

*The
Jefferson
Essays*

TIME TO ACT

*The Case for Heritage Tourism and
Rebuilding Erie's Three Historic Forts*

By
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WINTER 2017-18
ESSAY VI

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to the many people who contributed to this paper, particularly the leadership of the Jefferson Educational Society as well as the late Dr. William Garvey and Dr. Judy Lynch whose knowledge of and commitment to Erie prompted this work.

I owe a special thanks to Carl Anderson, who accompanied me on an exploration of a half dozen fort sites across Pennsylvania and New York. Our mission illustrated how Heritage Tourism can be a powerful economic driver for downtown revitalization. I am also grateful to Brad Mooney, the historic preservationist at Fort Ligonier, Pa., who generously shared his knowledge of colonial forts in North America and their contemporary reconstruction.

Finally, I wish to thank Dr. Chris Magoc for showing me how a community-based public history project can connect the residents of a diverse urban area more meaningfully to their city's roots, landscape, and to one another.

– Michael Fuhrman

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General Anthony Wayne Dies at Erie

On the wind-swept bluffs of Erie, high above the entrance to Presque Isle Bay, a group of civilians and soldiers solemnly gathers near the center of the parade ground at Fort Presque Isle. At the foot of the flagstaff lies a mound of dirt piled on the previous night's snowfall next to an open grave. The steady sound of collapsing whitecaps, laden with small chunks of ice, pound the shore below, breaking the silence of the burial service. A newly built plain oak coffin rests next to the gravesite, which is marked by a 15-star American flag tethered to a pole, snapping sharply with each gust of wind. A large piece of rawhide stretches across the top of the coffin, pinned down by brass tacks. It reads simply, "A.W. OB DEC. 15. 1796." The body of Major General Anthony Wayne, dressed in full military uniform, fills the casket. He had died two days earlier from complications of gout. He was 51.

Six months earlier, U.S. Army Captain Russell Bissell had been sent by General Wayne to Erie with a detachment of 200 men to build a fort and establish a garrison. Now Bissell stands at the base of the flagpole directing Wayne's burial. On the north side of the blockhouse, 25 soldiers and state militia stand at attention as the coffin is lowered slowly before it disappears beneath the ground. Soil fills the grave. A prayer and tributes are expressed, their contents sealed forever in an unrecorded past.

Breaking the somber mood, Captain Bissell orders the soldiers to face the lake and present arms. Muskets, raised, fire off the cliff into the turbulent waters. Soldiers and civilians weep. General Wayne's quiet end contrasts sharply with the ambitious life he once led. He believed that "to die in action was the most noble of all deaths for a soldier."¹ Such was the spirit of this ardent patriot whose final breath was taken in the fort he had ordered built, for a town he had helped set in motion.

General Wayne at the time of his death was the most celebrated military officer in the United States. He fought fearlessly in the American Revolution and then in 1789, two years after the adoption of the United States Constitution, President George Washington asked him to serve once again as Commander in Chief of a new professional army called the "Legion of the United States," formed to subdue the Miami Confederacy of Native American tribes in the Northwest Territory. Wayne's mission was successful, and he was celebrated across the new country for defeating the Native Americans at the Battle of Fallen Timbers near present-day Toledo, Ohio, in 1794 and consummating the signing of the Treaty at Greenville a year later, which ended the Northwest Indian Wars and opened the Ohio Valley for settlement. A year later, Wayne died at Fort Presque Isle in the eastern blockhouse overlooking Presque Isle Bay and Lake Erie.

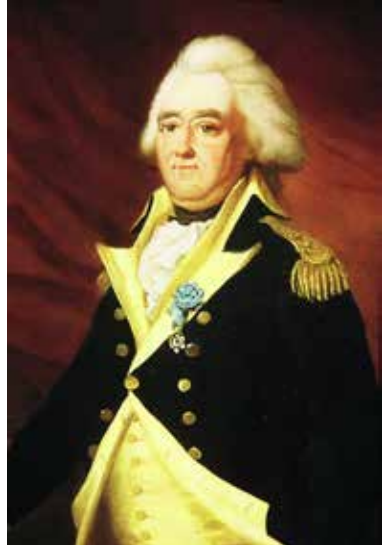


Figure 1. Major General Anthony Wayne

Participating in Wayne's funeral left a profound impression on a 20-year-old red-headed transplant from central Pennsylvania, Daniel Dobbins, who just a year before had walked with his wife to Presque Isle from Lewistown in Mifflin County. The Dobbins family was accompanied by Thomas Rees and Judah Colt, agents of the Pennsylvania Population Company, and a corps of surveyors, escorted by the state militia under the command of Captain John Grubb. Author and historian Robert D. Ilisevich pondered in his biography of Dobbins, based on Dobbins' journals, what this young pioneer was likely thinking as he took part in Wayne's funeral.

¹Nelson, Paul David, *Anthony Wayne, Soldiers of the Early Republic*, Indiana University Press. 1985.

His mind on this solemn occasion wandered between the idea of service to one's country and the knowledge that General Wayne had helped tame the frontier, now open to young men like himself to settle and civilize. Both thoughts drew him towards a search for the underlying principles of human and national sacrifice. One made him a pioneer set on transforming the lake region from a wilderness to communities of homes and industries; the other, a fervent, lifelong patriot.²

The death of Anthony Wayne at Fort Presque Isle at the peak of his military career and national renown left an indelible imprint on Erie history. Overnight, Fort Presque Isle became hallowed ground and, over the next 140 years, Wayne's legacy became etched in the area's lexicon. As the Erie area and communities stretching west along the Great Lakes grew, Wayne's name adorned municipalities, schools, forests, parks, businesses, streets, highways, even beers, and his image was displayed in a half dozen statues. The fictional superhero Batman derives his alter ego's surname, Bruce Wayne, not from movie star John Wayne, but from the 14th century Scottish King Robert the Bruce and military hero Anthony Wayne.³

Flash forward to modern Erie, entering 2018, as the city faces crucial decisions about its future and the region's future. It begs the question, what if the past were to meet the present and embrace the future?

Setting a Possible New Course

This essay will try to show the merits of not only reconstructing the American Fort originally erected in 1795 upon Wayne's order, but also of rebuilding the original French fort (1753) and the British fort that followed it in 1760, near where the foot of Parade and East Front streets intersect today. All three forts, which once stood as symbols of world power and reflected the men and women who lived and died in them, laid the cornerstone on which Erie's heritage now stands. All three fortifications were christened Fort Presque Isle and played key roles in the long imperial struggle for control of North America. The area between Parade and Wayne streets and from Front to Second streets is a tract of land intertwined with Native American, French, British and American history, and is the proposed site for the rebuilding of these three colonial forts.

² Illisevich, Robert D. Daniel Dobbins, *Frontier Mariner*. Erie County Historical Society. 1993.

³ Kane, Bob; Tom Andrae (1989). *Batman & Me*. Forestville, California: Eclipse Books. p. 44. ISBN 1-56060-017-9.

Near its original site, French Fort Presque Isle would be built on the 1.7-acre Wallace Street Playground located between Sobieski and Wallace streets. British Fort Presque Isle would be erected on the adjacent Ted Amendola Memorial Field, which occupies about 1.5 acres. Crossing the practically inactive railroad tracks to the north about 100 yards is a paved pathway overgrown with vegetation that bends its way up the canopy-covered knoll to the Wayne Blockhouse. This is the original site of the proposed American Fort Presque Isle. This bucolic expanse is owned by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and is meticulously managed by the Pennsylvania Soldiers' and Sailors' Home, which encompasses about 15 acres, including the scenic Veterans Memorial Cemetery on the north side of the railroad tracks.

In addition to the Three Forts of Presque Isle, this project calls for the establishment of an interpretive center and parking lot by acquiring and repurposing Janitor Supply Company's buildings and 2.5-acre property at East Second and Ash streets. The interpretive center and the sites of the three forts would together make up a striking 20-acre Heritage Commons complete with a two-story observation deck on the roof of Janitor Supply's main building, which overlooks the forts, Presque Isle Bay and Lake Erie.

It would be a truly unique project. No historic fort destination in the United States, including renowned forts such as Independence (Massachusetts), Niagara (New York), McHenry (Maryland), Ticonderoga (New York), and Castillo de San Marcos (Florida) offer to the visitor the chance to encounter, in one location, three distinctly designed and constructed colonial forts garrisoned by the three nations that fought for possession of North America more than two centuries ago.

Although each of the three Forts of Presque Isle fulfilled their needs, they were considerably smaller in comparison to the imposing fortresses mentioned earlier. Nonetheless, all three forts of Presque Isle held the central link in a chain of fortifications that stretched from the forks of the Ohio to the Great Lakes and up the St. Lawrence River. Without control of this strategic location at Presque Isle, the French, British and later the American forces would not have been able to thwart their adversaries by using the vital waterways to transport troops, communications, and goods.

When the Three Forts of Presque Isle are viewed within the context of Erie County's billion-dollar tourism market, strengthened by emerging bayfront development and its immediacy to Presque Isle State Park, this niche destination in the heart of Erie's oldest and most historic neighborhood could become an instrumental player in invigorating the downtown

economy, fortifying Erie's branding efforts, and reasserting a sense of civic pride among its people.

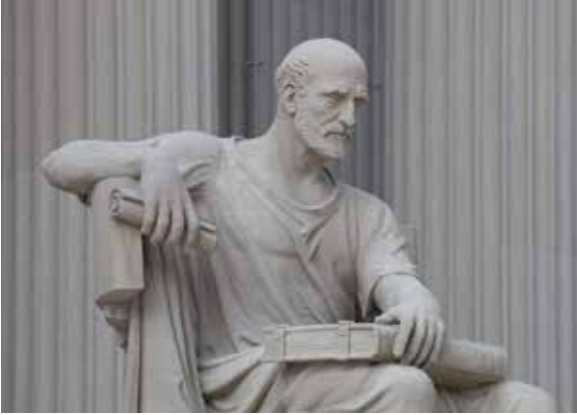


Figure 2. "The Past" at National Archives Building in Washington, D.C.

Power of the Local Narrative

At the north entrance of the National Archives Building in Washington, D.C., which holds original copies of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights, stands two imposing statues, "The Past" and "The Future." The Past, with eyes cast down the corridor of time, sits near the Pennsylvania Avenue entrance. On its lap is the closed book of history with a Confucius paraphrase etched in the base that reads "Study the Past." Sitting across is "The Future," peering into what is still yet to come. An open book rests on its lap with the inscription from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, which reads "What's past is prologue," signifying that the past moves the future, which is forever unfolding. These statues and the symbolism they portray convey an understanding that our national history is important because it is directly connected to the present and future of the nation.

But what about local history? Why have we not attached comparable importance to understanding local history? Isn't all history local? The late Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Tip O'Neill, is often quoted as saying, "all politics is local" but couldn't the phrase equally be understood as "all history is local"? After all, the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence were written and signed in the city of Philadelphia, and the Bill of Rights was drafted in the city of New York. These momentous events happened in local communities surrounded by



Figure 3. "The Future" at National Archives Building in Washington, D.C.

local people who helped shape these important documents. It was local settlers who shaped the contours of the landscape by clearing the forest, constructing roads and buildings. The settling of the North American continent is an epic written in the blood and sweat of men and women, and like all epics it is composed in the local oral tradition, with tales told around the campfire, with the language of scouts and squatters, of trappers and land agents, of Iroquois braves and plantation hands, all tongues that were wagging in an American way.

As the City of Erie contends with many serious challenges, we do well to remember both our central place in the drama of the early nation and the potential of our cultural and economic assets in local and regional revitalization. Stories about the past not only teach us how to act, but also inspire us to identify with the community today. Stories are not chronological collections of events stored neatly in memory's warehouse, pulled from time's dusty shelf for convenience's sake, but rather they are ways for us to understand the world and our place in it. They are embedded with power to not only explain the way things are but, more importantly, they hold the capacity to make change imaginable and urgent. In short, a unifying understanding and appreciation of our richly diverse achievements as a city can help us meet the demanding challenges of the present.

The first section of this essay is about some of the people who settled in Erie and left their mark on the community. The intention is to first reemphasize their significance in the early history of the republic and, second, to enlist them as the foundation upon which the community might build a more dynamic future for Erie's historic east side.

