

The Village of Suspension Bridge had three names in the early days. It started with the name of "Bellevue City," then "Niagara City," but because of building the Suspension Bridge, the name "Suspension Bridge," through constant usage, became permanent.

**1845:** Colonel John Fisk of Rochester formed the Bellevue Land Company. Colonel Fisk, General B. Stuart of Schenectady, I. V. E. Vedder of Geneva, and Roswell G. Benedict of Saratoga comprised the land company. It was organized to develop the area which encompassed one and one half square miles of land around what is now called North Main Street. It was called "Bellevue City." The property of Bellevue City was owned in three parts by Mr. Graves, and Mr. Williamson, and an Englishman who owned the center section. There were only two farm houses in this property.

**1846:** The first Maid of the Mist boat was built at the landing located near the end of Ontario Avenue.

**1846:** The Act of Incorporation for a suspension bridge was given by the Canadian Government. The measure was also passed by the New York State Legislature.

**1846:** The International Suspension Bridge Company was organized.

**1847:** The two companies incorporated to share equally in costs, profits, and losses.

**1847:** The Bellevue Land Company failed. When the decision was made to build the suspension bridge, the problem was how to connect the two upper banks. Mr. Ellet was chosen to build the bridge, and he offered a reward of five dollars to the first person who would get a string across the river. On the first windy day, many young men were out flying kites, and by the end of the day a young American boy by the name of Homan Walsh succeeded and won the five dollars. Then, heavier string and ropes were pulled back and forth until the cables were in place.

**1847:** The building of the first suspension bridge began. It was a foot and carriage bridge.

**1848:** The bridge was completed on July 28. Mr. Ellet was the first to drive over it in a carriage with a team of horses. The bridge was eight feet wide and had no railings. Traffic on the bridge brought in considerable revenue.

**1846 – 1847:** Witmer's Grist Mill was built on the river near the Maid of the Mist landing. It was evident now that a railroad bridge was needed to connect the United States and Canada. Mr. John Roebling, a very clever and brilliant engineer from New Jersey, who went on to build the Brooklyn Bridge in 1883, was engaged to build the Suspension Railroad Bridge. It was believed by other engineers that no suspension bridge would support a railroad. Mr. Roebling believed it would, and built the first practical suspension railroad bridge in the world.

**1852:** Construction of the Suspension Railroad Bridge commenced.

**1853:** On April 15, 1853 De Veaux College incorporated. Mr. Samuel De Veaux left \$74,652.52 to establish and maintain a benevolent institution to accept and support orphan boys and boys without a father, and destitute children, and to train them in industry and to teach them trades and professions. He also wanted to give them a social and religious education under the

fostering care of the Protestant Episcopal Church. The land for the college encompassed 364 acres of land at Suspension Bridge, extending 1/2 mile along the Niagara River.

**1854:** The hamlet grew to a population of 827 and was incorporated as Niagara City.

**1854:** A new and larger Maid of the Mist boat was built. With the expansion of railroads, business began to flourish rapidly in Suspension Bridge along Spring Street (now Whirlpool Street) and was referred to as "Under the Hill". The area was crowded with carriages of tourists and property seekers. Property was bought in the morning and sold in the afternoon at a large profit. The businesses now moved to the top of the hill, to Lewiston Avenue, as it was then called (now North Main Street). Spring Street is now only a block long behind the old Spirella factory on Lewiston Road. It got its name from the mineral springs in that location which were called "Bellevue Mineral Springs" or "Bellevue Fountain". Water poured out between rocks and pooled in a large stone basin. The composition of the water was sulphur, lime and magnesia. The springs brought hundreds of tourists who came to take the baths for healing ailments. The springs were claimed to heal everything from ringworm, freckles to stiffness and contractions of joints and limbs from disease. It was eventually covered with a very attractive building and was a very profitable business. However, the building of the bridge altered the flow of water and dried up the spring.

**1854:** A cholera outbreak in Suspension Bridge led to 8 deaths.

**1855:** The railroad suspension bridge was completed, and on March 8, 1855, the first locomotive train crossed the bridge. The train stopped in the middle of the bridge and a huge crowd on land gave a great celebration for brilliant engineering. Later, 30 trains a day passed over the bridge.

