

REMEMBERING NIAGARA'S Iron Scow Rescue

▼ The old iron scow, below, has been grounded since 1918 on rocks not far from Horseshoe Falls in Niagara Falls. On the left is the mist rising from the edge of the falls.

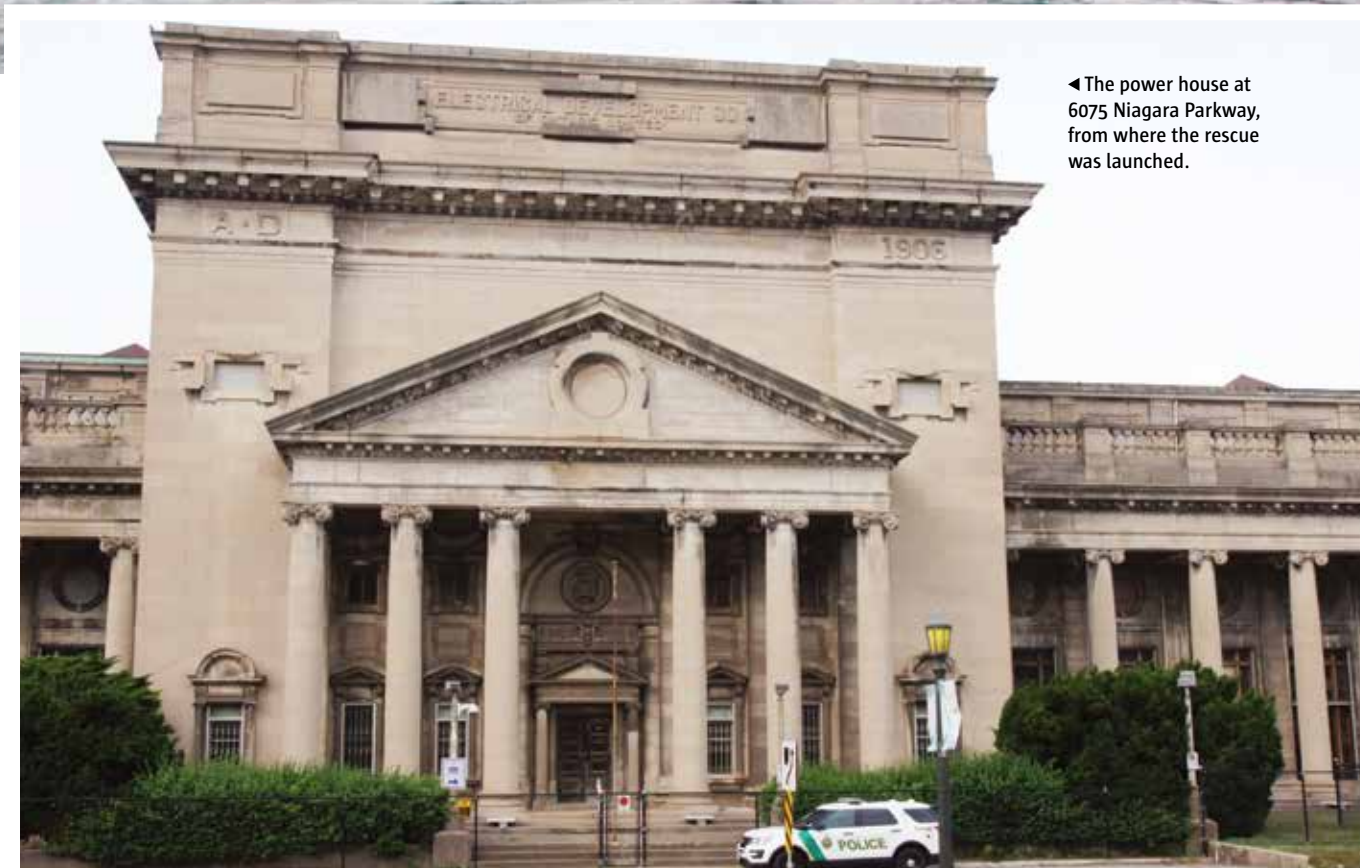
In 1918, two workers became stranded on a barge dangerously close to the edge of Horseshoe Falls. The men had been working upstream on the American side of the Niagara River when the iron scow they were on, broke loose from its tug boat and began drifting toward the falls. The scow and the workers on board became trapped on rocks in the river, only 600 metres from death.



▼ The iron scow remains in shallow rapids of the Niagara River.

HOW TO GET THERE

The iron scow can be seen from the edge of Niagara River at Toronto Power Park, 6075 Niagara Parkway, Niagara Falls. Parking is available across the street from the Park.



