

# Niagara County Tribune/Sentinel

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## Lewiston Bicentennial Commemorative Edition

### THE SENTINEL



## Bicentennial 2022: LEWISTON'S HISTORY ... IN EXACTLY 500 WORDS

BY LEE SIMONSON

Lewiston has a fascinating history going back thousands of years. Niagara Falls was born here 12,000 years ago when the first trickle of water fell over the escarpment near today's Artpark. There is evidence of Native American habitation in Lewiston over 7,000 years ago. When the first European explorers came to the area in the 1600s, it was occupied by the Neuter Nation – a peaceful tribe that tried its best to remain neutral between the warring Hurons in Canada and the Senecas of Western New York. But the Neuters disappeared in 1650.

The first European to write about the falls was Father Hennepin, who arrived in Lewiston in 1678 on board the Frontenac, the first ship on the Great Lakes. In 1720, the French built a trading post at the site now known as Artpark's "Painted Parking Lot." Subsequently, the French built Fort Niagara that was eventually seized by the British. In 1796, the fort was turned over to the Americans, many years after the Americans had won the Revolution.

A few years before the Village of Lewiston became "official" in 1822, it was invaded and burned to the ground by British forces during the War of 1812. After the war, Lewiston became a prosperous little community because it was located at the terminus of the Portage – a trading route that enabled goods and supplies to get around Niagara Falls. However, in 1825, the Erie Canal opened and trade shifted to Buffalo. Lewiston was considered a "backwater town" – lost and abandoned.

But Lewiston's fate was far from over. In the 1850s, Lewiston became a hub for the Underground Railroad that helped escort fugitive slaves to Canada. Around 1900, Lewiston became the busiest international passenger port on the Great Lakes, hosting over 20,000 people a day. Steamships would make several trips a day back and forth to Toronto. Those steamships ran on coal. Where did the ships load up on coal? It's where you get your hotdogs and ice cream now – the Silo!

Then, in 1960, the Power Project came to town, bringing in thousands

of workers who came to Lewiston for food and lodging. In 1974, Artpark opened and Lewiston quickly became Western New York's cultural centerpiece.

In the last 50 years or so, Lewiston has blossomed and has been ranked in the Top 10 Best Small Towns in America, offering residents and visitors alike the best restaurants, the best festivals, the best recreation, the best arts and culture – the best quality of life you can find anywhere.

Today, Lewiston's success can be attributed to three things: hundreds of involved community volunteers, engaged businesses and supportive local governments. Being situated on the Lower Niagara River doesn't hurt either!

Can our most vivid imaginations picture what Lewiston will be like 200 years from now? Despite amazing technological advances, we hope future generations will vigorously protect our historic structures and heritage. That history is Lewiston's DNA – the "secret sauce" that continues to make Lewiston the envy of other communities.




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