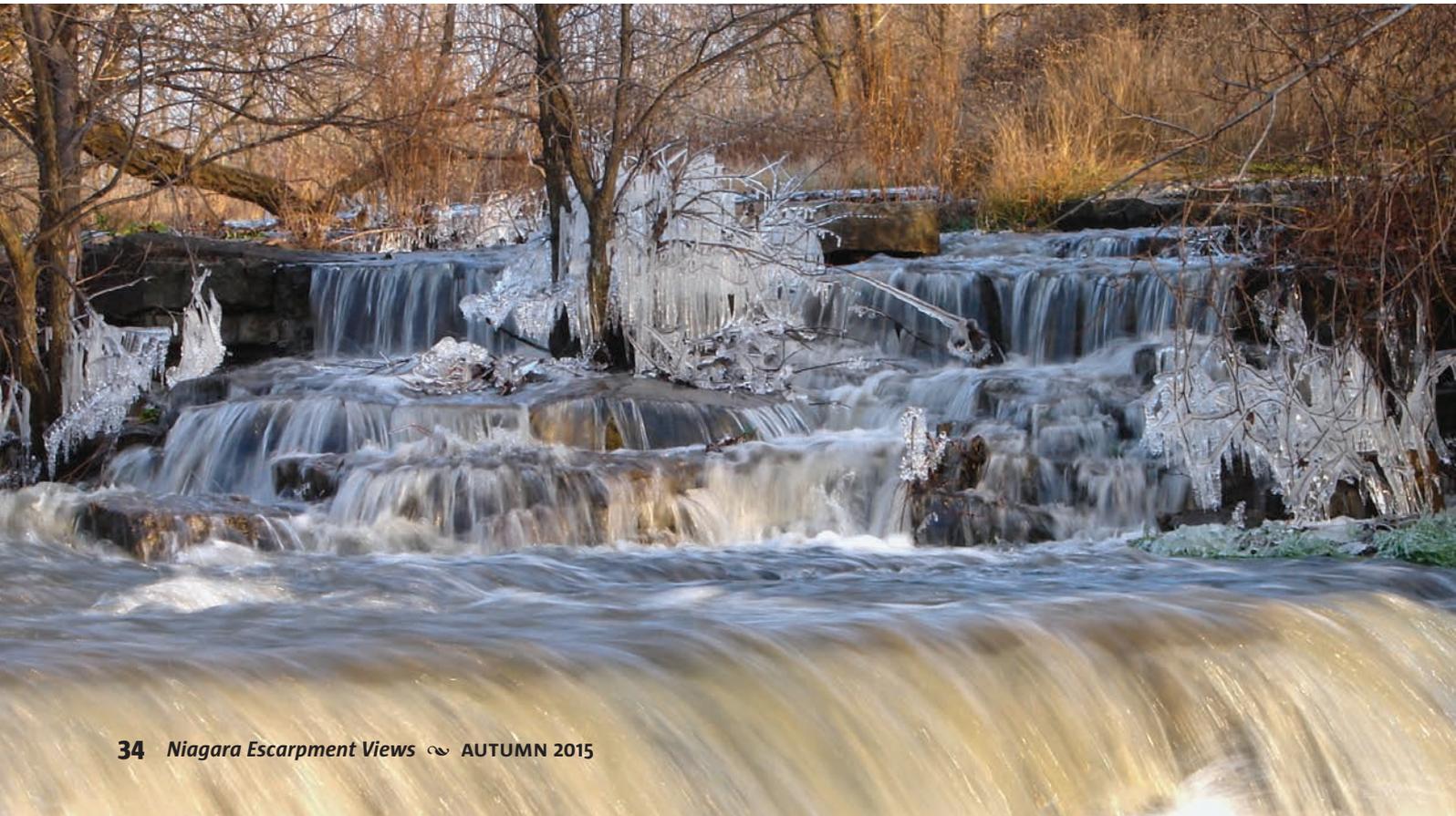
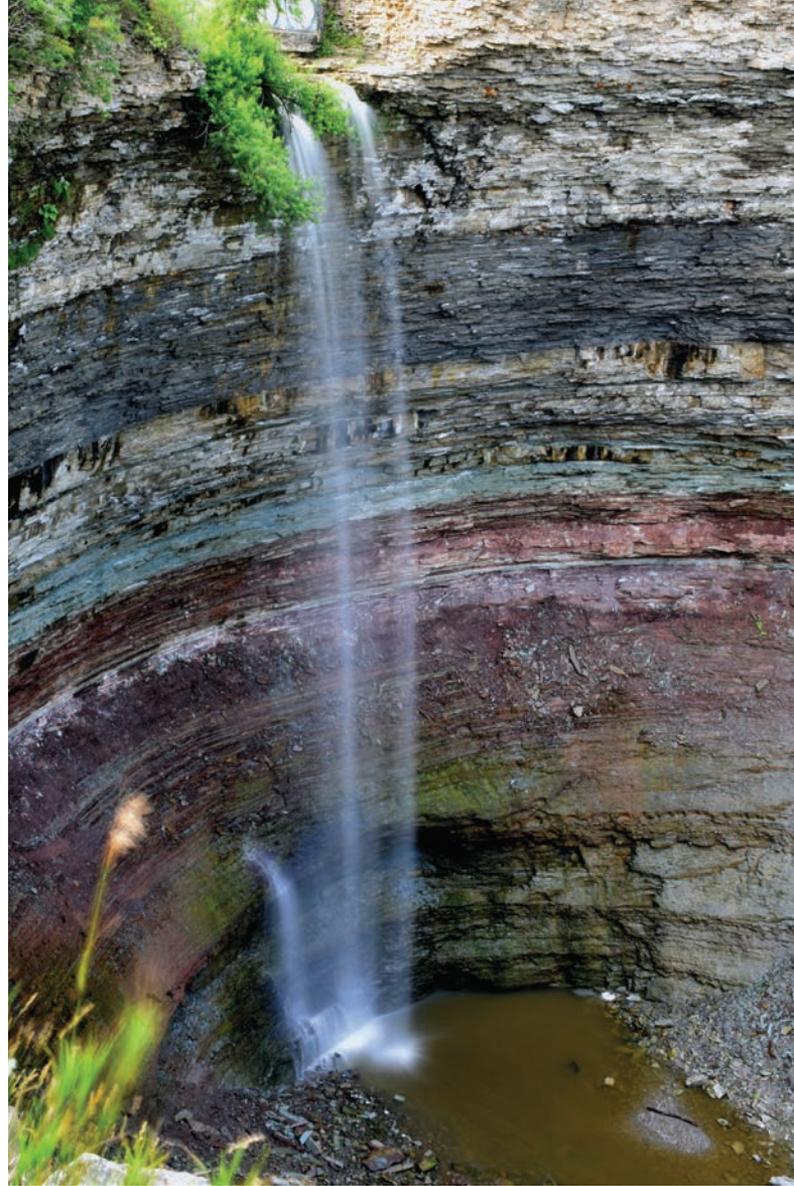