**1855:** There were six railroads in Suspension Bridge and one daily newspaper, published by G. H. Hackstaff, called Niagara City Herald. It was later published by Charles B. Gaskill, who let it die. By this time there were a number of hotels and all were thriving. The Vedder House, later called "Frontier House," the "Falls View Hotel" at the foot of Ontario Street, "Atwood's Western Hotel," and many others. The most famous was the Monteagle Hotel. Many world travelers who stayed at the Monteagle Hotel thought it to be one of the best in the world. It was located across the street from the old Spirella factory (now Bellevue Manor) on Lewiston Road. It had vats to catch the rainwater, which was then piped to nearly all of the rooms. It was constructed with beautiful mahogany, marble, and gilt everywhere, and was lighted with wood gas. In 1900 it was deposed and became a cold storage and was demolished in 1936. It was started in 1848 and in 1855 it was completed.

**1855:** Colonel Fisk lighted his house with wood gas, the first house in Suspension Bridge and in New York State to be so lighted. The pillars at both ends of the Suspension Bridge were also lighted with wood gas.

**1857:** There were five churches: Congregational, Dutch Reform, Dutch Evangelical, and Methodist Episcopal. Some did not last very long. There were 28 stores, 14 mechanic shops, two meat markets, one grist mill, and one saw mill. Business flourished from travelers who would have to stay overnight to change trains. Among the many patrons were cattlemen and brokers who bought and sold livestock constantly shipped through Niagara City (Suspension Bridge).

Hundreds of thousands head of cattle were watered and fed in mammoth stock yards east of the north end of railroad tracks. The feed for cattle was purchased from nearby farmers. The care of these animals gave jobs to many men and boys of the village.

**1857:** De Veaux College opened. The first trustees in charge were Bishop DeLancey, Dr. William Shelton, Peter A. Porter, and Richard H. Woodruff.

**1861:** With the building of the Suspension Bridge railroads, the Maid of the Mist boat company lost money and wanted to sell their boat. A company in Montreal was willing to buy it if delivered to Lake Ontario. A day was set to go through the lower rapids to do this. People from all over turned out to witness the voyage. Many believed it to be a hoax and that the boat would not leave the dock and there was a great deal of betting taking place. At the appointed time the boat left the dock with Captain Robinson, and his assistant Mr. Jones and an engineer on board. The boat soon hit the rapids and almost capsized. The smoke stack broke off; and the men were knocked to the floor. Captain Robinson, however, was able to get control of the boat and steer it past the Whirlpool and docked the boat in Queenston in seven minutes before then taking it to Lake Ontario.

**1863:** John M. Buttery built the world-famous elevator. It took tourists 192 down to the bottom of the gorge near Whirlpool. Originally it was a winding stairway. The Elevator had seats and was operated by water power.

**1867:** The city of Suspension Bridge became a port of entry, being moved from Lewiston. Some fine government buildings were built, one of which also housed the Port Office.

**1870:** The weekly newspaper Suspension Bridge Journal started publication.

**1870:** A class of 60 members formed for adult education to discuss literature, art and music. It was very cultured and socially prominent. It met twice monthly on the third floor of Colt Hall on North Main Street.

**1873:** Along with the many businesses there were three schools, two attorneys, two Justices of the Peace, five physicians and one bank. A deaf and dumb school was also founded but did not survive long.

**1875:** O. W. Cutler was credited with getting an act passed enabling Suspension Bridge village to supply the city with pure, wholesome water. The Holley Water System consisted of 4 1/2 miles of pipe with 27 double hydrants, installed at a cost of \$60,000.

**1878:** The Suspension Bridge Glee Club was organized for the cultivation of music. The director was W. A. Lamont.

**1892:** On March 17, 1892, Suspension Bridge, now boasting a population of 4,500, was incorporated with the Village of Niagara Falls into one city, which also included the territory between Niagara Falls and Suspension Bridge and around the area of Clinton Avenue and Orchard Park called Clarksville.

*Originally researched and compiled by Helen Bridgman Smith, Laguna Hills, CA*