SPECIAL REPORT
OF
NEW YORK STATE SURVEY
ON THE
PRESERVATION OF THE SCENERY
OF
NIAGARA FALLS,
AND
FOURTH ANNUAL REPORT ON
THE TRIANGULATION OF THE STATE.
FOR THE YEAR 1879.

JAMES T. GARDNER, DIRECTOR.

ALBANY:
CHARLES VAN BENTHUYSEN & SONS.
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PART I.
SPECIAL REPORT
ON THE
PRESERVATION OF NIAGARA FALLS.
STATE OF NEW YORK.

No. 37.

IN SENATE,

MARCH 22, 1880.

FOURTH REPORT

OF THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS OF THE STATE
SURVEY, AND REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR, FOR THE
YEAR 1879.

OFFICE OF THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS OF THE

To the honorable
the Legislature
of the State of New York:

I have the honor to transmit a Special Report of the Commissioners of the State Survey, on the Preservation of the Scenery around Niagara Falls, in accordance with a concurrent resolution of the Legislature of May 19, 1879, and the Fourth Report of the Board, containing their proceedings during the year 1879, as required by the statutes organizing the said Board.

I remain, very respectfully,
Your obedient servant,

HORATIO SEYMOUR,
President of the Board.

CONTENTS.

PART I.

Letter of transmission to the Legislature.......................... 3
Special report of the Commissioners on the Preservation of the Scenery around Niagara Falls........................................ 7
Report of the Director on the Plan for a proposed State Reservation at Niagara...................................................... 19
Notes by Frederick Law Olmsted........................................... 27
Father Hennepin's description of Niagara; facsimile of the first London edition.........................................................
Memorial to the Governor of the State.................................. 31
Extract from the Message of Gov. Robinson, 1879.................. 41

PART II.

Annual Report of the Commissioners on the Triangulation of the State............. 45
Detailed statement of expenditures for the year 1879........................ 46
Report of the Director on the progress of the triangulation............... 49
Explanation of tables.......................................................... 55
Table of preliminary geographical positions of State Survey monuments and prominent landmarks........................................ 58
Table of geographical positions of county-line stations and monuments........ 51
Special table of geographical positions of State Survey stations and monuments, along the Hudson river, from Albany to New Baltimore......... 83
Table of geographical positions of lot corners of the old rectangular surveys 92
Table of elevations of prominent points.................................. 94
Table of declination of magnetic needle at various points.................. 96
SPECIAL REPORT OF THE COMMISSIONERS.

To the Legislature:

The Commissioners of the State Survey were instructed by a joint resolution of the Legislature of 1879, as follows:

"Resolved, That the Commissioners of the State Survey are hereby directed to inquire, consider and report what, if any, measures it may be expedient for the State to adopt for carrying out the suggestions contained in the annual message of the Governor, with respect to Niagara Falls. That said commissioners are hereby authorized, in behalf of the State, to confer with any commission or other authorized body, person or persons representing the Dominion of Canada or the Province of Ontario, making a similar inquiry or contemplating measures for a similar purpose."

I.

Under this resolution it became the duty of the Commissioners to ascertain how far the private holding of land about Niagara Falls has worked to public disadvantage through defacements of the scenery; to determine the character of such defacements; to estimate the tendency to greater injury; and lastly, to consider whether the proposed action by the State is necessary to arrest the process of destruction and restore to the scenery its original character.

In pursuance of these objects, the Commissioners instructed Mr. James T. Gardner, Director of the State Survey, to make an examination of the premises and prepare for their consideration such a project as was had in view in the resolution of the Legislature, and they associated with him Mr. Frederick Law Olmsted.

II.

Before stating the conclusions reached on the topics of inquiry above recited, a brief consideration seems desirable of a matter not directly comprehended in the instructions of the Commissioners, but
so related to those to be reported upon and of such public concern, that reference to it cannot properly be omitted.

Apart from the profound interest which belongs to the great falls, the river scenery of Niagara has many charms peculiar to itself. As with charms of scenery elsewhere, these are hardly to be known at first sight and are the more enjoyed the more they are courted. The summer climate of the region is most agreeable and those coming to it from the seaboard experience a decided tonic effect, as of mountain air. It is accessible by several favorite routes of travel, its inns are of good repute, their sanitary conditions uncommonly satisfactory, and their charges not higher than rule elsewhere.

Under these circumstances it might reasonably have been expected that Niagara would be the temporary residence of great numbers of those who every summer migrate from town to country, and one of the most popular places of vacation sojourn in all the world.

It has, however, no summer population of the class referred to, and though it receives a great number of transient visitors, it is believed that at no other notable pleasure resort of Europe or America is the stay of travelers so short. It may be added that, if the public press for years past is to be credited, from none do so many visitors depart in ill-humor. The explanation is generally assumed to be that they are driven away by the pestering demands and solicitations, the petty exactions and impositions to which, whenever a stranger goes out of doors, he is at every turn subjected. This nuisance is spoken of as if it were in a great degree peculiar to Niagara; the local authorities are considered responsible for it and are urged to bring it to an end by better and more resolutely enforced police regulations.

Both the explanation and the remedy thus proposed appear to the Commissioners inadequate. Wherever scenery of great general celebrity attracts strangers in large numbers, a similar inconvenience is felt to a greater or less extent, and at many places the population which, under various pretences, seeks to obtain a livelihood through the offer of various small services to visitors, and when this fails by more direct forms of begging and depredation, is much larger than at Niagara. It is indeed incredible that the people of these rich corners of the prosperous State of New York and the thrifty Province of Ontario should either be moved in extraordinary numbers to adopt such courses of life, or to exhibit in them a degree of rapacity elsewhere unknown.

Why, then, the evil should apparently be more felt by the public, and have such an unusual result as is attributed to it at Niagara, demands inquiry.

The question has too many minor branches to be thoroughly pursued in this report, but the following considerations appear to have more importance than has generally been recognized.

Within certain limits at Niagara there are probably a larger number of distinct and rare qualities of beauty in combinations of rock, foliage, mist, sky and water, than in any other equal space of the earth's surface, and although the gorge of the river for miles below is very interesting, and the broad, smooth water about the Rapids, with its low shores, is an important feature of a marvelous landscape effect, the grounds of attraction in these more distant parts being more nearly paralleled elsewhere, the distinctive interest of Niagara, as compared with that of other attractive scenery, is remarkably circumscribed and concentrated.

The difference in the demand upon the attention of such a passage of scenery and that required by scenery of mountain grandeur, is plain. In the latter the elements of beauty are much diffused, are to be enjoyed on all sides and in great distances, and because of this pervading quality of its beauty, such scenery is not as much to be put out of countenance by the intrusion on the attention of incongruous objects or of impertinent palaver. Much pleasure may be taken in it while the observer is in rapid motion and even incidentally to other occupations; and a like comparison will hold as to the enjoyment of regions simply picturesque or those of more tranquil beauty.

The courses into which visitors are now generally drawn at Niagara, the facilities of conveyance offered them, and all the arrangements ostensibly designed for their aid, and for which they are constantly called upon to pay, are sufficiently well adapted to the bare satisfaction of curiosity in the waterfall as the largest in the world, and in those wonders of it which can be adequately set forth in words. Were nothing more desirable, the interruptions with which the visitor is now annoyed would be of little consequence.

But the value of Niagara to the world, and that which has obtained for it the homage of so many men whom the world reveres, lies in its power of appeal to the higher emotional and imaginative faculties, and this power is drawn from qualities and conditions too subtle to be known through verbal description. To a proper apprehension of these,