

WATER

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As we well know water is a necessity to sustain biological life; water transportation was equally as critical for urban economic life. As late as 1860, of the nation's nine largest cities with populations over 100,000, eight were major ports (the other city, Brooklyn, is the exception that proves the rule).

Water transportation played a major role in the Western Reserve's development. Settled at a time when land transportation, especially shipping materials long distance, was prohibitive because of the cost and limited technology, water travel served as the vehicle for economic development, i.e., shipping produce out and bringing in new settlers. Port settlements emerged along the north coast at Conneaut, Ashtabula, Fairport Harbor, Cleveland, Vermilion, Huron and Sandusky reflecting the import of lake shipping. Cleveland's success to become a canal terminus established its regional economic dominance from 1827, making it a "canal and lake city". Although railroad construction ultimately doomed the Ohio and Erie Canal, it remained important while other Reserve cities continued lake shipping.

The introduction of industrial production impacted differentially on these lake ports, but greatly expanded lake shipping to and from those such as Cleveland, Lorain and Ashtabula most able to take advantage of these changes. Recently counter trends have produced additional change; since 1959 the St. Lawrence Seaway added increased international shipping while deindustrialization and technological change reduced commercial lake shipping and the number of active ports. At the same time cultural tourism and recreational boating introduced new perspectives on canal, river, harbor and lake. These resulted in competition between commercial and recreational users for limited water space that have, on occasion, led to conflicts, collisions and deaths. This competition remains to be resolved and perhaps represents a subtext for our panel.