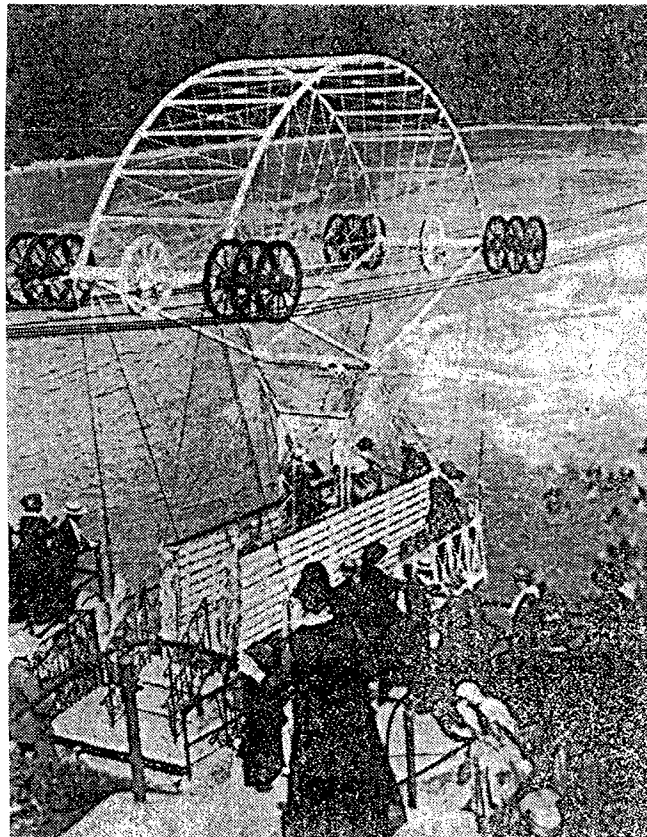


THE NIAGARA SPANISH AERO CAR

In 1913, the Niagara Parks Commission granted a fifty year franchise to a Spanish Company, Estudios y Obras de Ingenieria, to build and operate a cable car ride over the Whirlpool, from Colt's Point to Thompson's point. The cable car was designed and built by Spanish engineer Leonardo Torres-Quevado. It was similar in structure to a smaller cable car at Mount Ulia San Sebastian in Spain, but could accommodate forty people. The system operated "to and fro" on six 1" cables. Each cable was anchored at the terminals, and its tension was maintained by a 9 tonne counterweight. At their terminal points, the cables measured 1770 feet long and were 250 feet above the water level of the Whirlpool. The car was hauled by a continuous steel-wire rope 7/8ths of an inch thick which was powered by a 75 hp motor. Although the construction of the cable car was plagued by difficulties, it was finally completed at a cost of \$120,000 and opened to the public on August 8, 1916.

The Aero Car was operated for its Spanish owners by the Brooker family until 1961, when it was purchased by A. Blake Robertson. In its 45 years of operation, the cables had required replacement only once, and no other additions or improvements to the original system had been necessary, a testament to its excellent design. On acquiring the car, Robertson undertook a number of renovations to the structure. He replaced the primitive braking device of the original car with electromagnetic and hand operated brakes. In place of the ancient Buick engine which had provided the auxiliary power to the original system, Robertson added a 60 hp engine which allowed the operator of the car to switch to auxiliary power in minutes. Automatic switches were installed which cut power and applied the brakes as the car approached the stations on either side of the glen. The landing platforms were redesigned to make them safer, and aluminum wheels were used to lighten the weight of the car, increasing its passenger capacity.

The Niagara Spanish Aero Car was sold to the Niagara Parks Commission in 1968. At the end of the summer season in 1984, the Aero Car was completely renovated and upgraded to meet more rigorous standards. Although the carriage was not changed, the wheels, electric circuits, track cables and suspension system all were. In 1991, the Spanish Aero Car both celebrated its 75th anniversary, and was awarded the Leonardo Torres-Quevado award in Molledo, Spain. It was awarded for the preservation and management of the cable car, and was the first time that the award had been bestowed on a company outside of Spain.



(F. H. Leslie photo)