An Historical Overview: The Proposed Waterfront Park Phase 4

Located on the strip of land north of Main Street extending to the Ohio River’s edge at the Louisville and Portland Canal, the proposed location of a new park installation between Tenth and Fourteenth streets is unusually rich in local history and heritage. Lying just west of Louisville’s principal wharf and harbor area at Fourth Street, this segment of land is today largely neglected, with much of it lying directly beneath the I-64 interstate highway.

The site of Louisville’s first frontier fortress, this location hosted Fort-on-Shore, located at today’s Twelfth and Rowan streets.

When Clark and his men triumphantly returned to the Falls of the Ohio in 1779, the small frontier community they left behind had a new location and a new name.

Shortly after departing the Falls, Clark received the welcome news that France had formed an alliance with the United States to join the war against Great Britain. To salute King Louis XVI for his support for the American cause, Lt. Colonel George Rogers Clark sent back a message to the outpost on Corn Island that the location would henceforth be called Louisville. He also ordered that the settlers leave the temporary
sanctuary of their island and move to the Kentucky mainland. Beginning in the winter of 1778-79 they selected a location near the river’s edge and the future Twelfth Street. Here, under the able direction of Richard Chenoweth, they erected a series of wooden houses joined together to form protective walls. Outside the gates of the structure, called Fort-on-Shore, the settlers began to build cabins, blacksmith shops and other essential improvements. They referred to this, the first Louisville neighborhood, as “White Home.”

Rick Bell
“Louisville’s Waterfront Park: A Riverfront Renaissance”

The small fortress, shown below, was replaced in 1782 by a much more impressive military installation, Fort Nelson, located on Main Street between Sixth and Eighth streets.
FORT-ON-SHORE

This site marks the location of Fort-on-Shore, which was the first building erected on the mainland when General George Rogers Clark and the settlers of Corn Island came ashore. The stockade and fort, built 1778-79 on orders from General Clark, represented the first settlement in what is now Louisville.

Presented by Sons of the American Revolution

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Following the Revolutionary War, this area soon began to be developed for its commercial potential. It’s proximity to the Ohio River meant that large manufactured goods could be conveniently transported to the river’s edge to be loaded on flatboats and barges bound for downstream markets. In 1912, a watering fountain for dray horses was placed at the same location, but by this time the area was surrounded by warehouses and industrial plants.
Twelfth Street marked the western boundary for the town of Louisville. The downriver community of Portland, an independent township, extended its borders to Thirteenth Street. In 1815, at Fourteenth Street between Main and Rowan, the world’s first modern steam-powered distillery was built. The Hope Distillery was a massive, and overly ambitious, scheme by New England capitalists to harness steam engines to power the pumping, mixing and transport of whiskey in the years before the product was aged into bourbon. The Hope Distillery, a pot still operation, was capable of distilling 12,000 gallons a day. Due to very poor management and a lack of enough local grains, the Hope failed in a very few years.

A residual industry, a slaughterhouse, proved more successful at the site. Distilleries of that time kept herds of cows or pigs to be fattened by the by-products of the distilling process. Where the whiskey industry failed, the pork-packing business flourished. Following this period, the site of Hope Distillery was used as a race track.

Louisville’s 1832 City Directory shows that heavy industrial would take advantage of this location for many years to follow.
One of the most significant events in the city's history was the digging of the Louisville and Portland Canal to bypass the navigational barrier of the Falls of the Ohio. Between 1825 and 1830, over 3,000 workers dug the 2.5 mile canal and constructed a set of three large lock chambers. The Portland Canal starts at Tenth and connects with the lower Ohio River at Twenty-seventh, just past the old town of Shippingport.

A great many of the workers on the canal project were Irish immigrants who settled near their worksite, and western Louisville and eastern Portland became home of St. Patrick’s Parish. On election day, August 6, 1855, the worst civil unrest in Louisville’s history took place when nativist mobs attacked, killed and burned homes of Catholic immigrants. The greatest violence
occurred at Tenth and Main streets in a series of tenements called Quinn’s Row. Today, this
same site is the home of the Kentucky Lottery, and an historical marker shows the place where
“Bloody Monday” reached its peak.

