

## BIDDLE STAIRCASE (STAIRS)

Next to Terrapin Tower, the Biddle Staircase was the most notable structure erected on Goat Island. It was financed by Nicholas Biddle, a famous Philadelphia banker and friend of Peter Porter, one of the Porter Brothers who owned the land by the Falls on the American side, and who later built Terrapin Tower. On a visit to Niagara Falls, Biddle noticed that there was no safe way to descend from the west side of Goat Island into the gorge. He convinced Peter (who owned Goat Island along with his brother, Augustus) of the need for a staircase and offered to pay for it. The Biddle Stairs were built in September and October of 1829 and were located near the sight of the Cave of the Winds elevator. The staircase cost \$290, of which Biddle paid \$200 and Peter Porter the remaining \$90. The Biddle Staircase consisted of a flight of stairs which led forty feet down to a hexagonal wooden building which was secured by large iron bolts to the rock debris (talus) at the base of the cliff. This building enclosed a 90-step spiral staircase which descended eighty feet to the bottom of the gorge.

There were three paths at the bottom of the Biddle Staircase. One went a further eighty feet down to an area of the riverbank which was once one of the finest fishing areas in the world. The second path veered to the right, went directly to the Cave of the Winds, and allowed visitors to walk in front of the Bridal Veil Falls. This path is carefully maintained and is still in use today. The third path at the base of the Biddle Stairs veered to the left and went right up to the Horseshoe Falls. As a result of frequent rockfalls, this path was deemed unsafe and had to be closed. The Biddle Staircase remained in use from 1829 to 1927, when it was demolished.



*Left: the flight of stairs at the top of the staircase; Right: the hexagonal tower enclosing the spiral staircase*