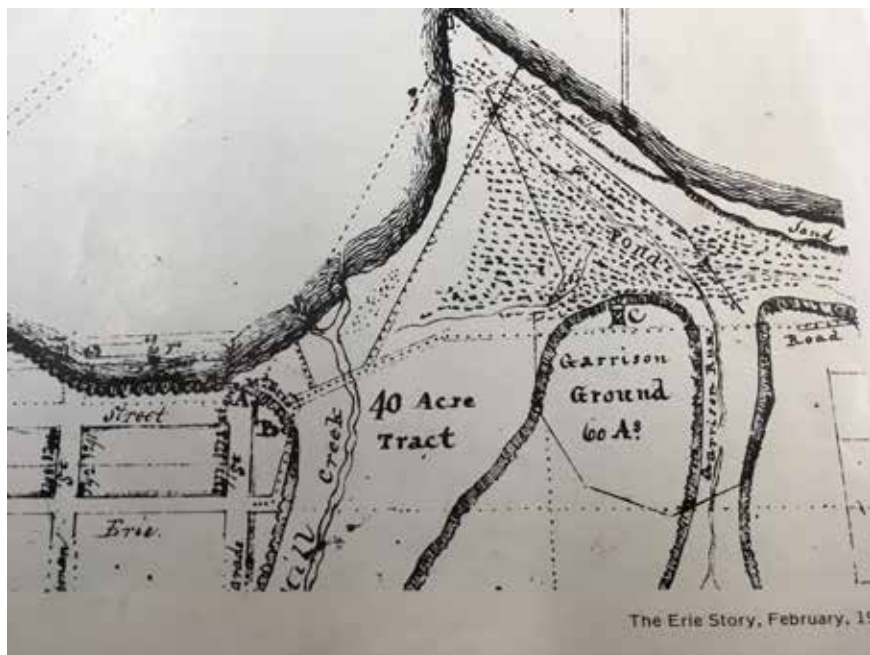


Figure 4. French, British (B) and American Forts of Presque Isle (C). Erie circa 1820s.

Erie's East Bayfront

This essay also pays tribute to the people who settled here over the decades and to those who live in the East Bayfront today. It was the East Bayfront that became the home of African Americans and successive waves of immigrants – the English, Germans, Irish, Russians, and Polish – and East Bayfront remains one of the most ethnically diverse parts of Erie. The people living in these neighborhoods have the greatest stake in the area's revival. This generation's story, and the places that make up the district today, are not separate from the story of Anthony Wayne, nor of the pioneers and immigrants who came before them, but rather part of the continuing unfolding story of this historic area of the city. Aligning historic narratives with the experiences of today's residents and their specific community agendas also holds tremendous power in connecting people of diverse backgrounds. Community engagement across ethnic and religious lines, across economic classes, and between past and present, can create a greater sense of social coherence, bringing a disjointed public together and helping to restore the vitality of Erie's urban core.

The land along East Front Street, which was inhabited first by the indigenous people, then the French, the British, and finally the Americans, has rarely been fully understood by the residents of Erie. Even now, the often aged and tattered infrastructure in much of East Bayfront is considered one of Erie's greatest liabilities, yet just below the surface lies Erie's most important untapped history, capable of igniting neighborhood cohesion and downtown revitalization.

The Stakes

The City of Erie's immigration history starts at the mouth of Mill Creek and extends along East Front Street at the bluff's edge overlooking Presque Isle Bay. Reconnecting with and investing in East Bayfront's historic past will position Erie to stand out from the homogenized mainstream of strip malls, chain restaurants, amusement parks, and suburbs, gaining a decisive edge in the competition for people's attention and interest. Historic preservation has already shown that northeast Erie can be a vibrant area, and the larger East Bayfront area could be an attractive site for heritage tourism, mixed residential living, and new investment. Erie Insurance played a key role in the rejuvenation, along with the Bayfront East Side Taskforce and Preservation Erie. Yet, given the serious challenges still confronting Erie's urban core, the moment for bold and immediate action has arrived. What we do at this turning point will determine the immediate and long-term future of the City of Erie and the surrounding region.

Lessons in History and Politics

The idea of reconstructing the American Fort Presque Isle on the Garrison Ground to commemorate the service of General Wayne and the United States military is not a new one. In 2002, in his seventh year in office, then-U.S. Rep. Phil English, of Erie, introduced to the 107th Congress a bill called H.R. 4681 to "establish as a unit of the National Park System the Fort Presque Isle National Historic Site in Erie, Pennsylvania." The bill's goal was to have the National Park System take ownership of the historic East Bayfront site and construct and operate a fort on the grounds of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Home "for the benefit, inspiration, and education of the people of the United States." The bill, despite having 22 co-sponsors, died in committee. Six years later, in 2008, Rep. English tried again, introducing to the 110th Congress H.R. 6730 with 19 co-sponsors. That bill also died in committee.

History informed English's interest. The current Wayne Memorial Blockhouse stands today as a tribute to General Wayne only because one man would not accept that the citizens of Erie, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and the nation would allow the memory of this important American patriot to be forgotten. In 1878, historic Erie figure Dr. Edward W. Germer, the Erie County Health Officer and a native Austrian, found and relocated the grave of General Wayne and his wooden coffin that had been long forgotten in a field overgrown with weeds and crabgrass. The military stockade and blockhouses were also long gone. The rediscovery of this national treasure by Germer, however, helped push state funding for replicating the log blockhouse that was believed to be one of the original blockhouses built in 1795. For the time, this investment was sizable. In 1880, the Wayne Blockhouse replica was finished and has since become the signature landmark of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Home, which opened in 1887.

Notwithstanding efforts over the decades by the Erie County Historical Society and other stewards of the city's founding history, few residents of Greater Erie today know much about General Wayne, let alone that a blockhouse dedicated to his memory stands on the bluff overlooking the harbor entrance where he died. Further, a growing number of Erie residents are not only unaware of Wayne's contribution to the nation and Erie's central role in these events, but also don't appear to realize what these historical happenings could mean for the city.

The proposal to rebuild the forts, ultimately, asks the Erie community to consider building something new and meaningful from their shared heritage. As Erie leaders strive to inspire people to work together on common goals, this essay will argue that communicating the city's history can instill a sense of identity and purpose. The call for a major investment in Erie's historic East Bayfront neighborhood also could be the spark that ignites a residential and commercial reawakening on lower Parade Street and bolsters a more vibrant downtown economy. More importantly, knowing and sharing Erie's civic story will bring the community together in pursuit of our common interests.

I. Erie's Origins

Before further discussion about the forts project, putting a spotlight on Erie's unique beginnings will help residents and potential visitors better understand Erie's earliest history and its context in our state and national histories. It spells out why Erie's history is worthy of being the center of a modern transformational project.

Eriez Indians and their Descendants: The Eriez or Erie people lived in what is now western New York, northwestern Pennsylvania, and northern Ohio on the south shore of Lake Erie and were related culturally and linguistically to the larger Huron-Iroquoian group. Frederick Hodge, in his study *Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico*, noted the Eriez Indians "were actually the parent stock of the Huron-Iroquois family." Hodge inferred that the Seneca assimilated the Eriez.⁴ The French gave the Eriez Indians the name Nation du Chat, "the cat nation," because of the number of wild cats found in the Erie region, most likely the eastern puma or panther. However, according to Harry Lupold's *The Forgotten People*, some scholars believe that the Eriez derived their name from the racoon, "since the Erie did save the penis bones of this animal, ate its flesh, and used the fur from its body." Although the Eriez Indians were primarily hunters and gatherers, archeologists have found that they grew squash, corn and had at least semi-permanent settlements. The Eriez were a warlike people and were highly skilled in the use of poisoned arrows discharging eight to ten before opponents could reload a musket. The Dutch of New York even called the Eriez "Santans," or devils, because of their aggressive nature. Although the Eriez were primarily hunters and gatherers, archeologists have found that they grew corn and had at least semi-permanent settlements.

The Eriez were destroyed by the Iroquois Confederation in the mid-17th century in five years of prolonged warfare primarily with the Seneca tribe. This coincided with the time that the first Europeans, the French, made their entrance into the region. The French were traders particularly looking for furs. The French pursuit of furs led to what is termed the Beaver Wars throughout the Great Lakes region and southern Canada. In the struggle between the Eriez and the Iroquois Confederation for control of the fur trade, the Eriez Indians, as a tribe, were obliterated. The remaining men were likely killed or enslaved and the women and children assimilated into the Seneca tribe. The French brought more than just a struggle over fur.

⁴ Hodge, Frederick W. "Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico." Washington 1910-1912. p. 617.

They brought new technology and disease that eventually reduced the Indian population dramatically. In *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, Jared Diamond estimates that the Native American population in North America has been reduced by 90 percent since 1492 by germs alone.

French Fort Presque Isle:

It was the search for a water route to the Pacific Ocean that led the French to Nova Scotia and then down the St. Lawrence River to the Great Lakes area. Three early French explorers crossed the Atlantic Ocean to present-day Nova Scotia. Jacques Cartier led the initial explorations. He sailed south exploring the St.

Lawrence River, but it was

Samuel de Champlain who discovered the Great Lakes and claimed them for France. Champlain also named the Great Lakes area “New France,” and based the French operations in Quebec. For the French, it was all about trade and religious conversion. The item that the French sought most was the beaver, an animal for which Indian peoples had little use. Europeans, however, coveted its barbed underfur for hats and other goods made from beaver pelts. In 1679, Rene Robert Cavalier, the third French adventurer, received from Louis XIV the rank of nobleman and was given an exclusive trade privilege with the five nations of the Iroquois Confederation: Mohawk, Seneca, Onondaga, Oneida, and Cuyahoga. His desire was to extend the boundaries of New France to pursue the lucrative fur trade.

The distinctive aspect of the fur trade was the Europeans’ dependence on Indian know-how. After all, trapping required familiarity with the beavers’ habits and habitats, which the French lacked. This reliance required the French to adapt to American Indian ways, which is evident in their pattern of exchange. They viewed the American Indians as trade partners and established personal relationships with the nations they traded with. They became members of the native communities. The French gave

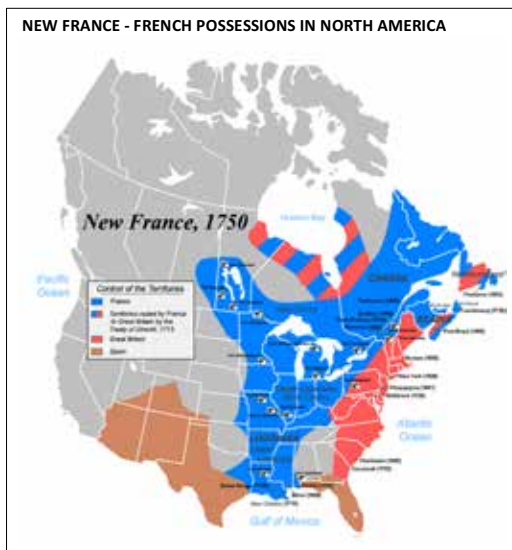


Figure 5.

gifts to the chiefs, participated in Indian diplomatic rituals, and even married into Indian families. As a result, metis (French-Indian offspring) played an important role in New France as interpreters, traders, and guides. The French relied on cooperation, not conquest. The French did not establish permanent settlements in the same manner as did the British colonies that were rapidly expanding along the East Coast from Maine to Georgia. The French, though, did create fortifications that were also trading posts, such as forts in Toronto, Michilimackinac (present-day Mackinac Island), and Detroit.

The character of the French operations, however, took on a confrontational aspect when the British colonialists encroached into the Ohio Valley region, which the French believed was their territory. The British colonial settlement, particularly Pennsylvania and Virginia, had reached the eastern base of the Allegheny Mountains and envisioned a natural expansion into the Ohio River Valley region for trade and future settlement. The prospect of this westward drive was a major threat to France's control of the Illinois Territory, which was expected to be the future center of agriculture and grain storage of a greater French North American empire. France felt that its colonies of Canada and Louisiana had to be linked by the Ohio River to undercut British claims to the Ohio Valley and halt further westward infiltration into New France's territory. Starting in 1753, France sent armed forces from Montreal to occupy the Ohio Territory and fortify its key points. This French movement into northwestern Pennsylvania and subsequent conflict with the British marked the entrance of Presque Isle (Erie) into world history.

