

## PRIVATELY DEVELOPED FOR 200 YEARS

### A HISTORY OF BATTERY PARK

By James O. Miller - Special to the Register

SANDUSKY - In February 2023, the citizens of Sandusky will have the opportunity to vote on the future of Battery Park. How the property came into being and its usage through the years may be of interest to many.

*Battery Park, circa 1884, shown in side-by-side images on a card designed for a stereopticon projector to create a three-dimensional effect. Gordon Wendt*



The original 1818 plat of Sandusky drawn by James Kilbourne called for the installation of two-gun batteries: one at the east and one at the west ends of the waterfront. These were to be lookout points for a British attack by water. No forts were built or guns installed.

The western battery is now the area starting at the intersection of Washington Street, Shelby Street, Camp Street and Tiffin Avenue, near A&B Hobbies & Cycles and extending to what was then the waterfront.

The area where the East Battery was to be located was mostly water. The shoreline was north of Water Street and east of Meigs Street and angled over to McEwen Street.

By 1853, this eastern area was largely enclosed by the rail line constructed by the Cleveland & Toledo railroad. The rail line followed what is now Cleveland Road and instead of curving left where the Buick dealership now is, it headed straight to downtown Sandusky. Wooden cribbing filled with stone was built from McEwen Street to the corner of Meigs and Water streets, creating a land bridge for the tracks. This created an enclosed area we now call the Cove, but, back then, it developed into a fetid and stagnant water area creating quite a concern for the city. This was solved in 1857

when the city granted a 30-year lease to the Sandusky Shipyard for the area from Market Street to 400 feet north of Water Street and east to the railroad.

Because most of the area leased was underwater, the lease required that Sandusky Shipyard fill it in within two years. The new era of the Sandusky Shipyard was short-lived. A steam-powered saw mill operated by the Robinson Brothers took over the lease. They were succeeded by the woodworking firm of Allen, Dorsey and Tenney.

In 1869, the original lease was extended to 1937 and granted to the Sandusky Tool Co. The lease required the tool company to fill in the remainder of the area, which was accomplished at a cost of \$50,000 (more than \$1 million today when factoring in inflation). Several stone buildings were built where the parking lots and tennis courts are today.

The city had continuing concerns with erosion caused by wave action at the shoreline, which was then at the corner of Meigs and Water Streets. This was resolved in 1874 when Sandusky Tool granted a second lease, now of the northernmost area, to shipbuilder John Monk. The 30-year arrangement required Monk to fill in the area

outside of the railroad tracks to the north and east. Monk fulfilled the lease requirement and operated there until his death in 1904.



Subsequent operators used the leased area with the last being the Lake Erie Dry Dock & Mill. With the expiration of the lease, in 1937, the land reverted to the city. South of Sandusky Tool, where the police station is today, was the city waterworks. The waterworks was built in 1875 and included a large steel standpipe, which came down in the 1924 tornado.

*A lithograph shows an image looking south at Water and Meigs street. The area where the water works standpipe is where the city police department is today. Gordon Wendt*

Work was performed on the Meigs Street pier in the 1930s, and there was an effort at local and state levels to extend the pier out to the channel

creating commercial freight dockage.

In the 1930s, it became the dream of city manager C. Webb Sadler to create a recreation area at Battery Park. At the time the entire waterfront, from Meigs to Shelby streets, was filled with commercial operations. Though Sadler was fired in 1934, his ideas for Battery Park came to pass with a bathhouse, concession stand, small restaurant, a boat rental facility, gas dock and diving platform.

In 1933, the city constructed a sludge or settling basin, now Sandusky Sailing Club dockage, which would have created additional filled land. However, plans changed, and, in 1940, the waterworks was moved to Big Island. There were additional efforts to fill in the surrounding area sometimes using jail labor. The jail laborers called the area "Baloney Park," given the nature of the sandwiches they were fed.



In 1961, a 20-year lease was granted for a showplace marina which included gas docks and the Surfside 66 restaurant. The Surfside was closed in 1981 and became somewhat of an eyesore.

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## Local firm's Battery Park plan approved

By JOHN PRZYBYS  
*Staff Writer*

The first step toward what could be the eventual rebirth of Sandusky's Battery Park was taken Tuesday when city commissioners approved a \$9 million development proposal submitted by a local company.

Commissioners unanimously accepted a proposal from Sandusky Bay Development Co., one of three proposals the city received from private concerns interested in developing and operating facilities in the Battery Park area.

With the commission's formal endorsement of Sandusky Bay's development concept, city officials and company representatives now will begin the complicated task of working out a preliminary development agreement.

Wally Thiel, city planning director, said the agreement would cover such items as development schedules, leasing fees and terms, project financing, performance insurance, re-



A play park for children would be added next to the relocated tennis courts.

Tennis courts would be relocated to an area south of the present location.

Parking in Battery Park would be expanded.

A fountain would be built in a now-vacant area in front of the wave action pool.

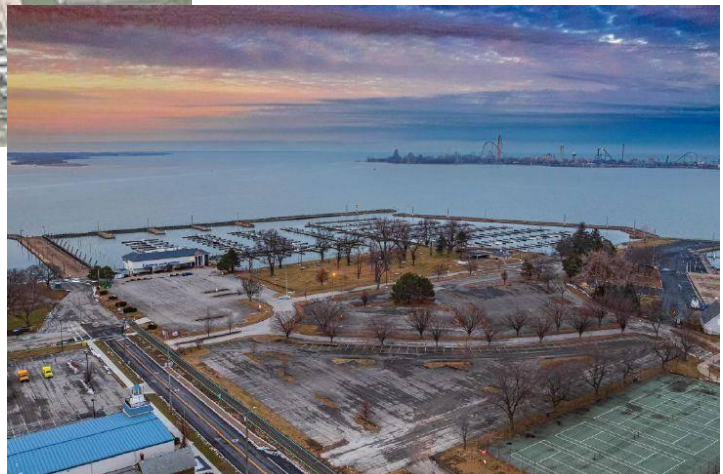
A new marina center, containing the harbormaster's office and a snack shop, is also planned.

A new parking area

In 1980, the sailing club, pursuant to its lease, built a fine new facility adjacent to their dockage in the old sludge basin. But, in 1986 the Sandusky Bay Development Co. leased what we now call Battery Park and built a new restaurant and improved the marina significantly creating a first-class facility. Sandusky Bay Development had the right under the lease to create a residential and retail development but chose not to do so.



In 1990, the United Church Homes attempted to acquire the property south of the marina for construction of what became Parkview. Opposition caused the city commission to falter and Parkview located in Perkins Township.



In 2007, voters gave the go-ahead to the Marina District, but the Great Recession and the developer's problems doomed the project.

*Miller is a retired banker and lifelong resident. This article was researched by the late Gordon Wendt, a maritime historian from Sandusky.*