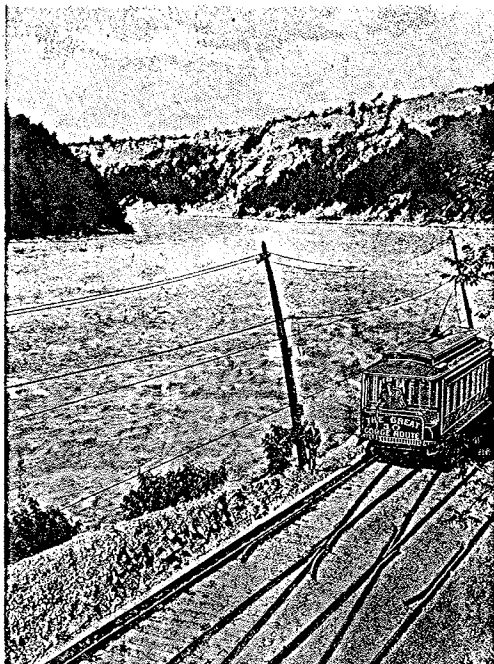


## GREAT GORGE ROUTE

The early 1890's saw the development of the electric railway on both sides of the Niagara border. In 1891, the Queen Victoria Parks Commissioners granted the Niagara Falls Park and River Railway a charter to operate an electric railway through Queen Victoria Park and Parks Commission land from Chippawa to Queenston. This single track railway was intended both to generate much-needed income for the Parks Commission and to offer tourists a better mode of transportation to the Queen Victoria Parks. The railway opened on May 24, 1893, and proved to be very popular due to its low fares and picturesque route, and as a result, the track was doubled in 1894. A similar double track railway line was constructed by the Niagara Falls and Lewiston Electric Railway on the American side of the River in the early 1890's. This line started at Niagara Falls, New York, gradually descended to the water's edge, proceeded along past the Whirlpool and Devil's Hole to Lewiston, where it again returned to the top of the gorge.

Both of these lines continued to be popular attractions until 1902, when the two trolley lines were purchased by the International Railway Company and combined into the "Great Gorge Route." The Route began at the Gorge Terminal on Falls Avenue in Niagara Falls, NY, where passengers paid a fee of \$1.00 and boarded the electric trolleys. The trolleys left the station, crossed the Falls View Bridge into Canada, and proceeded along the top of the Gorge to Queenston, where they met incoming steamships from Toronto. Next the trolley cars crossed the Queenston-Lewiston Suspension Bridge into the United States, descended into the Gorge and followed the route of the original American railway. The Great Gorge Route had 38 trolley cars, most of which were open, and which ran from May to September. Power for the attraction was provided by a small generating station at Table Rock. Beginning in 1901, the International Railway Company began offering nightly trips with several powerful spotlights illuminating the Gorge. The Great Gorge Route remained a very popular tourist attraction for nearly 40 years.

During this time, the Route proved to be quite dangerous; rock falls, derailment, and washouts of the tracks happened often on the American side of the Route, and were not without casualties. On July 15, 1915, a trolley left the rails, killing 13 tourists. In 1917, a trolley toppled into the Whirlpool and twelve more passengers were drowned. A conductor was killed by falling



rocks, and on another occasion, refuse was accidentally dumped from a garbage chute onto an open trolley car. In spite of these incidents, however, the attraction remained open.

With the arrival of the Great Depression, however, the Great Gorge Route faced a declining number of passengers. Poor business, coupled with high maintenance costs and increasingly hazardous rock falls made the Route too costly and dangerous to continue. Trips along the Great Gorge Route ceased in 1932, and the area on the Canadian side was sold to the Niagara Parks Commission who dismantled the Route. Trolleys continued to operate in the United States, until a rock fall in 1935 buried the tracks under 5000 tons of rock. At the time of its closure, over 13,000,000 passengers had ridden on the Great Gorge Route and had experienced the magnificent view of the Whirlpool and rapids which it provided.