

THE SCOW

On August 6, 1918, a dumping scow broke loose of its towing tug, the Hassayampa, when it ran aground in the American Channel less than a mile above the Falls. As the scow began to drift downriver, the two men aboard, Gustav F. Lofberg and James H. Harris, began to make preparations for the possibility that they would plunge over the Falls. Lofberg tied himself to the scow to go over the Falls along with it, while Harris tied himself securely to a barrel, hoping to be carried free of the scow so that he could grasp a rock. Luckily the men had also had the presence of mind to open the bottom dumping doors and drop anchor; the anchor slowed the drift of the scow and the water rushing in through the doors weighted it down, with the result that it became grounded on a ledge opposite the Toronto Powerhouse, 2500 feet from the brink of the Falls.

A crowd of employees from the Powerhouse gathered near the shore, along with police and fire fighters from both sides of the border. With the help of equipment from the Life Saving Station at Youngstown, NY, a line was shot out from the roof of the Powerhouse. One end was fastened to the scow and the other end pulled taut and securely tied to the Powerhouse roof. A breeches buoy was sent out on the line but was unable to make it to the scow as a result of tangled lines. William "Red" Hill of Niagara Falls, volunteered for the dangerous task of untangling the lines. He made his first trip at 3:00 a.m., untangled the lines and removed the obstruction. However, some rope from the scow was still tangled on the line and so, Hill made a second trip out at 8:30 a.m. On this trip, he came within 130 feet of the scow, close enough to be able to speak to Lofberg and Harris and shout out instructions to them. They were very weak and had much difficulty untangling the rope on the scow, but they finally managed to clear the lines, allowing the breeches buoy to pass. Harris, weak from fatigue and exposure, was the first one off of the scow. Lofberg landed on the roof of the Powerhouse at 10 a.m., nearly nineteen hours after the scow had first broken loose. For his role in the rescue, Hill was awarded the Carnegie Life Saving Medal.

The scow has remained grounded in the Upper Niagara River and is still visible today. Although it remained in good condition for many years, the rusty scow now shows signs of severe deterioration. There is a huge gouge on the left side of the scow facing the riverbed, and pieces of the decrepit scow continue to break off. Eventually, the scow, itself, will fall to pieces and be swept over the Falls.