When New France Governor Marquis Duquesne arrived at Quebec in 1752, he decided to dispatch a large force of troops the following year to take control of the Ohio Valley from the intruding British. He chose 61-year-old veteran Captain Paul Marin de la Malgue to command a company of 2,000 men to make the arduous journey from Montreal to Presque Isle. Marin's orders were to establish a fortified post on the south shore of Lake Erie, construct a road to the headwaters of the Allegheny River, make French Creek navigable, then establish a chain of forts to the Ohio River, and garrison them, all before the winter set in.

Initially, the first of four French forts was to be built in what is today Barcelona, N.Y., directly north of Westfield, about 32 miles east of Erie. The plan was to access Chautauqua Lake through a portage road and create a route directly to the Allegheny River through one of its many tributaries. Sometime in March, however, Duquesne was persuaded by a well-known, though unnamed voyageur to relocate the fort to Presque Isle, a place where

the voyageur had visited many times. Poring over maps and sketching out the Presque Isle landscape from memory, the seasoned trader explained that the peninsula and bay provided excellent shelter for the boats from squalls. A sandy beach on the mainland near what later would be called Mill Creek provided access to land boats safely.

The problem was that in early February, Duquesne had already sent from Montreal an advance party to prepare the way for the main expedition under the command of Captain Marin that would proceed in mid-April. On the first of February, while the ground and waterways were still frozen, Duquesne sent a detachment of 250 men, including 20 carpenters and masons, and a few bakers to Fort Niagara. While there, the men were to build 100 boats to be used on their journey from Lake Ontario to Lake Erie to erect a string of forts. To lead this important expedition fell on the young shoulders of Charles Deschamps de Boishébert, who, though only 24, had already been in the French service for 11 years.

In mid-April, Boishébert and his detachment arrived at the mouth of Chautauqua Creek at Barcelona. Finding the entrance of the creek shallow and considering the prospect of an exhausting eight-mile portage to Chautauqua Lake, the young officer took the initiative to scout along the shore line for a more suitable entry and came across the Erie peninsula. As luck would have it, new orders from headquarters arrived on May 3 that would send Boishébert and his detachment to Presque Isle, anyway, where they would begin the preparations to erect Fort de la Presqu'île at present-day Erie. In effect, it was this young and highly capable French officer, whom Duquesne described as "a very zealous and deserving officer," that started the first European establishment at Erie.

While Boishébert was working his way toward Erie in spring 1753, Duquesne sent Captain Francois Le Mercier, a 31-year-old engineer and artillery officer, from Montreal with a force of skilled laborers to Presque Isle. He arrived in mid-May and began to build Fort de la Presqu'île. The original sketch of Fort de la Presqu'île by Le Mercier was never found, but there are several credible secondhand sources that paint a reliable picture of where the French fort was built and what the basic structure looked like. After setting up camp, Boishébert began to cut down the large and abundant chestnut trees that would be used to build the fort and complete the garrison.

In early June, Captain Marin finally arrived at Presque Isle and found the fort in progress. Much to Marin's surprise, the fort that Le Mercier designed was more elaborate than the standard French frontier forts. These forts typically were built with a palisade of stripped tree trunks sunk upright

in a trench three to four feet deep, with logs rising about eight to 12 feet above ground. Marin sent a progress report to Duquesne, who immediately responded by reprimanding Le Mercier for wasting time and resources erecting such an uncommon fort and ordered him to build the next fort at Le Boeuf using standard frontier practice.

Fort Presque Isle, from all dependable accounts, was approximately 120 feet square and built on top of the bluff about 200 yards southwest from the mouth of Mill Creek. It possessed a commanding view of the lake, the creek and the bay from about 55 feet above the shoreline. The fort was stacked piece upon piece with 16-foot-long squared logs, most likely chestnut, to a height of 12 to 15 feet. The walls were 16 to 18 inches thick. There were four bastions, one at each corner but without embrasures and loops (musket holes). In the center of the southern wall a large gate roughly 10 feet wide was cut and opened onto the portage road that led about 14.5 miles south to Fort LeBoeuf. Another gate opened at the fort's northern wall, which led down to the bay and accommodated the unloading of supplies and their transport within close security of the fort. Apparently, the French did not anticipate the need for defense against an attack and constructed Fort Presque Isle primarily as a shipping center. Believing that advanced warning of a potential attack would give the French time to either prepare the fort for defense or cut and run, this fact may provide the clue as to why Le Mercier designed the uncommon fortification.

The penetration of the French deep into the Ohio Territory did not go unnoticed by Native Americans living in the area or British colonists, particularly from Pennsylvania and Virginia who were developing lucrative trading relationships with the Iroquois. The Ohio country refers to a huge geographic area of which today's western Pennsylvania was a part and included much of today's Ohio and parts of West Virginia and Kentucky. In the early 1700s, the Delaware and Shawnee migrated en masse to a sparsely inhabited Ohio Territory in response to British colonial land demands in the East. Migrating from upper New York were the Seneca Tribe of the Iroquois Confederation. The three native tribes of the Ohio country began to see themselves as Ohio Indians and accounted for 80 percent of the native population. When the French unexpectedly arrived in spring 1753 with 2,000 men and began constructing Fort Presque Isle without permission, the Ohio Indians quickly became alarmed at what they perceived as a breach of peace and a permanent fixture in their land.

As French forts were being completed, it was George Washington, addressing the French/British conflict over land rights, who personally



Figure 6. Painting of the Burning of the French Fort de la Presqu'île in 1759. Courtesy of Erie County Historical Society

delivered the British response from Virginia Governor Robert Dinwiddie in 1753. The 21-year-old Washington, who had been trained as a surveyor, was sent to the newly constructed French Fort LeBoeuf to state the claim of Britain to the area and demand that the French leave. He was escorted by the Mingos Chief, Tanacharison, an Ohio Iroquois, and the Seneca Chief Guyasuta. Jacques Legardeur de Saint-Pierre, the French commandant at Fort LeBoeuf, courteously rebuffed Washington, who left two days later for Virginia. After suffering an Indian attack, a baptism in the thinly frozen Allegheny River, and an unwelcoming night at Fort Machault (later Fort Venango in present-day Franklin), Washington and his guide, Christopher Gist, returned to Virginia, but not before an astute Washington made note of the construction and details of Fort LeBoeuf. The British eventually responded in what is called the French and Indian War in the United States and the Seven Years War in Europe. Historians point to this war as the world's First World War with battles fought in North America, Europe, Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The British were triumphant.

From its beginning in 1753 to its destruction in 1759, Fort Presque Isle did not change much. Men and provisions fluctuated inside the fort depending on the time of season and the amount of resources arriving from Montreal. From spring to fall, there could be a thousand men working on the enormous task of constructing the portage road from Presque Isle

to LeBoeuf. Before the onset of the bitter cold winters, most of the men returned to Canada, leaving behind about 100 soldiers at Fort Presque Isle to face harsh weather with little food. Life was indeed hard on the frontier. Malnutrition from an unbalanced diet and a lack of sanitary conditions often resulted in scurvy and drove up the high rates of death among the men. Not surprisingly, Erie's first cemetery was built most likely just southwest of the fort for the remains of French soldiers.

The situation turned worse for the French at Fort Presque Isle when word arrived in early July 1759 that Fort Niagara was under siege from the British. All French, Canadian and Indian allies from the Ohio Territory and the three remaining French forts of the interior were to rally at Presque Isle to provide immediate relief to the conflict. On July 17, nearly 1,500 men departed Presque Isle and about 500 were either killed or captured by British forces once they landed at the Niagara portage a week later. Those who broke and ran were either slaughtered or taken prisoner by the Iroquois warriors who had recently shifted from neutrality to support the British. Without the Iroquois alliance, the British, despite their large forces, would not have been able to take Fort Niagara.

During the first week of August 1759, all three remaining French forts (Machault, LeBoeuf, and Presque Isle) abandoned and burned their forts to the ground after sending off their supplies to Detroit. The resoundingly swift and bloody defeat of the French army at the Battle of Quebec in September 1759 and the subsequent surrender of Montreal a year later forced the French to give up Canada and the eastern half of French Louisiana, the very territory that sparked the conflict with Great Britain seven years earlier. The reign of French power in North America, which had spanned nearly 200 years, had come to an end, leaving behind only names they had given to the indigenous peoples, the Great Lakes, rivers, cities, and fortifications. Much to the disbelief and detriment of the Ohio Native American tribes, the French would never return to keep in check the unrelenting westward push by British colonists. The French not only deserted their defenses like Fort Presque Isle but they also abandoned the native peoples who had helped build their once lucrative fur trade, conceive offspring, and affectionately addressed them as "Father."

The British Fort and Pontiac's War: No sooner had the French abandoned nearly all of their fortifications in the Great Lakes region after a series of decisive defeats at Niagara, Quebec and Montreal, then the British, without the permission of their Indian allies, seized control of these sites

and commenced erecting their own forts. The British were not convinced, however, that the French would completely retreat, believing they could reestablish strong alliances with the Ohio Native Americans tribes to challenge westward expansion. Even though France was losing North America in 1760, the Seven Years War continued to rage in parts of Europe and India, consuming enormous financial resources from both warring countries. The future of Britain to control the Northwest Territory remained uncertain.

In 1758, Major General Jeffery Amherst captured the French Fort Louisbourg on Cape Breton, which opened the St. Lawrence River to future British incursions. The victory led to his promotion to commander in chief in North America. Later, as a reward for his success at the Battle of Montreal in 1760, Amherst was appointed Governor General of British North America. The capitulation of Canada, however, had left him with huge challenges, beginning with the administration of territories that extended from Newfoundland down the Mississippi River to New Orleans. To garrison and supply Britain's existing and new forts were tasks beyond the reach of any man at the time, especially one with shrinking manpower and funds.

Amherst directed General Robert Monckton, commander of the British troops in the southern district, to rebuild forts from Niagara to Machault/Venango. On July 6, 1760, Major Henry Gladwin, who had to travel by water along the southern coast of Lake Erie from Fort Niagara, arrived at Presque Isle with a small force of men and immediately began constructing an entrenchment of fascines, bundles of sticks bound together and used to fill ditches. A week and a half later, Colonel Henry Bouquet made his way to Presque Isle with a battalion of 400 colonists. The next day, 150 Pennsylvanians arrived under the command of Colonel Hugh Mercer. They immediately started digging a trench around the proposed fort to form the breastwork and started to prepare timbers to construct the blockhouse. Accompanying the detachment was the engineer Lieutenant Bassett, who designed the British fort based on the topography at the time. Under his direction, a unit of skilled laborers with special tools constructed the fort mostly on the original site of the French fort. This was evident by the re-tapping of the unsoiled well initially dug by the French and the pre-existing clearing on top of the bluff at the northeast corner of Parade and Front streets.

British Fort Presque Isle was built as a longstanding strong point and key link in the chain of communication between Fort Pitt (previously Fort Duquesne) and Lake Erie. It was the northernmost post in the Ohio country

and was heavily fortified. Colonel Bouquet carefully reviewed Lieutenant Bassett's design and decided on a massive two-story blockhouse positioned in the northeast corner of the garrison overlooking the mouth of Mill Creek and Presque Isle Bay. It was a log blockhouse 56 feet-by-56 feet and 16-feet high with wooden shingles and quarters for four officers in corner bastions and cannon emplacements.

The blockhouse was divided into eight large rooms with chimneys, enough to hold 150 men. The second story of the blockhouse extended beyond the sides of the ground story to allow soldiers to fire down on attackers who might place themselves directly outside the first-story walls. At the top of the blockhouse was a lookout, from which water could be thrown on shingles that had been set afire during battle. On the parade, Colonel Bouquet had the original French well cleaned and added a bake oven, a passage way from the officers' house to the blockhouse, and an outhouse.

An additional blockhouse was erected on the neck of the peninsula large enough to hold 12 men and a commander as there was constant concern of hostile Indians. A redoubt, or another enclosed defensive structure, and a corral for cattle were placed near the eastern end of the peninsula across the bay entrance from the mainland fort. The threat of an Indian attack was always on the minds of the men. A detachment returning to the fort from the neck of the peninsula was ambushed by a band of Indians reportedly loyal to the French. They included Delaware, Mississauga, Ottawa and Seneca tribes. Colonel Bouquet wrote to General Monckton about the skirmish:

“About 3 in the afternoon two of those men returned to the camp and reported that the canoe being too leaky, they were coming back by land when they were fired upon by 20 French and Indians near the neck of the peninsula. I sent immediately a party of 100 to the place, who found the sergeant alive, wounded by seven buckshot, two of our men killed and scalped, and two supposed to have been taken.”⁵

The Iroquois, however, were Britain's most powerful allies without whom the French could not have been defeated so readily. The need to maintain good relations with all native peoples forced the British to follow France's example and conform to the demands of Indian culture. Gift-giving and trade on liberal terms had been vital to forge alliances between Europeans and Native Americans for more than a century and a half. The

⁵ *Wilderness Chronical of Northwestern Pennsylvania*, p. 190. Bouquet to Monckton.

lack of gifts for those visiting the trading posts meant a lack of respect. Yet in his new position, when General Amherst was forced to make hard decisions affecting the allocation of resources, he willfully eliminated the practice of giving gifts to Indians, including liquor and ammunition, two goods they did not produce and were highly coveted. Basically, Amherst viewed the Native American gift-giving practice as nothing short of extortion and generally thought Indians “a vile and fickle crew.”

