



Massive Ice Jams Scar Lewiston Waterfront Throughout the Years

Over the years, Lewiston has had its share of “natural disasters” – namely, massive ice jams that have clogged the Lower Niagara River, wiping out homes and buildings. Ice jams have been recorded since 1844. Margaret Robson, in her 1958 *Under the Mountain* book, said, “The (ice jam) in 1844 was extremely disastrous, crushing and sweeping away nearly all the wharves and docking facilities.” There have been several destructive jams since, most notably in 1909, 1936, 1938 and 1955.



1909 Ice Jam Causes Major Damage to Homes and Businesses in Lewiston

In the famous 1909 ice jam, all boat houses between Queenston and Niagara-on-the-Lake were destroyed. The Lewiston-Queenston suspension bridge which was normally 60 feet above water level was only 25 feet above water level. The Great Gorge Railway tracks were buried in ice and all the poles and wires were torn down. Above you can see a picture of ice that climbed all the way up the embankment to the Cornell House hotel, which is located where the Freedom Crossing Monument is now on Water Street.

Lake Erie is shallow, so over the course of the winter months, hundreds of square miles of ice build up. Ice then makes its way north on the Upper Niagara River (starting at the Peace Bridge in Buffalo) and eventually goes over Niagara Falls, filling the Lower River with mammoth blocks of ice. The ice “jams” and starts piling up, creating “ice bridges” that can rise over 100 feet high.



Silo and Steamship Dock Threatened in 1936

You can see the ice build up at the Lewiston dock in the mid-30s. The Silo is located on the left side of the large building which no longer is standing.

Two years after this photo was taken, the 1938 ice jam completely destroyed the steamship docking facilities and they were never rebuilt. The coal bin (the Silo) was the only portion of the dock that was left intact. There was another ice jam in 1955. Miraculously, the Stella Niagara Chapel on the river bank was not damaged.



Row of Lewiston Homes Gets Wiped Out in '38 Ice Jam

Local teenagers were having a good, and unusual time, as they hopped across the roof tops of several destroyed homes in this picture taken in Lewiston on January 28, 1938 -- a day after ice caused the Honeymoon Bridge (right) to collapse in Niagara Falls. If you look closely, you can see the Hamilton Mansion in the upper left corner, a landmark on the Canadian side of the river.

The Honeymoon Bridge stood on abutments built close to river level, and the ice pressed against them, damaging them until they failed in a grand collapse of the structure on January 27, 1938. The thickness of this ice supported the weight of the wreckage until the final three pieces sank in April 1938.



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Historic Lewiston placemats written and designed by volunteer, Lee Simonson



Tuscarora Heroes

The amazing and true story of how the Tuscaroras saved Lewiston citizens from the brutal British attack during the War of 1812.

This story was almost lost to history, and stands today as a unique example of Native Americans rescuing white settlers from a foreign attack. The book is now available at DiCamillo Bakery and the Lewiston Museum. Price: \$10.

Get your copy and find out why Lewiston citizens will be forever grateful to the Tuscarora Nation.

Will Lewiston See Another Ice Jam in the Future?

No one can predict the future, but probably not. Thanks to the Power Authority's “Ice Boom” it looks like Lewiston is safe for the time being. The 1.7 mile long artificial barrier is placed in Lake Erie, near the Peace Bridge, from December 1 to April 1 each year, helping to regulate the ice flow. The boom releases ice gradually down the Niagara River so it doesn't all jam up at once. The boom was installed in the early 1960s to prevent the Power Authority water intakes from clogging, and Lewiston has not had a damaging ice jam since.

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