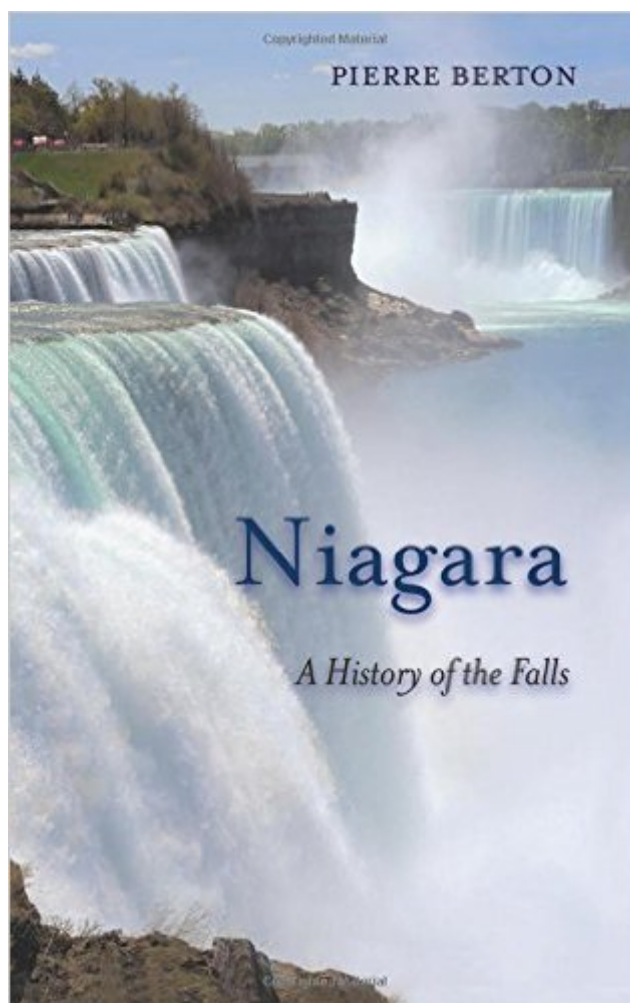


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Niagara: A History Of The Falls (Excelsior Editions)



Synopsis

"The noble cataract reflects the concerns, failings, and fancies of the times. If we gaze deeply into its shimmering image we can perhaps discern our own." - page 22 [Pierre Berton] makes a serious and convincing case for Niagara's pivotal role in North American history. ... His Niagara is a lodestar for North American culture and invention: site of the first railway suspension bridge, inspiration for Nikola Tesla's discovery of the principle of alternating current, and the subject of Frederic Church's most celebrated landscape; a natural wonder that has bewitched generations of scientists, authors, and utopians, and stimulated innovations and social movements still casting long shadows. ... surprising, rich and engrossing. -- Thurston Clarke, New York Times Book Review Canadian historian Berton tells dozens of absorbing tales about the region and those who passed through it ... He tells them all superbly, aided by essential maps and a few reproductions of posters advertising some of the more bizarre stunts. -- Publishers Weekly Entertaining. . . . Berton brings to life the adventurers and dreamers, visionaries and industrialists, who over centuries have been drawn to the Falls. -- Maclean's "Berton at his storytelling best; there is something here for everyone. ... a vintage, full-bodied read." -- The London Free Press "A book worth diving into." -- Calgary Herald "By turns ironic, amused, shocked, horrified and awestruck, Berton traces Niagara's history through the deeds of those who came in contact with it ... all the while walking the fine line between detachment and emotion with agility and grace." -- The Whig-Standard (Kingston) Pierre Berton was one of Canada's most popular and prolific authors, and is widely credited with popularizing Canadian history. His previous books include The Wild Frontier, Prisoners of the North, Klondike, The Invasion of Canada, and The Great Depression. "

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Niagara" is a nice little book, stringing together a series of anecdotes about Niagara Falls and its immediate region, especially from the mid 19th century to the mid 20th century. As histories go, it is fairly light (the author does not cite his facts, although he does include an extensive bibliography), but Pierre Berton is adept at telling stories, especially human stories. The stories mostly develop along one of two themes - daredevil encounters with the Falls, and human manipulation, either for the purpose of exploitation or protection of the Falls. Berton is best with the small stories of explorers, tightrope walkers, barrel riders, a family of "rivermen" (the Hills), and their ilk. The small becomes large with what is perhaps the best-crafted story, that of Lois Gibbs and the toxic tragedy of Love Canal, with which Berton ends the book. Although the story of the Falls did not end in 1980, Love Canal is a fitting final story. Despite the occasional preservationist triumphs, the story of the Falls really culminates in Love Canal. The natural wonder of the Falls became framed by hucksters, factories, power stations, tacky museums, homes, roads, manicured parks and everything else unnatural. Engineers even managed to stop the falls in an attempt to clear out fallen rocks (they wisely chose not to once they realized that the rocks propped up the rock face behind the falls). A visit to the Falls today is a jarring reminder of what a mess we humans have made of the natural world. It is an obscene juxtaposition of nature's best and humanity's chintziest. Berton is less skilled at relaying scientific stories about the formation of the falls, and the energy and chemical industries.

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