Treating Native Americans as subjects of the Crown and no longer allies threw into

question Britain’s underlying motives to Indian social and political standing. Eliminating the ancient gift-giving custom, which had deep and complicated meaning of social hierarchy for Indians, was a clear sign of contempt and a forewarning of the total extermination of their peoples. The Ohio Indians viewed these new rules as betrayals and a fundamental threat to their ability to carry on with the way of life they knew. This hardnose new policy would be the spark that set off a firestorm of rebellion led in part by the intrepid and persuasive Ottawa Chief Pontiac. In less than two months from Pontiac’s May 9 attack on Detroit, the western Indians had taken all but three British interior forts: Detroit, Pitt, and Niagara. The rest were seized by force or deception, their garrisons annihilated or soldiers taken captive.

Just before day break, on June 20, 1763, Ensign John Christie and 25 Royal Americans at Fort Presque Isle found themselves surrounded by a force of 200 Indians from the Ohio and Great Lakes tribes. Presque Isle was well supplied and highly defensible, and taking it would require the joint



Figure 7. Pontiac’s Attack on British Fort Presque Isle in 1763.

efforts of forces from Seneca Chief Guyasuta, Delaware Chief Custaloga, and Pontiac's followers from the west. Without notice they fired at the blockhouse and would keep it up all day and all night. The attackers dug in on two hills, on the north and south side of the fort, shooting flaming arrows down on the blockhouse roof and bastions. Through the course of the day, most of the reserved water in the blockhouse was spent putting out these fires.

The next day, the attackers invaded the fort by digging under the stockade and approached as far as the commanding officer's room on the parade, to which they set fire. Not having access to the well on the parade, Christie's men were forced to sink a well in the blockhouse. Toward the end of the second day, the men were spent and tensions were running high.

At midnight, an Indian who spoke French told the English it was no use trying to hold out, since they could set fire to the rest of the fort whenever they liked. Christie's men were exhausted and unable to keep extinguishing the fires. He asked if anyone among the Indians spoke English. One said he did and replied that they were Hurons, obligated to take up arms against the fort by Chief Pontiac. Now that they had it, they would allow the soldiers to leave when they pleased with six days' provisions. Christie told them to cease firing and said he would give them his answer in the early morning. But when he came out from the fort with his men at dawn, many of the soldiers were massacred, and Christie and two others were taken prisoner and later exchanged at Detroit.

General Amherst retaliated by waging a fierce war against the Indians, destroying crops and wasting villages. In a letter to Bouquet, Amherst asked: "Could it not be contrived to send the Small Pox among those disaffected tribes of Indians? We must of this occasion use every stratagem in our power to reduce them."⁶ Even the Pennsylvania Assembly, "with the approval of Governor John Penn, reintroduced the scalp bounties offered during the French and Indian War, which paid money for every Native American scalp, man or woman, above the age of ten."⁷ Frustrated that they could not take Forts Pitt, Niagara, and Detroit, Native Americans attacked British supply chains with short-term success. However, tired of waiting and running low on food, most of the Ohio Indians returned to their hunting grounds before winter. Pontiac, for what could be viewed as a successful campaign against a superior force, sued for a truce. In the final analysis, the Ohio Indians accomplished what the French could not. They halted the

⁶ *The Frontier Forts of Western Pennsylvania*, Thomas L Montgomery, WM Stanley Ray, State Printer 1916, p. 276.

⁷ Dixon, *Never Come to Peace*, 222–24; Nester, "Haughty Conquerors," p. 194.

spread of westward expansion by British colonists and forced a favorable treaty, albeit, short-lived. These concessions were a truly remarkable feat.

The main outcome of Pontiac's War was British realization that a consistent policy was needed to impose order and to appease the Indians. The Royal Proclamation of 1763 drew a boundary line from Canada to Florida beyond which no settlements were permitted. Thus, most of the land won by the British in the French and Indian War was to be reserved for the Indians. For a short period, it would be a white America to the east and a red America to the west.

George Washington, as commander of all the Virginia militia, retorted that "I can never look upon that proclamation in any other light than as a temporary expedient to quiet the minds of the Indians."⁸ Still, Washington, like Pontiac, would soon lead his people to take up arms against the British over the grievances of new tax policies imposed on the 13 colonies without representation in Parliament. The indignation suffered



Figure 8. Wikipedia Forts and battles of Pontiac's War

⁸ Tony Penikett, *Breaking Trail, A Northern Political Journey*, Trafford Publishing, p. 89.

by Pontiac and the Ohio Indians over Sir Jeffery Amherst's impetuous elimination of native peoples' sacred gift-giving custom was similar to the indignation felt by American colonists when Britain enforced trade laws and imposed taxes against the will of its subjects. Unsurprisingly, a conflict was imminent, but this time the Crown would lose.

Battle of Fallen Timbers and the American Fort: A little more than two years later, the British colonists in North America exploded in rage over the taxes levied by an almost bankrupt Britain, which felt forced to raise funds to pay for the French and Indian War and its Asian, European, and Latin American counterparts. While the American Revolutionary War was primarily concentrated along the East Coast of what would become the United States, the Great Lakes area was not altogether unscathed. When the American Revolution began, almost all Great Lakes Indians sided with the British against the Americans except for the Potawatomi at Milwaukee and around the southern shore of Lake Michigan and at present-day South Bend, Ind. America, nevertheless, gained sovereignty over the southern Great Lakes region when the British surrendered its control over lands west of the Appalachian Mountains in the 1783 Treaty of Paris that settled the Revolutionary War.⁹ Despite the American victory, historians have concluded that the British never left the Great Lakes area, including the forts of Detroit and Niagara, until after the War of 1812. The British continuously urged Native American unrest, and the Indians saw the British as their protectors from the threat of expansion of American settlers into the Ohio Valley and west. This was at a time when only a few adventurous settlers came over the Appalachian Mountains into the Ohio Valley. Change, however, was already happening. It was the time of the entrance of the land companies, such as the Holland Land Company and the Pennsylvania Population Company. It was the time when Judah Colt established his trading post on Station Road.

In 1792, after the Americans under Generals Josiah Harmer and Arthur St. Clair were defeated by Indians at the Battle of a Thousand Slain,

**PRESQUE ISLE
BLOCKHOUSE**

Built in July 1760 by British Col. Henry Bouquet, the blockhouse was 56-by-56 feet and 16 feet high. It was likely surrounded by a stockade, since it had 4 corner bastions with officers' quarters and cannon emplacements. Outworks included a surrounding entrenchment and 2 dependent posts on Presque Isle peninsula to protect corralled cattle.

⁹ Great Lakes History: A General View. Milwaukee Public Museum.

President George Washington appointed General Anthony Wayne, his Revolutionary War comrade and hero, as the commander of the United States Army of the Northwest. The main purpose of this army was to defend American settlers and encourage westward expansion. Wayne arrived with additional troops to supplement the Army of the Northwest in May 1793. He positioned his force at Fort Washington, near Cincinnati. In October, Wayne left the Cincinnati area and headed to Fort Jefferson, where six miles to the north of Fort Jefferson, Wayne ordered the construction of Fort Greene Ville. His army, which he constantly drilled, remained at Fort Green Ville for the winter of 1793-94. Then, Wayne had his men build Fort Recovery on the site of St. Clair's defeat.

Wayne's health was failing. He was suffering from injuries from a fallen tree, a gunshot wound to the leg, and persistent eruptions of gout. Paul Nelson, his biographer, quoted letters written by Wayne to his son Isaac, including this revealing remark:

"Deprived of life by the falling of a tree and was only preserved by an old trunk near where I was struck down which supported the body of the tree from crushing me to atoms."¹⁰ In another letter, Wayne wrote, "I find that I have been injured inwardly, from the frequent discharges of blood and by an almost total loss of appetite."¹¹ Perhaps because of this poor health or a premonition before the pivotal Battle of Fallen Timbers, General Wayne uncharacteristically enclosed his will in a letter to his son.

The Battle of Fallen Timbers took place on Aug. 20, 1794, and was the final battle between the newly created United States and the Indians of the Ohio Valley, an area north of the Ohio River, east of the Mississippi



Figure 9. General Anthony Wayne

¹⁰ Nelson, Paul David. *Anthony Wayne, Soldier of the Early Republic*. Indiana Univ. press. Bloomington, Ind. p. 261

¹¹ I.B.I.D., p. 261.

River, and eastward to Canada along the Great Lakes. In this battle, Native American tribes were supported by the British led by Captain Alexander McKillop. Although the Ohio Valley had been ceded by the British to the United States in the Treaty of Paris, the Indians, who had not been party to the treaty, refused to comply by relinquishing control of the territory to the Americans. They were particularly distrustful of the commitment of the Americans not to move westward into Indian territory.



Figure 10.

On June 30, about 1,500 warriors from the Shawnee, Miami, Delaware, Ottawa, and Ojibwa tribes, led by Little Turtle, attacked Wayne's supply train leaving Fort Recovery for Fort Greene Ville, killing and capturing many of the Americans. In response in late July, Wayne moved into northwestern Ohio and ordered his men to construct Fort Defiance to protect the army and its supplies. It was at this time that Wayne adopted brutal tactics, such as destroying native villages and the crops on which they depended.

As Wayne advanced toward the Maumee River, near present-day Toledo, Ohio, the Indians prepared to attack him in the Battle of Fallen Timbers. It received its name because a powerful tornado had earlier ripped through the dense woods, knocking down huge trees, and creating crevices and pockets in which to hide in ambush. Although the American Indians used the fallen trees for cover, Wayne's well-disciplined men forcefully dislodged them from their hiding spots with a bayonet charge. In the Battle of Fallen Timbers, the Americans lost 33 men and the Indian tribes lost twice that number.

The Native Americans, now led by Blue Jacket, retreated to Fort Miamis, anticipating that the British would provide them with protection and assistance against Wayne's army. The British refused. Wayne followed the Indians to the fort. Upon arrival, he ordered the British to evacuate the Northwest Territory, and the British commander refused. Wayne, on orders from George Washington not to start another war with Britain, decided to withdraw to Fort Greene Ville. It was not until July 11, 1796, under terms negotiated in the Jay Treaty, that Fort Detroit and Fort Lernoult and the surrounding settlements were surrendered by the British to the Americans. This was 13 years after the Treaty of Paris ended the Revolutionary War and a year after the Greenville Treaty negotiated by General Wayne. However, friction between Britain and young

LAND CEDED TO U.S. BY INDIAN NATIONS OF OHIO VALLEY IN THE GREENVILLE TREATY



Figure 11.

America would continue, leading these two adversaries into the War of 1812. After three years of fighting on land and sea and no real winner or loser to show for it, the two countries signed the Treaty of Ghent on Dec. 24, 1814, which ended all present and future conflict between the two nations.

Wayne's success in the Battle of Fallen Timbers was no doubt due to his insistence on discipline and rigorous training of the Army, which he called the American Legion in adopting Roman terminology. The Battle of Fallen Timbers led to the Treaty of Greenville and ultimately the British-Indian withdrawal from the territory. The Treaty of Greenville was signed on Aug. 3, 1795, at Fort Greenville, now Greenville, Ohio. The parties to the treaty were a coalition of Native American tribes: Wyandotes, Chippewa, Ottawa, Potawatomi, Delaware, Miami and others, and the United States government was represented by General Wayne. For the Indians, the loss at Fallen Timbers and the Greenville Treaty meant they could no longer depend on Britain for supplies and support. They had no alternative but to agree to Wayne's terms and desist from attacking the settlers moving into the area.