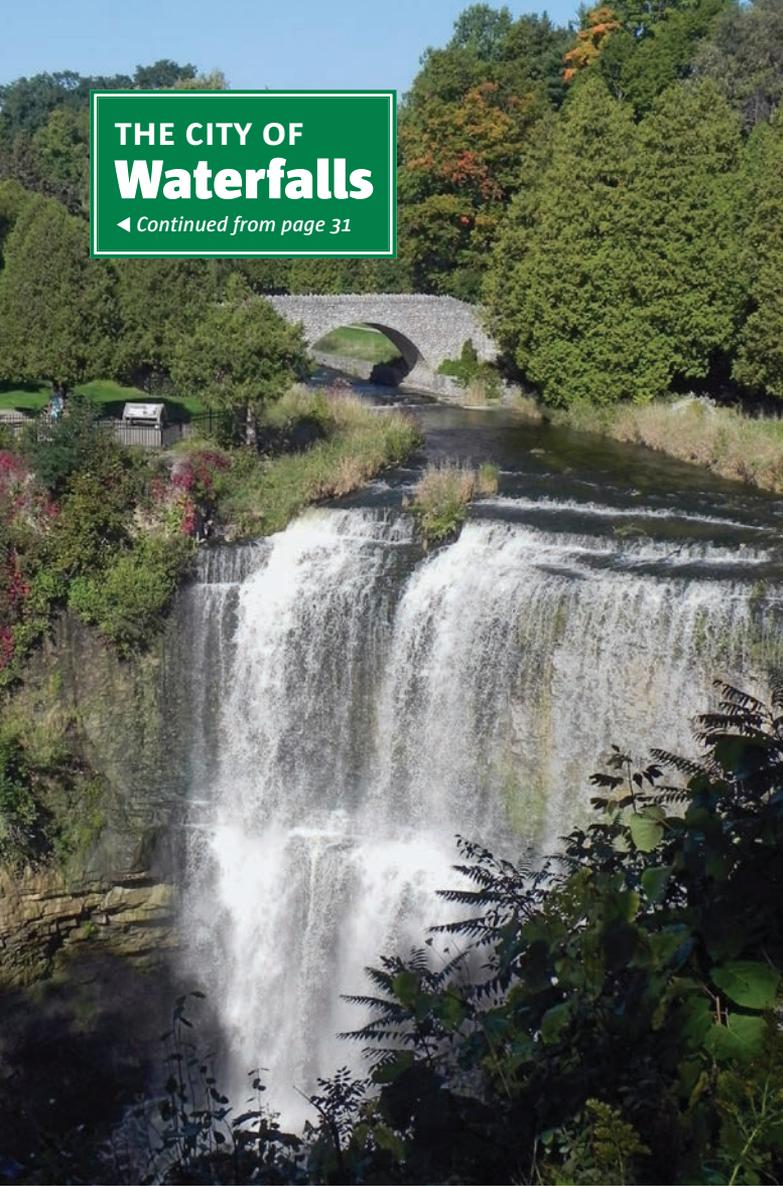
### **Spectacular Colours**

