

THE GREAT FARINI

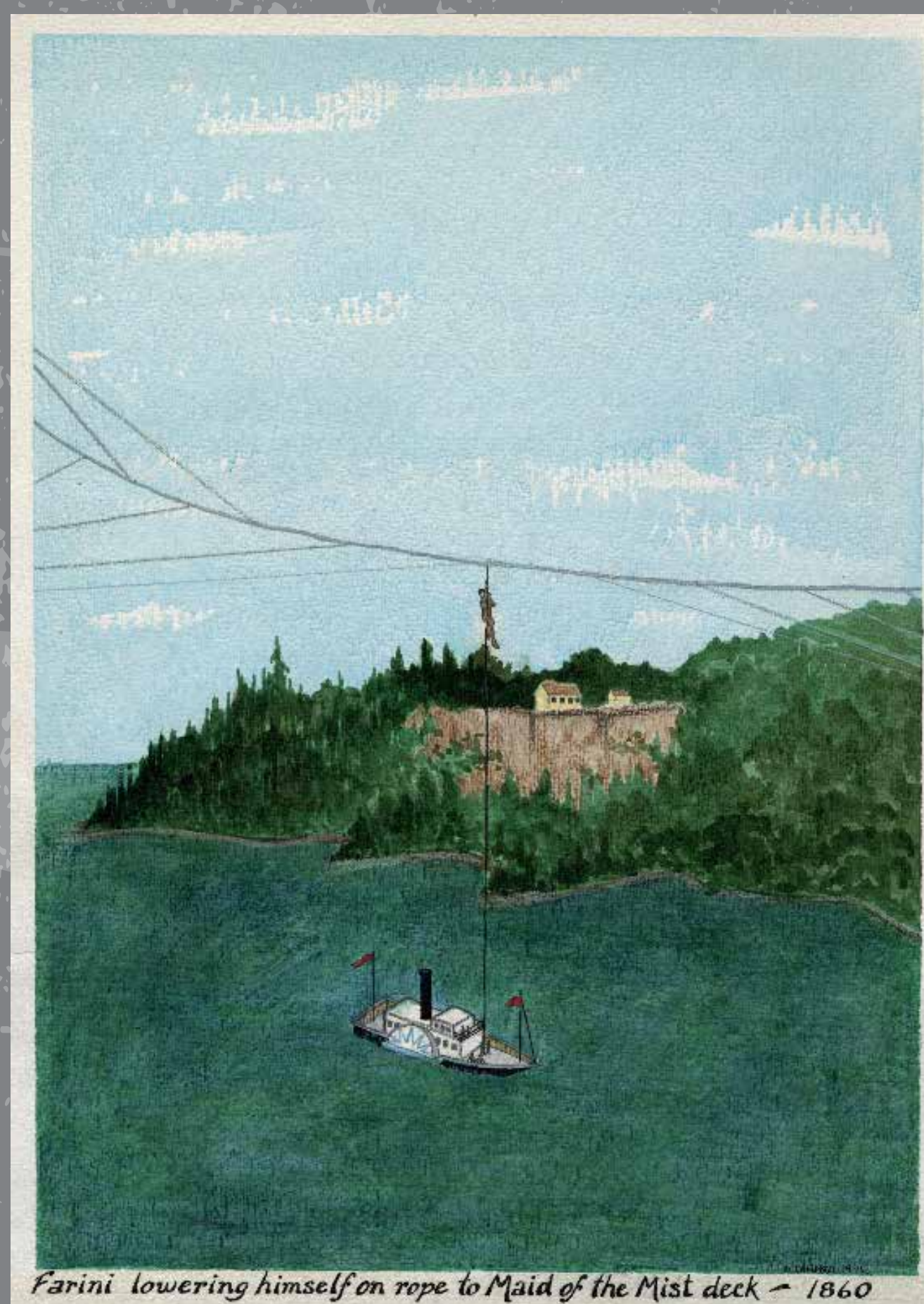
PORT HOPE'S
WILLIAM HUNT
1838-1929



Rope walkers in particular impressed him. The appreciation of the crowds for their performances was something the young boy didn't receive at home. Rope walking demanded skill, certainly, but nothing Willie believed he couldn't learn. So in secret he practiced and practiced, organized shows for his friends, disciplined his body and gradually turned himself into one of the world's most amazing entertainers.