The Greenville Treaty that ended what began as Pontiac's War served as an impetus to the movement of settlers into the Northwest Territory, including the Lake Erie region. The loss of Blue Jacket, high chief of the Indian confederacy, also opened a window of opportunity for settlers to safely proceed into the hinterland. Nevertheless, almost immediately, conflict erupted, this time between those who purchased land through land companies or the state government and those who under their own volition moved into the now-quieted Indian territory. These were the so-called "squatters." Indian hostilities had prevented squatters and land companies alike from moving westward, but the end of the Indian threat brought this new conflict. On Sept. 22, 1783, the Continental Congress issued a proclamation banning squatters and indicated that troops would be sent to enforce the ban.

American Fort Presque Isle: By 1795, Indian control of the Northwest Territory was over. From his Ohio base, Wayne sent Captain Russell Bissell and 200 men to construct a new American fort at Erie. When troops arrived in late July, the town of Erie was in the process of being surveyed by Andrew Ellicott and William Irvine. The survey called for setting aside 60 acres for the construction of a fort for the United States Army to be located on the high ground between Mill Creek and Garrison Run, a small creek running just east of the site and emptying into the bay. According to the 1795 journal kept by George Burges, who was employed by Ellicott to assist in the survey,

the land for the garrison was “in the form of a regular half polygon of 6 sides.”¹² The garrison was positioned to have a commanding view of the entrance of Presque Isle harbor encompassing “thirty [acres] of which was on the high land and the other thirty acres in the marsh between the fort and the entrance of the harbor.”¹³ The fort was situated “100 perches from the spot where the old French fort stood.”¹⁴ A perch, or rod, is a surveyor’s tool and a unit of length equal to five and one half yards or sixteen and one half feet. If we use the current location of the Wayne Blockhouse as a starting point, the American Fort would be 1,650 feet or 100 perches from the site of the French and British fortifications between Parade and Sobieski Streets and Front Street.

The size of the American Fort was 100 square yards. The fort started at the bluff with a zig zag palisade at the northern point and ran along the bluff line, designed to fire upon enemy troops coming up from the banks. Ellicott’s and Irvine’s 1795 map of the garrison ground originally called for three blockhouses to be erected; one at the east and one at the west, both on a parallel line. The third was to be built on the south of the two blockhouses, splitting the distance between them. However, by 1796, all reports state only two blockhouses, east and west, were ever constructed. The function of the American fort was to provide new settlers with protection from marauding Native Americans and to facilitate surveyors headed by Irvine and Ellicott.

In 1792, the Triangle known today as the Erie Triangle became part of Pennsylvania, purchased from the federal government for \$151,640.25. The American fort built in 1795 was the center or cornerstone from which the town of Erie developed. A few years later, the first real estate transaction took place in a tent pitched near the old French fort. Seth Reed, one of the first settlers, purchased from the Pennsylvania Population Company land at the mouth of Mill Creek and built the log cabin Presque Isle Tavern, establishing a family dynasty that would span nearly a century.

When Oliver Hazard Perry took command of the Lake Erie fleet in 1813, the American fort with its two blockhouses had all but deteriorated. Perry was alarmed that Erie had made little provision for defense during fleet construction and quickly ordered the construction of four blockhouses: one on the eastern section of the peninsula on the bay side, one east of Cascade Creek on the bluff’s edge where Perry’s two brigs were being built, one on the American fort’s garrison ground also at the bluff’s edge, and one most likely

¹² *Journal of a Survey Trip into Western Pennsylvania*, George Burges, 1965 by Marydeana Duckworth p. 21.

¹³ *I.B.I.D.*, p. 21.

¹⁴ *I.B.I.D.*, p. 21.

near the intersection of Wayne Street and East Bayfront Drive overlooking the current Erie Coke Corp. plant. During the War of 1812, this blockhouse was occupied by a battery tactically situated to fire on British ships that could threaten to enter the bay. In 1880, the Wayne Memorial Blockhouse was constructed at the location of the blockhouse on the American fort's garrison ground originally built by Perry.

Land companies, the Erie Triangle, Early Settlers, and Commerce: At the end of the Revolutionary War most of America's 13 states had significant debt. Some of it was owed to the soldiers who stayed with Washington. Some states, including Pennsylvania, looked to the sale of western lands for the funds to pay the soldiers. In addition, funds to fight the Revolutionary War had come from European financiers, largely Dutch. These debts, too, had to be repaid. These financiers, particularly the Dutch, saw the immense amount of unsettled land in the west as opportunities for investment. Thus were born the land companies. Dutch financiers created the Holland Land Company, and in Pennsylvania, Controller General John Nicholson created the Pennsylvania Population Company. The goals of the two companies were identical: purchase large tracts of unsettled land in the west, survey it, separate it into parcels and sell it at a significant profit. While both land companies were highly active in western Pennsylvania, eventually the Holland Land Company bought shares of the Pennsylvania Population Company and the two were largely operated as one. Both were at odds with squatters and used new laws to evict them. Meanwhile, Andrew Ellicott was enlisted by Pennsylvania in 1786, even before the Battle of Fallen Timbers had made settlement of the Northwest



Figure 12. Andrew Ellicott

Territory possible, to determine the western border between New York and Pennsylvania. Ellicott would later lay out the new city of Washington, D.C., after President Washington fired Pierre Charles L'Enfant, who had drafted the basic design. Drawing the line between New York and Pennsylvania ended with the clear establishment of the Triangle Lands, the property between New York and Ohio bordering Lake Erie that had been claimed by

Connecticut, New York, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts and Virginia. In 1789, Washington asked Ellicott to survey the triangular piece of land to determine the border between Western New York and Ohio. Then the five contending states, under pressure from the federal government, ceded their claims to the Triangle to the federal government, which allowed Pennsylvania to purchase it in 1792. However, Pennsylvania's purchase did not end the land dispute in this area because of Indian claims. Later, the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy released the land to Pennsylvania for payments of \$2,000 from Pennsylvania and \$1,200 from the federal government. The Seneca Nation separately settled land claims against Pennsylvania in February 1791 for the sum of \$800. In the end, the Triangle Lands had clearly become part of Pennsylvania.

The year 1795 was significant because by this date there was clear evidence of a permanent Triangle settlement. In 1795, Captain Bissell's men built the last of three forts at Presque Isle. At the time, only about a dozen people lived in Erie. Among them were Thomas Rees, esquire, and Captain John Grubb, head of the Pennsylvania militia. Grubb had accompanied General Irvine, the Revolutionary War hero and founder of nearby Warren, with orders to protect land surveyors who were mapping the area. Rees purchased on behalf of the Pennsylvania Population Company 390 warrants, literally thousands of acres, in the Triangle and almost immediately the war between land companies and squatters began.

Many of the new settlers purchased land from the land companies or held their own warrants because of their service in the Revolutionary War. Among those settlers were Colonel Seth Reed and his family; Captain Martin Strong, who settled in the Fort LeBoeuf area but visited Presque Isle; and General Irvine, who received

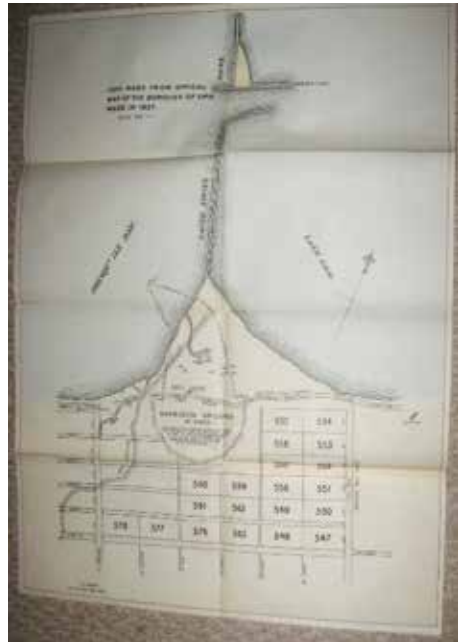


Figure 13. Garrison Ground and Erie harbor entrance, 1837.

2,000 acres in present-day Harborcreek Township for his war service. In addition, in 1795, a corps of engineers was escorted by a company of Pennsylvania militia that had returned to the area to begin laying out the town of Erie.¹⁵ The survey marker, called the Erie Stone, was placed at the southeast corner of the old French fort, and is now part of a monument area at the foot of Parade Street. Some of the other families residing in Erie at this time were Talmage, Dobbins, McNair, Moore, Miles, Cook, and Baird.

During the summer of 1795, while the U.S. Army and state militia were constructing the American fort and a team of surveyors were charting the town, Erie was visited by French royalty. Louis Phillippe, who would later rule France from 1830 to 1848, was in exile with his brother traveling about America. They spent a few days in Erie with Rees and Reed in his makeshift Presque Isle Tavern. One of Erie's most prominent settlers, Judah Colt, arrived on the shores of Lake Erie in 1795. He attempted to buy 30,000 acres of land for \$1 per acre from the Pennsylvania Population Company, which promptly declined his offer. Instead the company hired Colt as their land agent, a job he held until his death in 1832. By 1800, the first U.S. Census disclosed that the town of Erie had 81 residents.

Another commerce-related structure was a sawmill built at the mouth of Mill Creek in 1796 under Bissell's supervision to supply timber for barracks and dwellings near the old French Fort. The first brick yard was built in 1803 by Isaac Austin and B. Rice and was located east of Parade Street between Second and Third streets. The first two-story brick house in Erie, constructed from the bricks produced in this brick yard, was on German Street between Front and Second streets. Another imposing structure at the time was the Buehler House, later known as the McConkey House, at Third and French streets. It served as the headquarters for Perry in 1813 and later as Erie's first courthouse.

Erie's economy started much like the initial purpose of the French and British forts, as a transshipment center moving cargo from Lake Erie into the interior to Pittsburgh. The most significant commerce for the town of Erie was the hauling of goods such as furs, pork, lard, bricks, apples, soap, butter, whiskey and salt. Salt originated from the mines in Salena, New York, and were transported by wagons to Buffalo where it was placed in boats and sailed to the harbor at Presque Isle. The salt was unloaded, stored in warehouses and at a seasonally appropriate time placed on wagons and portaged by way of the Waterford Pike to French Creek. There the salt was loaded on specially made flat boats and floated down the Allegheny River to

¹⁵ Sanford, Laura. *History of Erie County Pennsylvania*. Heritage Books Westminster, MD. 1894. p. 82-83.

BUEHLER HOUSE



Figure 14.

the bustling town of Pittsburgh for distribution. Salt was so vital at the time that it was used as a monetary medium for which one could buy land, horses and slaves. The salt trade, driven in large part by James O'Hara, Pittsburgh's first captain of industry, became responsible for the fortunes of some of Erie's foremost entrepreneurs and affluent families. These include members of the Reed family, P.S.V. Hamot, the Sanford family and Daniel Dobbins, who was the most active and highly skilled mariner in Erie.

War of 1812 and the East Bayfront: By 1810, the population of Erie had increased from 81 to 394. The War of 1812 brought more people to Erie as it became the center of the U.S. effort to build a fleet and to expel the British from control of the Great Lakes. For both the British, who saw the conflict as part of the Napoleonic Wars, and the Americans, the Great Lakes region was potentially an important theater of war. For the United States, it was a reaction to impressment of American seamen and also the opposition to the British establishment of a neutral Native American buffer state in the Midwest. At the outset of the war, the British, based in Canada, controlled much of the Great Lakes, including Lake Erie. The Americans did not have a significant naval presence in the Great Lakes.

Enter Daniel Dobbins, who ventured to the District of Columbia to see President James Madison about the need for an American naval force that could be built in the natural harbor of Erie. Dobbins had learned of the outbreak of war when he was held captive twice by the British while on a trade trip above Detroit. General David Mead, based in Meadville, sent Dobbins to Washington, D.C., to report the developments and urge President James Madison to launch a defense against the British at Erie. Dobbins received appointment from the Navy Department of Sailing Master

and was ordered to repair immediately to Erie and commence building the fleet. He was instructed to draw funds from the Navy Department to meet the expense. On Sept. 15, 1812, Dobbins received authorization from Secretary of the Navy Paul Hamilton to build two brigs and four gunboats at Presque Isle on Lake Erie. By April 1813, Perry's "Fleet in the Wilderness" had begun to take shape. Tigress and Porcupine were launched in April from the yard at the mouth of Lee's Run at the foot of Myrtle Street, followed in early May by Scorpion from the same yard. The U.S. Brig Lawrence was launched June 25 at the Cascade Yard at the mouth of Cascade Creek, followed by the U.S. Brig Niagara and pilot boat Ariel on July 4.