Depending on the time of year, there may be sizeable crowds enjoying the sights and sounds of Hamilton’s waterfalls. In the west end, Tew’s Falls and Webster’s Falls are very close neighbours and they have 90,000 to 100,000 visitors each year. An added attraction is nearby Dundas Peak, an incredible Escarpment outlook with panoramic views around the Dundas Valley and across the city.

◀ Sherman Falls on Ancaster Creek was named after the Sherman family which owned this property a century ago and founded Hamilton’s Dofasco Steel Company. PHOTO BY JOSEPH HOLLICK.

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**Waterfalls**

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◀ (Top Left) Webster's Falls is well equipped for picnics, lawn games and leisurely strolls over the stone bridge. PHOTO BY HELEN POWERS.

◀ (Top Right) Devil's Punch Bowl on Stoney Creek shows the many layers of rock in this part of the Escarpment. Note also the small stream coming out of the rock face near the bottom of the waterfall. PHOTO BY JOSEPH HOLLICK.

## Trip Advisor ranks the waterfalls as Hamilton's second most popular attraction

Tellier says that late winter and early spring are popular times because the water volume grows dramatically when snow and ice melt away. Autumn generally has lower water flow but the spectacular colours draw people out with their cameras at the ready. Thanksgiving weekend is a very popular time for families and friends to share the scenic views and trails as part of their holiday traditions. As winter transforms the waterfalls into frozen sculptures, ice climbers get enthused and while summer's heat can reduce the water volume, thunderstorms bring a loud rush of water that is thrilling to capture on video shortly after the storms have passed.

During all times of the year, you can enjoy colourful illuminations organized by Hamiltonian Chris Ecklund who describes the waterfalls as "the biggest piece of canvas an artist could work on." Seven years ago, he began promoting Hamilton all over North America as "The City of Waterfalls" and he is proud that awareness of the city's incredible natural assets has grown significantly. According to Ecklund, 70 per cent of his website users are from outside Hamilton and Trip Advisor ranks the waterfalls as Hamilton's second most popular attraction.