◀ The power house at 6075 Niagara Parkway, from where the rescue was launched.



◀ A corner of the power house. In 1918, lines were sent from the roof over to the iron scow, lower right.

It was August 6, 1918 when the accident occurred. Two Americans working on a dredging operation upriver from Horseshoe Falls, were on the dumping scow when it became separated from its towing tug. The men, Gustav F. Lofberg, aged 51, and James H. Harris, aged 53, drifted dangerously toward the falls.

They were able to open the bottom dumping doors of the scow, causing the compartments to flood and slow the scow's drift, until it grounded on rocks in shallow rapids 600 metres from the brink.

There they remained stranded for 19 hours while a rescue was repeatedly attempted.

The U.S. Coast Guard brought a lifeline cannon from New York to the roof of the power house across from the scow's grounding location. The cannon shot a light line out to the two men, who secured it at their end. A heavy rope was then tied to the light line.

A canvas sling suspended from a pulley, known as a breeches buoy, and capable

of carrying a person, was attached to the heavy rope. Rescue personnel began sending the breeches buoy out to the men on the scow. Part way there, the buoy stopped because of a serious tangle in the rescue ropes.

Heroic Rescue

A resident of Niagara Falls, Ontario, William "Red" Hill,



◀ A member of the Niagara Police High Angle Rescue Team is lowered from a Niagara Helicopter near the mist of Horseshoe Falls, demonstrating how stranded people are rescued today.

Sr., volunteered to make the highly dangerous attempt to swing over the Niagara River on the heavy rope, hand over hand, to untangle the lines. Hill was an experienced riverman and a soldier in the Great War who had recently been sent home after being wounded and gassed in battle.

In the night's darkness, with only searchlights for illumination, it took two attempts and the next morning's bright sunrise before Hill was successful in fixing the ropes.

Harris was the first to be rescued by the breeches buoy, and later Lofberg was also safely brought to the roof of the power house. The next day, the two men returned to work. The iron scow could

not safely be moved, so it has remained grounded for more than 100 years. It can still be seen from Toronto Power Park, 6075 Niagara Parkway in Niagara Falls.

Commemoration

Last year marked the 100th anniversary of the rescue and a commemoration ceremony was held at the site at Toronto Power Park. Niagara Parks unveiled new materials that share the history of the event. In addition, the scow was lit up for 16 nights as a reminder of the nighttime rescue effort by search lights.

Janice Thomson, chair of The Niagara Parks Commission, explained in her speech at the ceremony, "While Niagara Parks had previously erected a plaque

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▲ Niagara Parks staff unveiling new interpretive panels among the descendants of Red Hill.

◀ Kip Finn, left, the great grandson of Red Hill, who was crucial in saving the two stranded men, and Dan Hill, Red's grandson. Kip is wearing a T shirt with a photo of Red in uniform with medals, sitting in a vessel that reads, in part: "William Red Hill, master hero of Niagara." Dan holds a document noting a medal for bravery that was given to Red in 1920, but was lost, as well as a replacement medal that was presented in 2018.



on these grounds, signifying the rich history and important rescue efforts, no formal recognition was ever bestowed or afforded to those directly involved in the rescue of Gustav Lofberg and James Harris, the two American workers stranded on the scow. This evening we are pleased to be unveiling a new Niagara Parks plaque which commemorates the 100th anniversary of the grounding of the scow,

but more importantly, commemorates the rescue efforts of everyone involved." Descendants of Red Hill were recognized with a surprise. Kip Finn, a great-grandson, had approached Niagara Parks about presenting a replacement for Red's lost medal for bravery which had been made in 1920 by the Royal Canadian Humane Association. Red's grandson Dan Hill was given the replacement.

In addition, a high angle rescue exercise was conducted to demonstrate how the scow rescue would be performed if it occurred today. The Niagara Parks Police HART, or high angle rescue team, and Niagara Helicopters showed the dramatic retrieval of a man on the ground. A helicopter flew overhead with another man on a cable, who descended to pick up the man on the ground and then fly safely away.

Finally, the iron scow was illuminated by searchlights for 16 nights, to commemorate Red's perilous nighttime efforts lit only by searchlight, when he dangled over the Niagara River, close to the falls, working to untangle two men's only lifeline. **NEV**

Niagara Falls is located on the Niagara Escarpment which is also found in New York State. The falls actually go over the Escarpment.

Eat & Stay Along the Niagara Escarpment



▲ The dining room of Evergreen Lodge looks out over Lake Huron. PHOTO BY MIKE DAVIS.

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