Then-Master Commandant (Commander) Oliver Hazard Perry arrived in Erie on the evening of March 27, 1813, after an arduous trip, partly by sleigh on frozen Lake Erie from Buffalo. The garrison above the harbor was restored and a blockhouse built at the edge of the bluff. Farther east along the bluff near East Avenue, another blockhouse was built and accompanied by a battery with cannons sufficient to reach the entrance of the harbor. Two additional blockhouses were built at Cascade Creek to protect the shipbuilding and one on the peninsula. The military complex became the lookout point in the harbor defense. In addition, earthen redoubts were thrown up along the edge of the lake for protection. Both the militia and the regular army were stationed at the blockhouse. Brigadier General John Kelso commanded the militia, while Dr. J.C. Wallace commanded the regiment.

The final battle between Britain and the United States for control of the Great Lakes came on Sept. 13, 1813 in the Battle of Lake Erie. Many British officials believed that the United States wanted to take Canada from Great Britain. The British continued to cultivate good relations with the Indians and even promised to establish an independent Indian state in the Great Lakes region to act as a buffer between the United States and Canada. Prior to the War of 1812, two Shawnee Indians from Ohio, Tecumseh and his brother Tenskwatawa (also called the Shawnee Prophet), created a formidable pan-Indian alliance to prevent further American expansion west of the Appalachians and allied with the British against America. Although the British and their Indian allies enjoyed great success in Wisconsin and the upper Great Lakes region, the British once again lost this area to the

ERIE POPULATION	
1810	394
1820	635
1830	1,465
1840	3,412
1850	5,858
1860	9,416
U.S. Census	

Figure 15.

Americans when peace was made in 1814.

Several years after the Battle of Lake Erie and the end of the War of 1812, a settlement was clearly evident in the east bayfront area. This settlement was named after Alfred King, who had purchased outlots which he sold to newcomers, many of whom had originally come to build or protect the fleet. This community became known as Kingtown and was located just southeast of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Home. In 1853, the year before King would be elected Erie's third mayor, Kingtown teens burned the blockhouse to the ground. By that time, there was little evidence of the British and French forts, but there were other important structures in the east bayfront, including the Dickson Tavern and the Judah Colt House. Nelson's Biographical Dictionary and Historical Reference Book of Erie County (1896) noted that Colt realized that prosperity would be found near the lake, so in 1804 he left Colt Station for Erie, where he built a house on Sassafras Street. While seated with his family at the fireside, Colt died unexpectedly on Oct. 11, 1832 at the age of 71. Mrs. Colt died two years later at the age of sixty-six; "they left no children, two sons and a daughter having died in infancy."

Some exciting events occurred in the East Bayfront during the early years. One of the most memorable took place on June 3, 1825, when General Marquis de Lafayette visited Erie. The French aristocrat and military officer had fought in the American Revolutionary War and was a close friend of George Washington and Alexander Hamilton. Lafayette was led from Federal Hill near present-day West 26th and Peach streets by a battalion of volunteers in full uniform to the bridge on Second Street, which connected French and State streets over a ravine. Dinner tables were placed on the bridge, and spread from the span's beginning to end was a sumptuous banquet prepared by John Dickson. The bridge was covered by an awning made from the sails of the ships captured by Perry in the Battle of Lake Erie. All of Erie came out to catch a glimpse of the heroic Frenchman, who at the end of dinner lifted his glass and offered this toast:

Erie – a name which has a great share in American glory:
May this town ever enjoy a proportionate share in American
prosperity and happiness.¹⁶

¹⁶ Sanford, Laura. *History of Erie County Pennsylvania*. Heritage Books Westminster, MD. 1894



Figure 16. Judah Colt's House (1830) at East Front Street between Holland and German streets before it was disassembled.

II: The East Bayfront and Erie's Comprehensive Plan

The argument to invest in the creation of the Three Forts of Presque Isle and Interpretive Center as a signature attraction is best understood within the framework of Erie's comprehensive plan and its assessment of the East Bayfront planning area, as well as the greater Erie region. This proposal details how Erie's early history, which began on the East Bayfront about 222 years ago, can be a stimulus for social and economic revitalization for the city. This appeal for such a large investment is not for a mere stand-alone project but has been carefully developed within the agenda of the City of Erie's new comprehensive plan, whose key principles it embodies and whose strategies it fulfills.

Charles Buki, whose firm produced Erie's latest plan, *Erie Refocused*, acknowledged that the problems plaguing Erie are serious but not insurmountable. He went on to say Erie's problems are more of the "garden variety" faced by many post-industrial metropolises. Like several Rust Belt cities in the Great Lakes region, Erie faces challenges that can be characterized by significant job and population loss, urban sprawl and a failure to move toward a knowledge-driven economy. Though Buki

downplayed the City of Erie and Erie County's frequent political squabbling over the years, his frank Letter of Transmittal to Erie Mayor Joseph Sinnott argued that Erie's fundamental problem is a proclivity for "self-inflicted wounds."¹⁷ He stated that Erie has never really grown up because of its self-defeating habits and attitudes that often prevented the community from having serious conversations about its future. He warned that Erie would elude prosperity if it continued to avoid honest and inclusive discussions.

Situated only a few blocks from downtown Erie and a stone's throw of the bayfront, the Three Forts of Presque Isle would be a major tourist destination helping to draw a critical mass of visitors to the urban core, a factor that is key to the revival of any struggling downtown. The location of the forts would foster a walkable urbanism by integrating the bayfront with Erie's downtown, thereby reawakening in Erie the prospect of a second spring. In Buki's Letter of Transmittal, he asserted that "if the City of Erie is to have a second act, optimizing the bayfront for its cultural and recreational value, its real estate value, and its iconic value, needs to happen."¹⁸ Finally, targeting investment in the historic East Bayfront neighborhood would signal to the entire community that Erie's east side can play a meaningful role in the strengthening of the city's urban core. If not, it will be an unbearable weight dragging down the center, never quite achieving the unison that urban renewal requires.

Targeting Investment in Core City Assets

The *Erie Refocused* plan, often called the Buki Report, is Erie's third major community plan since Andrew Ellicott and William Irvine mapped the town of Erie in 1795. The city's subsequent three plans included the visionary John Nolen Plan of 1913, which was rolled out during a time of great economic expansion and in concurrence with the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Lake Erie. About 50 years later, the Maurice E. H. Rotival Plan reflected a time when Erie's economy was beginning to peak, and its more prosperous population started its long migration to the suburbs. One of Rotival's major assertions eventually paved the way for the Bayfront Parkway, which revealed Erie's bayfront to the public but severed Erie's most treasured real estate property from its downtown. The third comprehensive plan, *Erie Refocused*, was produced by Buki's CZB Planning firm in April 2016, as Erie faced some of its biggest challenges in decades. The city has lost nearly 30

¹⁷ The Erie Reader, Wednesday, April 13, 2016, Published in: Vol. 6, No. 8.

¹⁸ Buki Letter of Transmittal.

percent of its population since the 1960s. In addition, the Census Bureau reported “26.9 percent of the city’s residents, or 25,572 people, lived below federal poverty guidelines in 2015. The federal poverty line is \$24,300 in annual household income for a family of four and \$11,880 for an individual. Erie’s current rate is the second-highest of any major city in Pennsylvania, topped only by Reading’s 38.8 percent.”¹⁹ Erie’s public school district also teetered on bankruptcy before consolidating its four high schools into two, eliminating two middle schools, and receiving the promise of substantially more state funding.

As many questions remain to be answered, any search for Erie’s history discloses that the east bayfront is its most historically significant area. Today, however, an inspection of the east bayfront reveals a highly distressed area. To help understand this new comprehensive plan, the Buki team divided the city into 17 planning zones, each forming a collection of neighborhoods.

One of the 17 planning areas is East Bayfront, identified as approximately one square mile, consisting largely of vacant factories, deteriorating houses, and too many trash-strewn yards. Because of the last 50 years of disinvestment, much of the east bayfront zone has hit bottom as more prosperous families moved to the suburbs, leaving behind mostly those who couldn’t afford to move. Many manufacturers abandoned the city as well, depriving urban populations of what had long been the major source



Figure 17. Blighted Property in East Bayfront Planning Zone.

¹⁹Gerry Weiss and Chris Sigmund, *Erie Times News*, Sept. 15, 2016

COMPARISON OF ERIE NEIGHBORHOODS

ITEM	Highly Distressed	Highly Distressed	Distressed	Distressed
	EAST BAYFRONT	TRINITY PARK	LITTLE ITALY	PULASKI LIGHTHOUSE
RESIDENTS	9,574	6,824	7,850	4,075
HOUSEHOLDS	3,353	2,325	3,212	1,578
HOME OWNERSHIP RATE	30%	41%	32%	44%
AVERAGE HOME SALE	\$24,369	31,416	47,969	35,642
POVERTY RATE	46%	41%	41%	42%

Figure 18.

of decent-paying jobs and sufficient tax revenues to support the city and school district. When property values plummet, crime rates rise. As the *Erie Refocused* report states:

The East Bayfront's high levels of property distress, vacancy, and abandonment are perhaps the most tangible expressions of Erie's supply and demand imbalance, as well as the class and racial disparities that closely track neighborhood conditions in the city.²⁰

Despite the increasingly distressed appearance of the east bayfront planning area, no other section of the city holds greater potential for historic-based economic revitalization. These zones are identified with various statistics of economic need and with recommended core strengthening strategies. It is no surprise that the two most highly distressed planning areas are on Erie's east side: East Bayfront and Trinity Park. Of the 17 planning areas identified in the plan, the east bayfront has the most residences and households, but has the lowest home ownership, lowest average home sale, and the highest poverty rate at 46 percent.

Buki described the urban core as a geographic area that covers the bayfront to 12th Street, including the West Bayfront, East Bayfront and downtown planning zones. Buki pointed out that this area is the heart of the region, and strengthening it is "key to creating an amenity-rich city that competes for households and businesses at a high level."²¹

The historic East Bayfront neighborhood, with some of its housing stock dating back to the early 19th century, is set between Holland and Wayne streets, on the bluffs overlooking the industrial corridor of Presque Isle Bay. This neighborhood borders the east campuses of two Erie institutions, UPMC Hamot and Erie Insurance. Each of these entities

²⁰ Buki, Charles. *Erie Refocused*. March 2016. p. 37.

²¹ Buki, Charles. *Erie Refocused*. March 2016. p. 48.

employs nearly 3,000 people locally, and both recently implemented plans to collectively invest \$246 million in new seven-story buildings on their downtown campuses, thus creating hundreds of job opportunities. This major investment has led many to believe that downtown Erie could be entering a renewal phase. Concurrently building the Three Forts of Presque Isle and Interpretive Center just a few blocks from these private investments could create a connective tissue that supports these two anchor institutions, thereby expanding the initial investments and producing the impetus for regeneration that will spread from Parade Street back to downtown.

Targeting investment in core city assets such as the forts touches all four principles expressed in *Erie Refocused*. The report notes that the east bayfront, “despite its current levels of distress and disorder, possesses several outstanding historic and cultural assets that should, along with newly created parks, serve as anchors for new public and private investment.” Further, the proposed reconstruction of the forts would be a 15-minute walk from Erie Insurance and 10 minutes from UPMC Hamot, a comfortable stroll for downtown visitors. The six city blocks between downtown and the proposed forts offer the opportunity to reimagine the existing physical infrastructure and the social and economic relationships of the people living in and surrounding this neighborhood.

The waterfront has always been and will continue to be Erie's most important natural economic advantage. The proposal to connect the forts to the waterfront would also serve tourists. Joining these three urban core locations by a pedestrian bridge over the Bayfront Parkway also would reinvigorate and promote the East Bayfront neighborhood's historical importance and multiply the investments occurring not only along the bayfront but also in the downtown. Making the Forts of Presque Isle part of the bayfront experience would also reset how the greater Erie community perceives and values its east side. Through this project, Erie residents would rediscover their shared heritage, and in doing so, begin the journey of unifying the city's disconnected parts.

