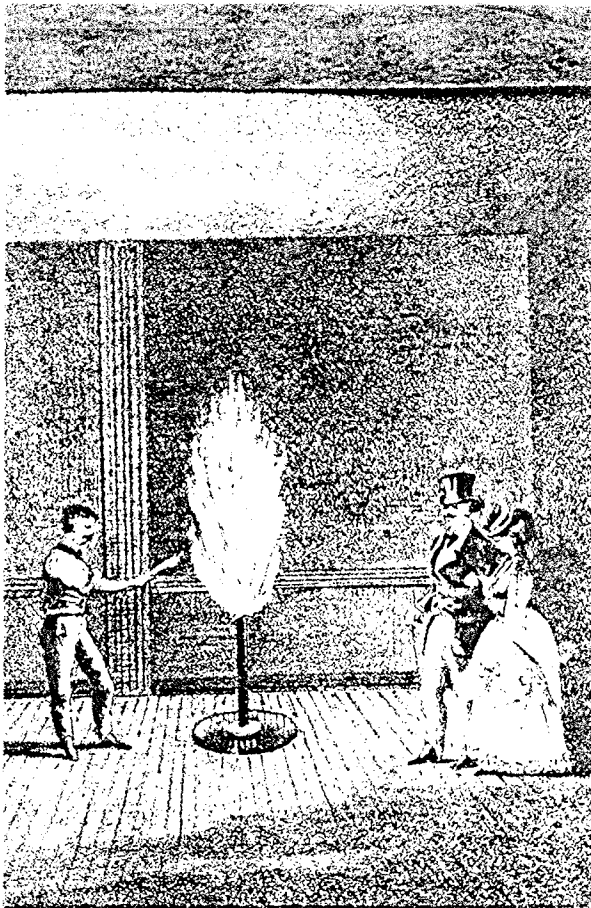


## THE BURNING SPRINGS

Natural gas had been observed in the area since the early 1700s. It bubbled up through the water along the shore from the Chippawa River to nearly the crest of the Falls, and came from a layer of Queenston shale which was over 600 feet below the surface. In 1794, during excavations for the foundations of the Bridgewater Mills, a "spring" of natural gas was discovered which could be harnessed and ignited. The spring attracted many tourists, and was soon turned into Niagara Falls' first tourist attraction, "The Burning Spring," by Thomas Clark and Samuel Street. They built a wooden enclosure on the site and covered the actual spring with a barrel which was attached to a pipe. The pipe was corked and the gas was allowed to collect in the barrel. When an audience had gathered, the pipe was uncorked and the gas was ignited. The spring was listed as a "must see" attraction in early guide books, and tourists were charged a nominal fee of 12 1/2 cents, by its keeper, M. J. Conklin. Located near the Dufferin Islands, "The Burning Spring" was situated on land which was deeded to the Queen Victoria Parks Commission in 1887. When the Commission assumed control of the land, they did not choose to continue the attraction, and so the operators of the Burning Spring were forced to move it to the junction of Portage Road and Burning Spring Road, overlooking Dufferin Islands.

Sometime before 1920, the Burning Spring attraction was again moved, this time to property between Stanley Street and Portage Road. In 1924, a building housing a



restaurant and souvenir shop and which featured the Burning Springs was built by Bryant Langmuir and William Laughlin. Called the Falls View Observation Tower and Old Burning Springs, it was operated as such until 1962, when it was sold to Malcolm Howe and Arthur White. Howe and White completely renovated this building and added a wax museum, which was promoted as the main attraction. On June 6, 1967, The Burning Springs Wax Museum was destroyed by a fire and rebuilt. The Burning Springs Wax Museum closed permanently sometime during the 1980's, and Niagara Falls' earliest tourist attraction ceased to exist.

*Left: The Burning Spring, from a stereograph by George Barker, circa 1860*