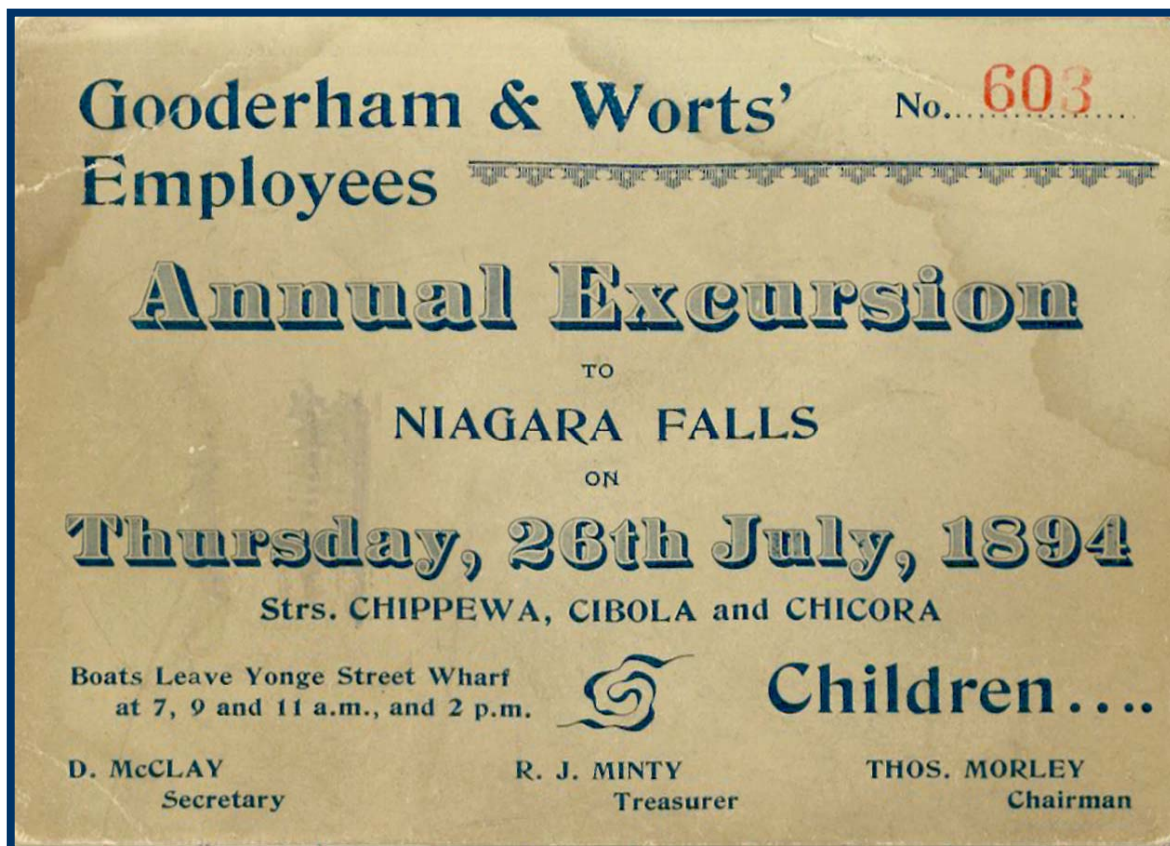


Employee Excursion to Niagara Falls



Steamship ticket, 1894

On July 26, 1894, Gooderham & Worts employees headed off for their Annual Excursion to Niagara Falls. Because the excursion was scheduled for a Thursday, it's hard to know which employees and their families might have taken advantage of the free ticket. But company excursions of this sort were a fairly common occurrence at the time and Niagara Falls was the most popular destination. Exchanging the heat, grime and pressure of the workplace for Lake breezes, scrumptious picnics, and close encounters with one of the Great Natural Wonders of the World would have been hard to resist.

So it's a sure bet that groups of merry-making employees made their way down to the Yonge Street Wharf on foot, by newly-electrified streetcar, or hugely popular

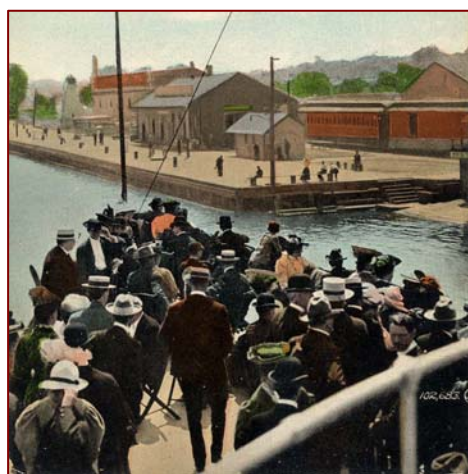


Yonge Street Dock ca 1900

“safety bicycle.” As for waterfront facilities, Torontonians were well served by ferries and Lake steamers with diverse ports-of-call. But getting to the boats was dicey: tangles of railway tracks had to be crossed, at grade, without any safety gate to prevent people from dashing out in front of trains. Still, the crowds flowed to and fro in time with the arrivals and departures of the vessels. A *Globe* reporter in August 1898, described the scene:

Dudes with summer girls are seen in the same line as the mechanics and their wives and babies; parties of both sexes and all degrees of age are there; wives of prominent citizens with their summer visitors – no class seems to be unrepresented.

Excursionists had the choice of three Niagara River Steamship Line paddle-wheelers that offered 5 trips daily to Niagara-on-the-Lake, Queenston, and Lewiston, and connected with such local railways as the Niagara River Railway that followed the river to the Falls.



Approaching Niagara-on-the-Lake

The oldest and most historically famous was the sleek, elegantly refurbished Confederate blockade runner, *Chicora* (1864-1904), that had made her way to Toronto in 1878 via Halifax and the 1870 Red River Rebellion in the far Northwest. Her speed, raked stacks, jaunty hexagonal pilot house, and colourful history ensured her popularity.

The 206-foot *Cibola* (1888-1895) was nearly as fast as the *Chicora*, but also featured electric lighting (when electric lighting was rare), cut-glass chandeliers, and mahogany-finished

interiors that made day-trippers feel like aristocrats. Sadly, just a year after the G&W excursion, the *Cibola*, was destroyed by fire.

Launched in 1893, the 311-foot *Chippewa* was not only the biggest, but the grandest of the choices. As historian John Ross Robertson noted, she was “a floating palace, her appointments, machinery and general finish as nearly as possible approaching perfection.” Pure poetry.

Whichever steamer they took, the excursionists enjoyed a two-hour Lake voyage, a railway toot along the Niagara River, and perhaps a half day at Niagara Falls where they could get soaked aboard the reopened *Maid of the Mist*, picnic in Queen Victoria Niagara Falls Park, enjoy tacky amusements, and float home by moonlight. Unlike the Canadian Temperance League members, who had made the very same trip two weeks earlier, our Distillery folk could also enjoy a tipples or two under the stars.



A Busy Harbour 1893: Niagara-bound *Cibola* (far left) steams toward the Eastern Gap ... across the bow of the Hamilton-bound *Macassa* (right) heading toward the Western Gap

1893 Bird's-eye View is a detail from a chromolithograph of the City of Toronto by Barclay Clark & Co. at the Toronto Public Library (TRL 916-2-1).

Please send your comments or questions to Manager of Heritage Services, Sally Gibson, sg@thedistillerydistrict.com