Building Overpasses for a Pedestrian Focus Redevelopment

First, a little more about some of the challenges that need to be addressed. As the Buki Report points out, development of a new tourist attraction like the forts project requires accessibility not only by car, but also

by walkers and bicyclists from the entire area. Progress has been made in this regard, especially with a dedicated bike path from Penn State Behrend to Presque Isle State Park, but much of the “walkability” occurs along the bluffs of West Bayfront. Recently, the Erie-Western Pennsylvania Port Authority opened two new pathways on Erie’s west side for pedestrians and bicyclists to connect with the bayfront. The new trail picks up the Bayfront Promenade at the foot of Cascade Street and runs north to a new traffic light and crosswalk at the entrance of Liberty Park. A second pathway stretches from the bluff at the foot of Chestnut Street to the Bayfront Parkway crossing at Erie Water Works, just west of the Erie Water Authority pump station. These pathways can be used for transportation, recreation, and fitness as well as connecting the many neighborhoods located in the West Bayfront planning area. Unfortunately, eastside neighborhoods along the bluff have few established pathways connecting residents or visitors to the city’s rich historical landmarks or the waterfront. Constructing a pedestrian bridge from the Intermodal Transportation Center over the Parkway to East Front Street would correct this oversight and open up the downtown and Erie’s historic eastside neighborhood.

Erie’s comprehensive plan captures this imbalance by pointing out that the “downtown and the bayfront feel far apart, with transitional areas including the slope down State Street and the Bayfront Connector that do not facilitate the safe and comfortable movement of pedestrians and bicyclists.”²² Depending on traffic and weather, it is approximately a half-hour walk from the Sheraton Hotel parking garage to the proposed forts project site at Wallace and Front streets. Currently there is no easy and attractive way to walk this tour whether one proceeds south on State or Holland streets and then to the Heritage Commons. In addition, because of high-speed traffic, it is a precarious venture for many pedestrians to cross the Bayfront Parkway at any place. More precarious for bicyclists and pedestrians is the crossing at the Bayfront Parkway and Port Access Road. There is no walkway or bikeway that continues from this point to East Avenue for those residents or visitors wishing to access the public beach or to visit the Great Lakes’ first Land Lighthouse two blocks farther east. Connecting these landmarks and public amenities with a safe and attractive pathway that runs the entire length of the waterfront from Lighthouse Street to Peninsula Drive would exponentially increase visitor use and get people out and about enjoying the waterfront.

²² Buki, Charles. *Erie Refocused*. March 2016. p. 41.

The intersection at Holland Street and the East Bayfront Parkway has the potential of becoming one of the most attractive crossings on the parkway if one considers the relationship between the built environment and the natural landscape. Some architectural elements of Blasco Library, accentuated by horizontal stripes running along its exterior facade intersecting at the entrance by tympanum arches, pay tribute to the architecture of Siena, Italy. Picking up this Romanesque motif is the adjacent Intermodal Transportation Center with its circular twin sea green domes buttressing the eastern entrance to the bayfront. Together these buildings create a handsome welcoming portal to Erie's waterfront. On the southeast side of the parkway at this intersection is the iconic Russian Church of the Nativity with its glistening gilded onion dome affixed like a beacon at the bluff's edge as it harkens back to a time when that neighborhood was bustling with Russian immigrants. At the southwest corner, the bluff leads the eye gently upwards to UPMC Hamot's buildings stretching along the bluff line from State to Holland streets, signifying the sheer scale of the health care industry in Erie. This unassuming intersection, if carefully developed, can bring value to the image of the city, especially if the Scott family's Harbor Place project converts the former Penelec smokestack into a symbolic lighthouse complementing the Bicentennial Tower or a climbing wall.



Figure 19. Aerial View of Intersection at Holland Street and Bayfront Parkway.

For these reasons, installing an eye-catching pedestrian bridge traversing the parkway from the Intermodal Center to the foot of East Front Street not only becomes a practical way to move many people back and forth from the downtown to the waterfront, but also becomes the light switch illuminating the entire intersection.

Erie Refocused has asserted that pedestrian pathways are essential to connecting a community. The construction of pedestrian overpasses to easily cross the Bayfront Parkway has been recommended by the Erie-Western Pennsylvania Port Authority and the Downtown Partnership in their published master plans. These plans recommend “pedestrian bridges and crossings to connect the downtown and the bayfront as interim measures until a larger, final project is constructed. (Ref. Waterfront Master Plan and 2015 Penn DOT Parkway Study.) Possible locations for such connections include from the bluffs to the Bayfront Convention Center, State Street, and from UPMC Hamot to the Scott Enterprises property.”²³

With two or three walkways over the Bayfront Parkway in place, the stage would be set for pedestrian circulation to flow easily between the downtown and the bayfront, reducing the need for vehicular transportation and increasing the likelihood of better foot traffic. However, these proposed overpasses should not be “interim stopgaps” while the Gordian Knot at State Street and Bayfront Parkway gets resolved but rather permanent fixtures enhancing the singular vista of the waterfront and making it easier to attract that critical mass of people needed if Erie is going to survive and flourish. An overpass is a prerequisite for economic viability for the Three Forts of Presque Isle and the amenities at the bayfront. Connecting the historic East



Figure 20. Rendering of Lafayette Street pedestrian bridge over railroad tracks in Portland, Oregon.

²³ Erie Downtown Master Plan, page 80 section 1.2.3.

Bayfront neighborhood with the bayfront supports the flow of pedestrian traffic unimpeded by the challenging crossing that exists today at Holland Street and the Bayfront Parkway.

This recommended pedestrian bridge would be about 300 feet long from the south lawn of the Intermodal Transportation Center into the bank just beneath East Front Street between German and Holland streets. Building this overpass into the bank flush at street level east of the Russian Church of the Nativity, would eliminate any obstructions blocking the view of the bayfront. Further, this overpass would become the gateway for those who work and live in the downtown area and who may wish to visit the bayfront for lunch or recreational purposes. Installing a lift at the entrance to the overpass at the Intermodal Transportation Center would offer handicap access. The walk from the Sheraton Hotel to this overpass is about 10 minutes with ample time to enjoy the wide-ranging scenery.

Like all bridges that intra-connect cities such as Pittsburgh, Chicago, or Chattanooga, Tenn., constructing pedestrian overpasses fosters a more walkable urban core and will naturally increase the number of people on the streets. Cities that invest in this infrastructure also create a more attractive place in which to work, recreate and live. A vibrant city is one that lets people interact efficiently, irrespective of the physical extent of the city. What really matters is whether people can meet face-to-face. The more public connections a city makes adds tremendous value to the urban core's vibrancy. And it is this "buzz" that attracts more and more people.

Such is the central point Buki made in *Erie Refocused*. He urged the creation of a pedestrian-focused redevelopment on the bayfront connecting Erie's leading asset with its downtown and adjoining neighborhoods. Correspondingly, with a signature attraction in place like the forts project, this arrangement could work equally well by attracting bayfront visitors to Erie's historic East Bayfront neighborhood and ultimately to downtown.

III. The Three Forts of Presque Isle and the Interpretive Center

Site Location: The precise location of the French and British forts cannot be known with certainty because a portion of the land they once occupied at Parade and East Front streets has been altered significantly by various developments since the early 1800s. However, after inspection of the 1795 map made by Ellicott and Irvine to lay out the town of Erie and the written descriptions of the forts from the French, British and American military, one can narrow down the locations with some degree of accuracy.

In the middle of East Front Street, between German and Parade streets, a gentle slope begins to descend eastwardly past the Heritage Parade Street Memorial and finally flattens out between Sobieski and Wallace streets about 175 feet from the tubed Mill Creek, which runs just beneath the city's surface. When the French military built Fort Presque Isle in 1753, this descending grade would not have been so gradual but would have had two tiers before ending sharply at the edge of the ravine about 50 feet above Mill Creek. The lower tier would have been closest to Mill Creek. The edge of the ravine swung from the bluff in a 90-degree angle south along Sobieski Street to Second Street, then cut west in another 90-degree angle back along Second Street crossing over Parade Street. This topographical lip above Mill Creek, where the French and British Forts were erected, may explain the small irregular size of this city block between Parade and Sobieski streets and from Front to Second streets.

The original 1795 town map made by Ellicott and Irvine depicts a dozen streams, creeks, and tributaries of various sizes emptying into the bay from Ash Street to Lincoln Avenue. These tributaries carved deep irregular V-shape ravines out of the embankments between which the land at the top was generally flat, like a table top. The ravines cut by Mill Creek and Cascade Creek were the widest. The bustling brickyard of Austin and Rice consumed the ravine's western bank, which consisted largely of clay. Over time and by continuous development, this may support the reason why there are no remains of the French or British forts and may also explain why the gentle slope along East Front Street levels out between Sobieski and Wallace streets.

Finally, during the early 1850s starting at the docks at the foot of Holland Street, railroad tracks were installed along the eastern base of the bluffs and the water's edge. Between 125 and 150 feet of the bluff's bank from Holland to Ash streets were removed in preparation for the rail lines.

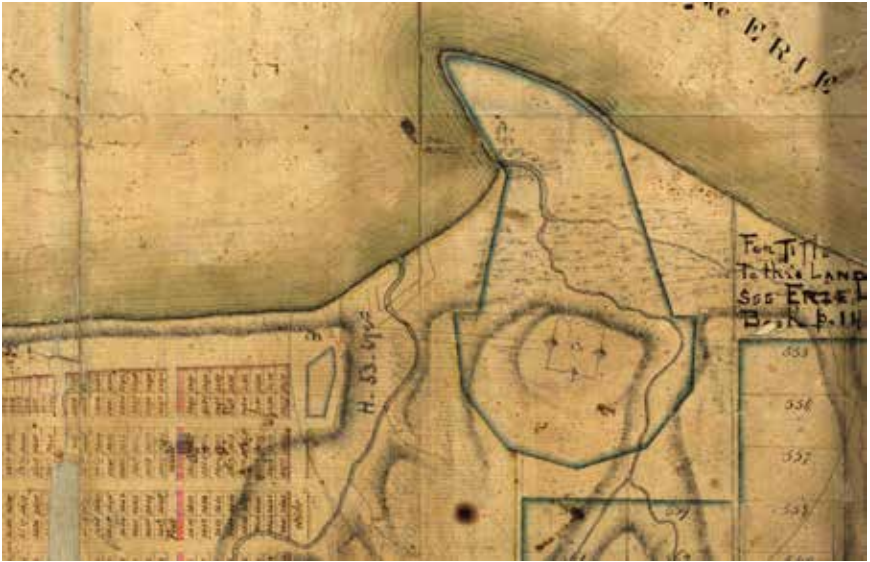


Figure 21. Ellicott and Irvine's Erie Plan of 1795 with French, British and American Forts of Presque Isle sites indicated.

The dirt most likely was deposited along the water's edge to extend the shoreline farther into the bay, thereby rendering the area usable for future dock extensions. The rail lines turn south near the foot of Ash Street and cut a wide path through the high bank on the eastern side of Mill Creek. This explains why a pedestrian bridge over these railroad tracks once connected the Wayne Memorial Blockhouse and Cemetery to the grounds of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Home.

In determining the original sites of the three Presque Isle forts, we can build on the historic information left by surveyor Ellicott, whose rendering of the location of the forts is shown on the next page.

Much of what is known today about the location of the American fort comes through the journal written by George Burges in summer 1795 after he was hired by Ellicott to assist in surveying Erie, Waterford, Franklin, and Warren. Burges also described in his journal life on the frontier, documenting stories from escaped children once held captive by Native Americans, his reaction to first seeing Lake Erie from the summit of the Old French Road just south of Interstate 90 on route from Fort Le Boeuf (Waterford) to Fort Presque Isle and eating fistfuls of "cram-berries" from the peninsula.

While charting the town of Erie in late July, the Chief of the United States Army Corps of Engineers, Stephen de la Rochefontaine, determined the site for the American Fort on the 60 acres set aside for use by the United States Army. Burges describes him as “a corpulent French man, and to appearance is a good natured man.”²⁴ The American garrison was located on 30 acres of the high ground east of the mouth of Mill Creek in the “form of a regular half polygon of six sides.”²⁵ The other 30 acres would run down the cliff to the marsh between the fort and the entrance to the harbor.