Following the Civil War, this area was transformed by the building of the Pennsylvania
Railroad bridge in 1870, the first bridge to cross the river at Louisville.

Located at Fourteenth Street, the Penn bridge was the longest cantilever bridge in the
world when built. With its approaches, the bridge stretched over 7,700 feet long. This bridge
was rebuilt in 1914, using the same piers. The bridge is also notable for its “direct-lift” segment
that spans the canal and raises and lowers to accommodate passage by both trains and boats
through the canal.
Heavy industries would dominate the site for most of its history, as indicated by the Phoenix Foundry shown in the 1880 City Directory.
By the 1880s, this area became famous for its importance to Kentucky’s tobacco manufacturing and shipping businesses. The area on Main and north to the river was known as the “Tobacco Breaks.” By World War I, with the popularity of cigarettes, it would become the largest tobacco market in the world, shipping thousands of large 1,000 pound containers called hogheads. By 1932, Louisville cigarette plants produced eleven billion cigarettes a year.
In 1890, the park site was devastated by a great tornado which swept down Main Street, destroying a great many buildings. The newly-built Central Station depot, located at Tenth and Water streets was leveled by the winds.
Central Station was rebuilt in a grand style following the tornado, only to be subject to another great natural disaster in 1937, when the Great Flood covered the entire area adjacent to the river.

In the 1960s, the abandoned rail depot gained a new life as the first permanent home of Louisville’s famed Actors Theatre.
The proposed Waterfront Park Phase 4 site is unusually rich in history and has greatly contributed to the community. Reminders of this history are present in abandoned streets and active rail yards in the area.
**APPENDIX – City Directory Listings**

**1900 City Directory – Rowan Street**

Tenth Street – nw corner – Citizens’ General Electric Co. Power house

1100 Z Bisig – grocer

1120 Louisville Malting Company

Ne corner I C RR & Co. – freight depot

L E & St. L RR – freight depot

L H & St. L RR – freight depot

1216-1224 B. F. Avery & Son - warehouse

1226 Otto Ryser – stair builder

1228 T. Bossmeyer – saloon

Se corner JJ Reilly Manufacturing Co. – pumping machinery
Fourteenth St – NW corner – C I & L freight depot

1414-1416  C S Tabb – transfer agent
1430       J B Halloway Co. – snuff manufacturers

1914 City Directory - Rowan Street

1001-1011  Louisville Gas & Electric power house
1160       Nettie Gunther saloon
1120-1122  F. E. Roscoe Shoe Manufacturing Company
           Forman-Breen Mfg. Co.
1200       Gunther saloon
1214-1222  Dunkerson & Co. tobacco rehandlers
1230-1232  J. J. Reilly Manufacturing Company –
           Pumping and hydraulic machinery
1428-1432  Philip Levy & Sons – Junk

14 individuals & 2 multi-family houses with three families each

1930 City Directory – Rowan Street

1001       Winter Paper Stock Co.
1135       I C RR Freight Depot
1200       Louise Gunther – soft drinks
1230       John Isert – electrical cutout boxes
1428       Universal Carloading & Distributing

1951 City Directory – Rowan Street
1001-13  Winter Paper Stock Co.
1101     Lamppin Transfer & Wholesale Co.
1122     Kentucky Sanitary Bedding Co.
1216-24  Federal Express Inc.
1230     General Plastics and Rubber Co.
1403     C I & L Railway Co. – freight office

1960 City Directory – Rowan Street
1001-13  Winter Paper Stock Co.
1101     Chas. Ubelhart, Inc. – food brokers
          Lamppin Transfer & Wholesale Co.
1122     Kentucky Sanitary Bedding Co.
1200     Kolor-Bright Bleach Co.
1403     Monon RR

1970 City Directory – Rowan Street
1101     Lamppin Transfer & Wholesale Co.
1216     Dean Truck Line
1222     Queen Hydraulics
1403     Banner Transfer

1980 City Directory – Rowan Street
1101     K Y F I, Inc.
1122     Louisville Seed Company
1200     Queen Equipment Distributing
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