

**Lewiston
History
Mysteries**

First Railway in America Built in Lewiston

British constructed pulley system known as “The Cradles” to transport goods up the Escarpment in 1764

America’s first railway was built in Lewiston and was completed in 1764. It became part of the famous “portage” that was used to transport goods and supplies around Niagara Falls.

When supply ships came to Lewiston in the early 1700s, they would drop their cargo off near the gully at present day Artpark (the gully is behind the Artpark gift shop.) Then, porters from the local Seneca tribe would manually carry the goods up the Escarpment and to the Upper Niagara River above the falls. About 200 Senecas were employed and because of the way they had to carry the backpacks, they called the Escarpment "Crawl on All Fours."

However, once the British took control of the area from the French in July 1759, many of the Senecas found themselves out of work. The British not only began the construction of the railway, but brought more horses and wagons to Lewiston to replace manual labor. In September 1763, the Senecas revolted and killed many British soldiers and workers in what is called the Devil's Hole Massacre. Despite the setback, the British continued with their work to improve the portage and the railway was still in operation in the early 1800s.

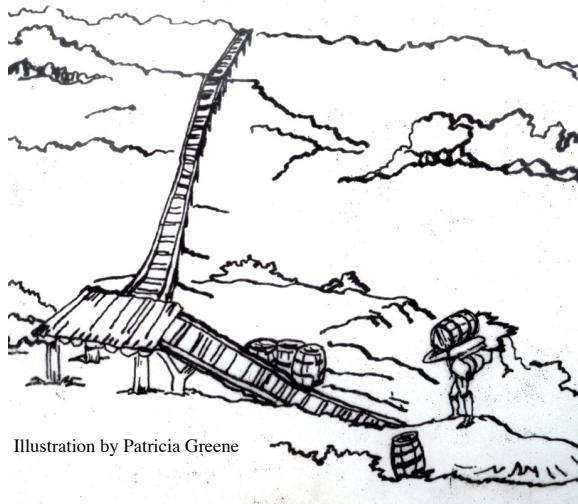


Illustration by Patricia Greene

The first railway in America was located where Artpark is today. It was made of wood and was used to haul goods up and down the steep Escarpment.

The Cradles Used Counterweights

Exact details aren’t known, but there’s a good chance there were two sets of wooden tracks, not one. The cradles, or carts, which carried the goods were actually sleds that handled 12-14 barrels of supplies at a time.

Two cradles were linked by rope over a pulley at the top so that when one cradle moved down one railway, the other cradle moved upward, creating a counterweight and making it much easier to transport the goods up and down the hill.

To manage the slope, the rails were built in sections. The first section raised the carts from the river to where the parking lot directly east of the main Artpark theatre is today. Then, the second section, seen here in this illustration, turned 90 degrees and began the ascent up the Escarpment. The third and last stage began half way up the Escarpment and ended at the top.

Montresor Credited with Design and Construction

British Captain John Montresor was a military engineer and mapmaker who is credited with the design and construction of the “gravity railroad” built in Lewiston. It is sometimes referred to as “Montresor’s Tramway.”



John Montresor

In 1754, he accompanied his father to America when he was 18 and eventually became a British officer, commissioned in the Corps of Engineers. When he was stationed here, he designed and built fortifications at Fort Niagara and Fort Erie, as well as series of blockhouses.

Montresor participated in the American Revolution and was present at the execution of the American hero, Nathan Hale, who said, “I only regret that I have but one life to give for my country.” It is said that he kindly sheltered Hale in his office, giving him pen and paper to write final letters to his family, and that the execution moved him deeply. Later, he was sent to the American line, under a flag of truce, to report Hale's last words.

In his later years, his expense accounts came under scrutiny, and he was suspected of stealing government property. England seized his assets and threw him in debtor’s prison where he died on June 26, 1799.

Sail the Black Pearl

Lewiston’s Newest Weekend Attraction

If you’ve never experienced the thrill of sailing on a tall ship, then this is what you’ve been waiting for. It’s the Historical Association’s new fundraiser -- a spectacular ride on the Black Pearl.

No, not the one commanded by Capt. Jack Sparrow in the Pirates of the Caribbean movies, but the real brigantine Black Pearl, built in 1938 and the former flag ship of the American Sail Training Association. It’s 70 feet long, and 63 feet high.



The Historical Association will be offering cruises on the Lower Niagara River this summer aboard the Black Pearl.

Schedules are “still a work in progress” but organizers are aiming for several one-hour sails every Saturday starting in May 2010. The Black Pearl can take 20 passengers at a time and those aboard will be treated to fascinating historical tidbits about the boat and the Niagara River.

The Black Pearl has been in a number of Tall Ship celebrations up and down the East Coast and has even traveled to Europe. But now, she is under local ownership and will be a part Lewiston’s weekends. For more information you can call 716-754-4214 or go online at HistoricLewiston.org

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HistoricLewiston.org
716-754-4214

The Historical Association of Lewiston hopes you enjoy your visit to our historic and quaint village. Mark your calendar for our next spectacular

Lewiston Tour of Homes on Dec. 4 & 5, 2010.

To get the latest news and monthly program notes, join our free email list by sending an email to: join@HistoricLewiston.org You can also see and download our past placemats at our website: HistoricLewiston.org

Historic Lewiston placemats written and designed by volunteer, Lee Simonson



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