

## SAMUEL ZIMMERMAN (1815-1857)



*Toronto Metropolitan Library Board*

Samuel Zimmerman, the man considered to be the "founder" of the City of Niagara Falls, was born on March 17, 1815 in Huntington County, Pennsylvania. Very little is known of his life before he immigrated to Canada in 1842, where he soon became a very prominent citizen. He was a shrewd businessman who quickly made a fortune in construction work. His first undertaking was the construction of four locks and an aqueduct on the Welland Canal. After that, he received a contract to build 129 miles of railway track for the Great Western Railway, thereby extending its lines to the Niagara River. Zimmerman was also instrumental in the construction of the second Suspension Bridge over the Whirlpool Rapids, in 1854-1855.

Zimmerman owned a fair amount of property in Clifton. In 1848, he had purchased the Clifton Hotel, and renovated and enlarged it. He had also bought out and demolished unsightly buildings in the surrounding area. Around 1850, he purchased 52 acres of property in Clifton, from the widow of Captain Ogden Creighton, the man who had established the village of Clifton. This land, which overlooked the American Falls, was the site on which Zimmerman later chose to build his estate. In addition to his Clifton holdings, Zimmerman owned most of the land in Elgin, the village which developed around the bridgehead on the Canadian side of the Suspension Bridge. As a result, Samuel Zimmerman increased his fortune substantially through his real estate ventures.

In the 1850's, nearly everything in the towns of Clifton and Elgin revolved around Samuel Zimmerman. He established a Post Office in Clifton in 1854. He incorporated the Zimmerman Bank on May 19, 1855, and opened his own bank at the corner of Bridge St. and Clifton Ave. (now Zimmerman Ave.). In 1856, he helped to amalgamate the Villages of Elgin and Clifton into the Town of Clifton, and founded St. Andrews Presbyterian Church in the same year. In addition to his extensive property near the Falls, Zimmerman also owned large amounts of land in Toronto and Hamilton, and two steamships, the "Zimmerman" and the "Peerless," which sailed from Toronto to Niagara.

Samuel Zimmerman decided to build an estate on the 52 acres of land which overlooked the American Falls in Clifton. He had landscaped the grounds and built stables and gatehouses, and was in the process of building his home, when he was killed in a rail accident at the Des Jardins Canal, on March 12, 1857. Ironically, Zimmerman had been repeatedly warned about the unsafe condition of his rail lines, but had done nothing to address those concerns. Thus, the man who had been instrumental in bringing the railway to Niagara himself died in a rail accident.

The day of Samuel Zimmerman's funeral was declared a public holiday. He was temporarily buried in a private vault on his estate, and was re-interred in the present day United Church Cemetery in St. David's beside his first wife, when the Queen Victoria Parks Commission acquired his lands in 1888. Zimmerman's death paralyzed the many projects which he had begun in Niagara Falls, and it was many years before the city recovered completely from his loss. Zimmerman lay in an unmarked grave in St. David's until 1940, when the Lundy's Lane Historical Society had a metal inscription placed on the monument which Zimmerman had erected for his wife.