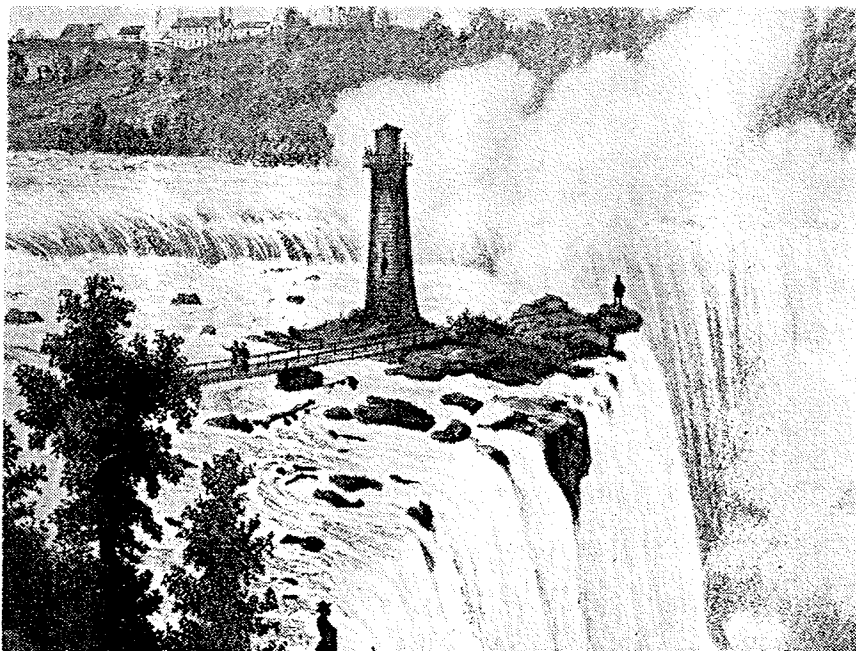


TERRAPIN BRIDGE AND TOWER

The Terrapin Bridge was a wooden boardwalk built on a shallow part of the Niagara river near the Horseshoe Falls, by Peter and Augustus Porter, the famous Porter brothers who owned the land on the American side of the Falls. Constructed in 1827, the bridge was 300 feet in length and extended from Goat Island to 10 feet beyond the brink of the falls, offering tourists a spectacular and awe-inspiring view which was meant to compete with the view available from Table Rock on the Canadian side. The Bridge was built in the midst of the rapids on top of the Terrapin Rocks, a scattered group of large boulders, so named because they rose above the water like the backs of giant turtles (a terrapin is a small turtle-like reptile found in North America that lives in fresh water and on land).

To complement the view of the Falls from the Bridge, the Porter Brothers built Terrapin Tower, also known as Horseshoe Tower and Prospect Tower, in 1833. It was a circular tower situated at the brink of the Horseshoe Falls which was accessible by the Terrapin Bridge. It is estimated to have been between thirty and forty-five feet high with a twelve foot diameter. It contained a winding staircase which led to an open portico with an iron railing from which an incredible view of the Falls could be obtained. Although the tower was an instant hit, there were many people who argued that its presence detracted from the natural beauty of the Falls. Terrapin Tower was blown up in 1873 by the Porter brothers, not because of such opposition, or because it was unsafe, but simply because they no longer wanted it. The boardwalk remained for many decades after the removal of the tower, but exactly when it ceased to exist, and whether it was dismantled or simply washed away, is unknown. The boardwalk can be seen in pictures as late as 1934, and was gone by the time renovations were done to the area in 1954.

In 1954, the Terrapin Rocks were permanently drained to create an artificial viewing area called Terrapin Point. Some of the "turtles" are still visible on the parts of the river bed which were uncovered. In 1969 and 1970, geological testing revealed that some of the bedrock below Terrapin Point was unstable. As such, it was closed to the public and closely monitored for possible rockfalls. An unstable overhang was dynamited in July of 1983, and the point was reopened later that year.



Public Archives of Canada