

MAID OF THE MIST—LEGEND

The most famous Indian legend surrounding Niagara is that of the Maid of the Mist, the Thunder God Hinum and the origin of the Horseshoe Falls. This saga of the "Maid of the Mist" was originated, or at least was perpetuated by the Neuter Indian Nation which occupied the Niagara Frontier when the first French priests came to their villages to preach Christianity.

As the story goes, many of the Indian tribes were dying from an unknown cause. After burial, graves were being desecrated and bodies devoured. Since the Indians each year were sending a canoe filled with fruits and game over the Falls to appease the Thunder God Hinum and his two sons, who lived in caves behind the Falls, they felt that continuation of their ill fortune was because the God was not satisfied. Consequently, they tried to satisfy the spirits by sacrificing also their most beautiful maiden each year. The attempt was to no avail.

One year, it fell to the daughter of the chief of the tribe to be sacrificed to the spirit of the Falls. Without emotion her father watched the preparations, but after she had been sent on her way in the canoe filled with food, he set out after her. Both canoes passed over the brink of the Falls never to be seen again.

The legend continues by saying that the maiden was caught in the arms of Hinum's sons, both of whom had known she was coming and both of whom desired her. Recalling that she had been sent to her death to save her people, the Indian girl offered to accept one—with a condition.

If she were told how her people might rid themselves of the evil which visited them and if she were permitted to inform them, she would agree to live forever in the caves behind the Falls.

Both sons fought with their consciences, it is said, since both were sworn to secrecy. Finally, the younger one told her of the giant watersnake which lay at the bottom of the river and which would grow hungry once each year.

While the Indians slept, the snake would visit their villages and poison their water. After those who died were buried, he would again visit and devour the bodies.

In spirit form the maiden was allowed to return to her people and inform them how they might destroy the monster. They were to drink only from the springs and when the night of the serpent's visit arrived, they were to destroy the watersnake with spears, tomahawks, bows and arrows and any other weapons they might have.

Following the maiden's instructions, the Indians assaulted the monster, which they mortally wounded. It was successful in reaching the river but was carried to the brink of the Falls.

The serpent did not go over the Falls, however, the legend relates. The Indian Gods arranged that the monster's head be caught in the rocks on one side and its tail in those of the other. In its dying contortions, the body writhed into the form of a horseshoe.

There, it is said, it remains to this day, showing that the Gods are present to protect the Indians against evil spirits.

