

Competing Visions of the Lakefront

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Throughout the history of Cleveland, citizens have debated competing visions for the development of the waterfront. Should the waterfront serve Cleveland's industrial needs or recreational public use? Differences recurred on how to configure the shoreline, on what facilities to construct on it, and on how to attract public support and monies.

The economic expansion of Cleveland required waterfront developments to serve industry and transportation. Piers, docks, shipyards, marine supply stores and manufacturing facilities prevailed. Railroad companies built tracks and depot stations conveniently close to piers and docks, placing industrial leaders in control of the waterfront.

Within each period of Cleveland's development advocates spoke out in favor of preserving the waterfront as a natural recreational haven for public use. Their voices were ever present but often unheard in the face of the Industrial Revolution. Advocates and plans for a recreational waterfront were the following: 1- John G. Stockley, a pier builder; 2- Canfield, Pease and Associates donated land to Cleveland for developing Clinton Park in 1835 [the first recreational and residential park site in Cleveland (in area of East 17th St. and Lakeside Rd.)]; 3- Cleveland purchased its first land for creating a park, Lake View Park in 1867 [in the area between West 3rd and East 9th north of Lakeside Rd.]; 4- Mayor George Gardner started the Cleveland Yachting Association in 1878; 5- William J. Gordon bequeathed land to the city for the creation of Gordon Park in 1892 [property surrounding and along the lake to the north of Martin Luther King Blvd.]; 6- Jacob Perkins sold property to the city of Cleveland in 1894 for the creation of Perkins Beach and Edgewater Park; 7- The Cleveland Municipal Stadium opened on the lakefront in 1931; 8- The Great Lakes Exposition took place during 1936-1937 on the waterfront north of City Hall and east of Municipal Stadium; 9- the North Coast Development Corporation planned North Coast Harbor in 1988; 10- 1990s lakefront boom, including the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, Great Lakes Science and Technology Center, new Football Stadium, Whiskey Island Marina, and plans for The Crawford Auto Museum and the Cleveland Aquarium on the lakefront).

The last two decades of Cleveland's history include the most diverse and successful efforts to turn Cleveland's North Coast into a recreational, educational, attractive destination for public use.