### Rare Environment

The most popular waterfalls have viewing platforms and formal trails to help people of varying physical abilities. These features also protect the natural environment by directing foot traffic to specific areas. Staying on the trail is important as short cuts can become so well used that soil compaction and trampling of plants become a problem.

"There are rare ecosystems along the way that people might not notice because they're busy viewing and appreciating the waterfalls," Tellier explains. "As an internationally recognized biosphere reserve, the Escarpment is unique and we want to balance its protection with its popular recreation opportunities."

Spread throughout the city's urban and rural settings, there is a perfect waterfall to see whether you are the hiking type or not. For the ambitious, choose a neighbourhood with several waterfalls and fill your day with multiple beautiful scenes. Or pack a few meals and spend all day at one waterfall park equipped with picnic tables, barbecues and open lawns for activities.

When you plan your visit, be sure to check the top 18 locations listed on the Cascades and Waterfalls of Hamilton

◀ Visible from Hunter Road, Hunter Falls is located on a branch of Fairchild Creek in Troy, at the western boundary of Hamilton. Taken in November, this photo shows ice beginning to form. PHOTO BY JOSEPH HOLLICK.



▲ Not all waterfalls come from the surface. Clappison Falls is created by ground water flowing from karsts or fissures in the Escarpment on the west side of Hwy. 6 south of Clappison Corners. These falls dry up, making the best viewing after a long rain or during the spring melt. PHOTO BY JOSEPH HOLLICK.



▲ November ice is forming on Felker's Falls on Davis Creek in Stoney Creek. PHOTO BY JOSEPH HOLLICK.



▲ Tiffany Falls in early autumn. Located on Tiffany Creek in Ancaster. A terrible accident occurred here in May when a branch fell off a massive oak tree and killed a young woman from Hamilton. PHOTO BY JOSEPH HOLLICK.



▲ Market Street Falls on Spencer Creek in Dundas, is not on the official list of Hamilton's waterfalls because it is only two metres high, not the required minimum of three metres high. PHOTO BY JOSEPH HOLLICK.



▲ The Bruce Trail crosses Canterbury Falls on Canterbury Creek in Ancaster. PHOTO BY JOSEPH HOLLICK.

website. That's where you will also see this: "In Hamilton, it's been said that if the Escarpment is the city's crown, then its waterfalls are the sparkling jewels in that tiara."

The waterfalls may no longer power local mills as they did hundreds of years ago but experiencing their amazing sights and sounds can certainly rejuvenate the soul. Come see for yourself — and don't forget your camera. **NEV**

*Helen Powers is a writer who moved to Hamilton nine years ago and is continually finding*

*great things to do and see in the City of Waterfalls. You can find her at [livinginhamilton.wordpress.com](http://livinginhamilton.wordpress.com) or on Twitter @HelenEPowers. Her last article for Niagara Escarpment Views was "Stories From the Kitchen Garden at Dundurn Castle," Spring 2013.*

*Joseph Hollick of Dundas is an award-winning photographer. He has produced four posters of Hamilton's waterfalls and, until 2014 was part of a Hamilton waterfall group that works to document and promote the area's many falls.*

## Plan Your Trip

- The Cascades and Waterfalls of Hamilton website provides links to partner agencies such as Bruce Trail Conservancy and Hamilton Naturalists Club: [www.waterfalls.hamilton.ca](http://www.waterfalls.hamilton.ca)
- Giant's Rib Escarpment Education Network, based in Hamilton, provides public education programs about the Niagara Escarpment World Biosphere Reserve: [www.giantsrib.ca](http://www.giantsrib.ca)
- Tourism Hamilton's Interactive Waterfall Hikes Guides provide maps, photos and terrain elevations: [www.tourismhamilton.com/hamilton-waterfalls](http://www.tourismhamilton.com/hamilton-waterfalls)
- Find dates and locations of illumination events at City of Waterfalls' Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/cityofwaterfalls](http://www.facebook.com/cityofwaterfalls)