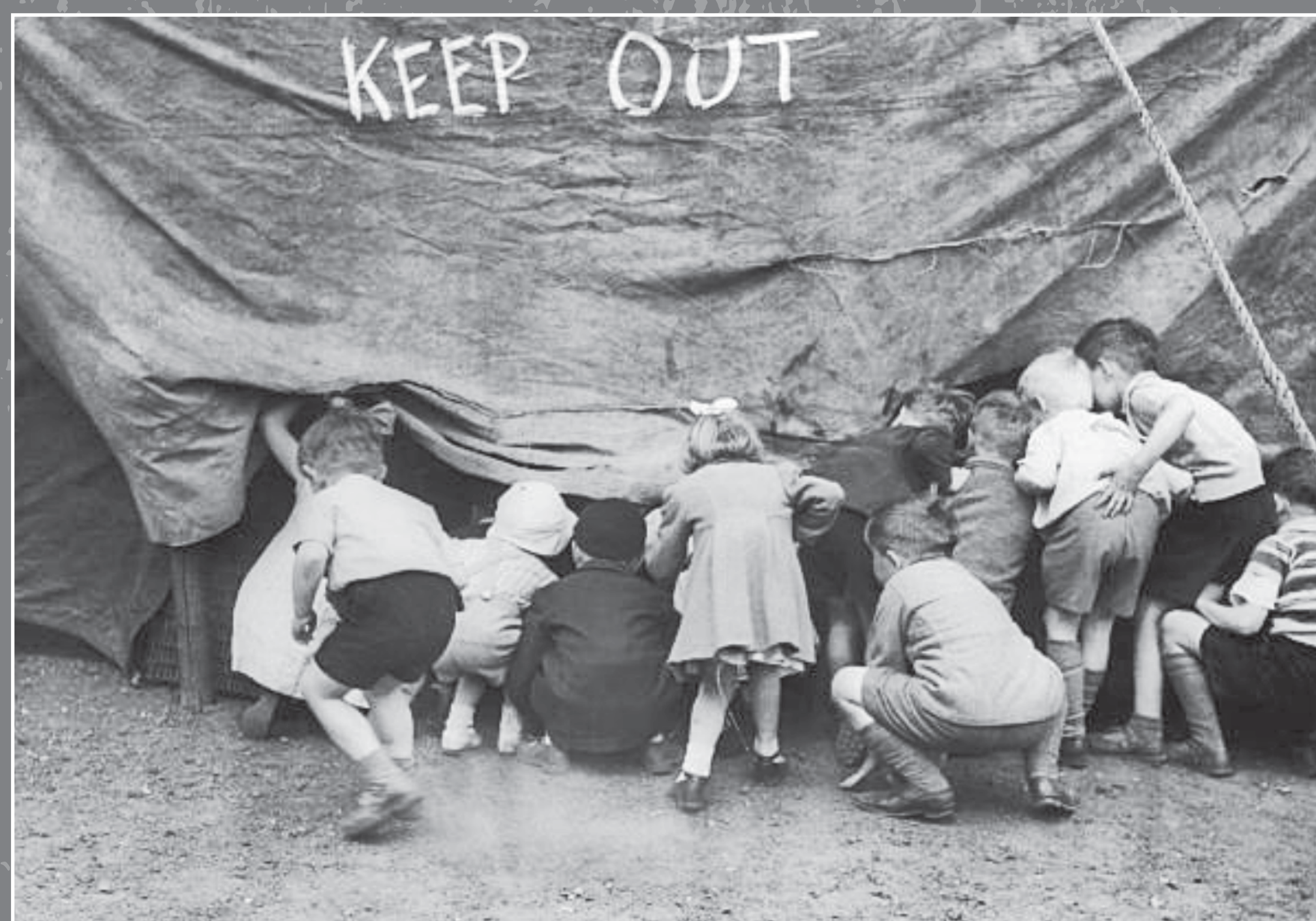
1859 - His first truly public performance, at 21, was a walk above Port Hope's Ganaraska River (including hanging by his feet) in support of the town's annual Agricultural Fair. In most ways it was a resounding success, but Mr. Hunt Sr. was mortified. The father-son relationship deteriorated so severely that Willie picked up his balance pole and left home to begin his great adventure.

1860 - The lure of a grand challenge drew him to Niagara's Falls. Here the Frenchman, Charles Blondin, was already famous for rope walking over the dangerous Gorge. Willie, who had chosen the stage name **The Great Farini**, was soon matching the great Blondin walk for walk, each performing startling new tricks - sliding to the water below, taking someone across in a wheelbarrow, crossing wrapped up in a sack, whatever it took to outdo the other. **The Great Farini had truly arrived.**



Farini lowering himself on rope to Maid of the Mist deck ~ 1860

Farini and Maid of Mist -
Courtesy Niagara Falls (Ontario)
Public Library



THE GREAT ADVENTURE BEGINS

1838 - William Leonard Hunt, was born in Lockport, NY, but moved as a youngster to Bowmanville, Ontario and then, **at age 5, to our neighbouring Hope Township.** Willie's dad was anxious to keep up appearances in this new community and was not happy with the unruly antics of his young son.

Circuses were not considered appropriate entertainment for the boy, but for him the draw was unbearable. He held out until June 1852, when he turned 14. By then the family had moved back to Bowmanville, and when the Circus arrived Willie sneaked in. **What he saw there marked him forever.**