

*Lewiston
History
Mysteries*

Stella Niagara Preserve Rich in Nature, Art & History

Landmarks and miracles at site highlight importance of the “Meadows”

The Stella Preserve is located at 4420 Lower River Road in Lewiston, directly across the street from Stella Niagara Education Park. In 2015, the WNY Land Conservancy purchased the 29-acre site from the Sisters of St. Francis after an extensive fund raising campaign. It is the largest privately owned undeveloped tract of land along the entire 36-mile Niagara River. It is also one of the most historical sites in Western New York. Native Americans used the location for transportation, trade and fishing. It is also where the British invaded the United States during the War of 1812. There are “witness trees” on the property that are old enough to have seen the British come ashore. It also is the home to the Peace Memorial, the famous Little Chapel, and the Grotto of Bernadette of Lourdes. The Peace Memorial and Chapel host murals by Josphe Slawinski who used a technique called “sgraffito.” He applied layers of different colored concrete and then scraped the layers from the still wet concrete to reveal the colors he desired.

The Little Known, and True Story, of the “Miracle Logs”

At the end of October 1917, the sisters at Stella Niagara had run out of coal to heat their building. World War I had caused rationing and railroads were busy carrying ammunition and soldiers. The weather was turning cold and they wondered how they would survive. They prayed for an answer and got one. They soon discovered that big wooden logs began settling in the river eddy near the Little Chapel. Here’s what happened: A load of wood from a paper mill in North Tonawanda had fallen into the river, floated downstream, went over Niagara Falls and ended up at the Stella property. Being too expensive to retrieve the wood, the mill owner was happy to let the sisters keep the wood at no expense. It took workers at Stella a week to haul the wood with a team of horses to the motherhouse. The nuns were kept warm until their coal was finally delivered.



Rare Look Inside The Little Chapel

Most locals are familiar with the chapel that sits on the bank of the Niagara River. You can see it from River Road. But few people have actually seen the inside which is replete with amazing artwork by Joseph Slawinski (1905-1983), a renowned Polish artist. On the ceiling (upper left) you



can see the image of St. Mary protecting the chapel during the ice jam of 1955. While properties were wiped out along the river with huge blocks of ice, the chapel remained untouched. The “miracle” made national news. The chapel is thought to be the tiniest religious structure in Western New York.

The doors to the chapel are locked but special tours can be arranged by contacting the WNY Land Conservancy at 716-687-1225. Their office is located in East Aurora.

Western New York Land Conservancy Will Protect Property for Generations

The Land Conservancy has opened the preserve to the public with walking trails and kayak access. It plans to restore and enhance wildlife habitat, protect the property's historic structures and art, and steward the property into the future.

You can see the Conservancy plans, along with special activities and programming, online at wnylc.org. The Conservancy always welcomes donations and volunteers to help maintain the property.



The “Peace Memorial” at the site was dedicated to President Kennedy. You can see his image at the side of the monument which has several Slawinski sgraffito artworks. Quotations from Kennedy and Pope John XXIII are also engraved in the monument.



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