From Burges’ description on July 30, 1795, it is learned that the French fort was built on the elevated west bank of Mill Creek and slightly below the bank of where the town of Erie is to be surveyed:

We laid out the ground for the [American] fort, which is to be 100 yards square, and is situated a hundred perches from the spot where the old French Fort stood, down the lake from the old fort on a high bank commanding the entrance of Presque Isle Harbor, from whence there is a beautiful prospect of the lake as far as the eye can see. Between the fort and the lake there is a marsh of about 50 perches in breadth into which there runs a fine creek [Mill Creek]. The town is to be laid out on the bank of the harbor above the old fort.²⁶

The presence of the garrison in Erie, intended to reassure the fears of existing and newly arriving settlers, could not have come fast enough. In early June, a few months before the arrival of General Wayne’s men to erect the fort, a father and son were ambushed and killed by Indians on upper Parade Street and Old French Road, which was the access into the interior from Erie and the only traveled road. Sanford in her book described the incident: “The elder Rutledge was dead when found, the son scalped and also shot, but still alive, and placed against a tree”²⁷ but expired soon after. Thus, the need for the American fort provided protection to the settlers. It also provided Andrew Ellicott and William Irvine and their team of surveyors a home base from which to lay out the town of Erie.

²⁴ Burges, George. *A Journal of a Surveying Trip into Western Pennsylvania*. John Cumming. Mount Pleasant, Michigan. 1965.

²⁵ Burges, George. *A Journal of a Surveying Trip into Western Pennsylvania*. John Cumming. Mount Pleasant, Michigan. 1965.

²⁶ Burges, George. *A Journal of a Surveying Trip into Western Pennsylvania*. John Cumming. Mount Pleasant, Michigan. 1965.

²⁷ Laura Sanford, *History of Erie County*, p. 84.

Repositioning the Wallace Street Playgrounds

Although the French and British forts were erected between Parade and Sobieski streets and from East Front to Second streets, today this is a city block supporting 23 houses. There is no point or need to relocate these residents. Rather, the French and British forts can be ideally erected about 100 yards to the east on the Wallace Street Playground and Ted Amendola Field, respectively. The two playgrounds are owned by the City of Erie and maintained by the Erie Bureau of Parks.

This proposal calls for the relocation, not the elimination, of both city playgrounds. For the repositioning of the Wallace Street Playground, an option is to initiate the general concept presented in the *Erie Refocused* plan for the East Bayfront Planning area. Buki recommended Savannah, Georgia's famous Historic Square Plan model. The Comprehensive Plan proposes the acquisition of six city blocks throughout the East Bayfront planning zone, relocating homeowners and creating six large-scale parks preferably of equal distance from each other. This process requires gaining control of the properties, relocating residents, clearing the blocks and designing and developing high-quality parks and public spaces. This is a costly, complex and long-term process, but if managed correctly the *Erie Refocused* plan



Figure 22. Chicago's Merryman Park is a .15-acre pocket park in a residential neighborhood.

maintains that it will achieve the “right-sizing” objective and ensure a higher quality of life for residents.

An alternative recommendation, perhaps one more fitting and beneficial to the East Bayfront neighborhood, is to identify and then secure a string of vacant lots with no structures on them to design and develop a succession of “pocket parks.” These pocket parks can provide opportunities for small event space, play areas for children, spaces for relaxing or meeting friends, taking lunch breaks, or cultivating community gardens. Pocket parks are usually developed by community groups, private entities, or foundations trying to reclaim empty spaces for the benefit of the local neighborhood. There are approximately 20 vacant lots currently in the historic East Bayfront neighborhood. The pocket-park initiative could be led in part by B.E.S.T., the East Bayfront Neighborhood Watch, and other related organizations in Erie. More importantly, the cost would be relatively inexpensive compared to Buki’s proposed Savannah Square Plan and far more expedient for the relocation of the Wallace Street Playground.

The challenge is where to relocate the infrequently used Ted Amendola Field. Boys and Girls Baseball of Erie does not use this field; its use is an occasional adult softball game during the fall. According to the Rev. Steve Simon, of the Russian Church of the Nativity, Jeremy Bloeser of B.E.S.T., and Ed Masharka, owner of Janitor Supply Company, this ballpark sees no action. To relocate it into the East Bayfront planning zone would be somewhat challenging but certainly not impossible. There are only a few privately owned empty lots throughout the East Bayfront Planning Zone that can accommodate a baseball field.

One ideal location is across the street from the much-used soccer field at David J. Madurski Park between Parade and Wallace streets along East 16th Street. Across the street from David J. Madurski Park is an unused 2.5-acre site south of the railroad tracks off 16th Street, between German and Parade streets. This location, if acquired, offers enough land for a baseball field or another recreational park. This location is across the street from the Lake City Housing Authority and the Better House Erie apartments. The Booker T. Washington Center is two blocks away from this proposed recreational site and three blocks from the ever-popular Spoon’s Summer Basketball League at East 18th and Holland streets. Under one umbrella, these three recreational fields – the newly relocated Ted Amendola Park, David J. Madurski Park, and Spoon’s Summer Basketball League – would significantly enhance opportunities for summer activities for youth in this neighborhood.

Opening of Garrison Ground and Repurposing Janitor Supply Building

About 200 yards northeast from the proposed British fort site stands the rebuilt Wayne Memorial Blockhouse. It opened in 1887 on the original site of the American Fort Presque Isle. Land surrounding the blockhouse, including a veterans cemetery, is owned by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and maintained by the Department of Veterans Affairs. This well-kept park has not been significantly altered in the past 200 years, apart from the railroad line cut between the south side of the Garrison Ground and the Soldiers' and Sailors' Home in the early 1850s. A pedestrian bridge over the railroad lines once connected the Garrison Ground and the Soldiers' and Sailors' Home. Reestablishing this bridge would enhance the visitors' experience and make for a scenic walk about the Heritage Commons.

Central to this proposal is the Interpretive Center, which would house the exhibit spaces, gift shop, classrooms, offices, lecture hall, and observation deck. Janitor Supply Company on East Second Street, between Wallace and Ash streets, could be retrofitted into the interpretive center and is located ideally between the proposed British and the American forts. The Janitor Supply Inc. purchased this building in 1972 from Organ Supply Corporation, which had owned it since 1924 and "specialized in the manufacture of wood organ pipes, wind chests and consoles."²⁸ The original structure was built around 1904 and owned by the TRY-ME Manufacturing Company, which produced washing powder. In 1919, a new building doubled its capacity.

Every effort should be made to repurpose this old building for its intrinsic value, showcasing its history as part of the neighborhood's history. Janitor Supply operates several buildings on this property, which encompasses more than two acres, including ample parking for visitors. A second-story roof covering 3,600 square feet could become an observation deck overlooking the entrance to the harbor and the forts. In initial conversation, owner Edward Masharka III was supportive of the project and open to relocating the company if an agreement could be reached.

²⁸ Paul E Fischer, *Making Music* p. 49.



Figure 23. Pedestrian bridge connects Wayne Blockhouse to Soldiers' & Sailors' Home over railroad tracks, circa 1960.

Access to the Three Forts of Presque Isle

Visitors to the Forts of Presque Isle could enter the Heritage Commons from several ways. Access off the East Bayfront Parkway would make the most sense since it provides a direct and efficient route for visitors. Most out-of-town visitors would enter the city from Interstate 90 either from the east or west then take the Bayfront Connector if traveling from the east or Interstate 79 from the west. A traffic light between Holland Street and Port Access Road on East Bayfront Parkway would need to be installed at Ore Dock Road, which runs north between Sunburst Electronics and UPMC's recent purchase of the Environmental Reclamation Service facility. Ore Dock Road could extend south across the railroad tracks and tie into East Front Street then east to the foot of Ash Street, ending at the Interpretive Center parking lot. CSX Transportation owns the rail lines, called the Lake Yard, running east-west from State Street and eventually tying into the dedicated line from Erie Coke Corp. The Lake Yard's sole purpose is to occasionally park cars for Erie Coke, otherwise it is not used. An easement would be required to permit a traffic signal to cross the tracks and access the Forts of Presque Isle parking lot.

An additional benefit in establishing a traffic light at Ore Dock Road and East Bayfront Parkway is its proximity to Port Access Road, which ends at the harbor entrance at the South Pier next to Lampe Marina and Campground. Here, a proposed tunnel, about the length of a football field, under the channel connecting Presque Isle State Park to the east bayfront would fulfill a century-long aspiration to provide East Erie an economical way to reach the state park and its amenities. The peninsula attracts more than 4 million visitors annually. Whether a tunnel offers access for pedestrians and vehicular traffic or is restricted to pedestrians and cyclists, the returns would not be limited to the Heritage Commons but shared by all facilities along the bayfront, particularly Bayfront Place, the downtown and adjacent neighborhoods.

An east bayfront egress under the channel is also a potential solution to traffic congestion problems on the state park, where there is only one ingress. Most critically, the connector would provide public safety vehicles an alternate access route to considerably reduce time, depending on the location of an accident or incident. It now takes more than 30 minutes from the peninsula to reach Erie County's only trauma Center at UPMC Hamot at Second and Holland streets.

A second option to access the Heritage Commons is traveling through the historic East Bayfront neighborhood off East Sixth and Parade streets. Visitors could drive north to Front Street and right onto East Front Street and park behind the Interpretive Center. Directing traffic along this route poses both a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge, of course, would be a considerable uptick in traffic through this residential neighborhood. On the other hand, the opportunity exists for a considerable economic upswing along the northern section of Parade Street for restaurants, boutiques, coffee and ice cream shops, a bakery, a grocery store, and the possible reuse of East Erie Turners. Regardless of where visitors access the Heritage Commons, commerce along Parade Street stands to benefit.

After spending time in the Interpretive Center, visitors could be guided on a walking tour of the grounds starting at the French fort on the Wallace Street Playground, then pass through the stockades to the adjoining British fort on Amendola Field. Visitors will walk to the American fort by crossing the train tracks adjacent to the parking lot to an existing footpath up the shaded knoll where the Wayne Blockhouse stands today. Not only would the American fortification be accessible on these beautiful 15 acres, but visitors could also take in the well-manicured Veterans Memorial Cemetery.



Figure 24. Intersection of Ore Dock Road and East Bayfront Parkway is shown near proposed Heritage Commons.

Looping back to the center, visitors could use the existing path they arrived on or, if the pedestrian bridge over the railroads tracks were to be reinstalled, it would make for an inspiring way to end the walking tour.

Possible Price Tag

The cost of constructing the Forts of Presque Isle and Interpretive Center would be sizable. However, a multimillion-dollar project would be appropriate if the goal is to create a world-class historic destination with a reputation that would attract tens of thousands of visitors. There are, however, some important factors to consider regarding the expense of the project:

- No residents would have to be uprooted or relocated nor any homes needed to be purchased and razed.
- There is only one commercial building, Janitor Supply Company, that would need to be acquired and retrofitted into the Interpretive Center, and the proprietor is amenable to seeking an agreement.
- This commercial building comes with an acre for parking, which would accommodate about 110 vehicles.
- The size of the Wallace playground, Amendola Field and the northern grounds at the Soldiers' and Sailors' Home would accommodate the scope of each of the three colonial forts.

Function of the Interpretive Center

Tourism is a major economic activity in Erie County largely due to the attraction of Presque Isle State Park. However, tourism is much more than revenue for businesses and municipalities. It can provide people with possibilities for discovery, experiential learning, inspiration, and personal growth. It offers the opportunity for a community to showcase amenities unique to its history and landscape. The need to understand the world around us is a deeply felt human need, just like the need to belong, to be respected, and to pass one's values to the next generation. The Three Forts of Presque Isle and Interpretive Center could help to fulfill these needs and connect people to places, landmarks, and stories in a profound and meaningful way.

It is important to see heritage tourism for its multifunctional potential to achieve the goal of an improved quality of life for the residents of the east bayfront and indeed the entire City of Erie. Focusing only on the economic advantages of this project, though critically important, would miss the importance of other roles that heritage tourism plays, such as a tool for all life learning, social cohesion, forming common values and historical memory, and preserving local identity. Interpretation as a special, strategically planned communication can, with carefully designed experiences, make leisure an ideal opportunity for personal growth and a more tolerant and knowledgeable community.

The function of the Interpretive Center is not to serve solely as another fortress "museum" intended to glorify past conflict, but correspondingly to tell the story of how this important tract of land along East Front Street was the epicenter of Erie's first development. Further, the Interpretive Center would break with the traditional fortification model that tends to isolate events in history to a particular time, disconnecting those events from the effects they have had on the future. The Forts of Presque Isle Interpretive Center would rely less on the need for collections to illustrate the story and focus more on other forms of learning, such as touch-screen kiosks, photographs, writings, speech, maps, reenactments, 3D imagery, and even local festivals. Education, interpretation, and a commitment to the community will be important aims of the Interpretive Center as it strives to develop deeper relationships with area schools to convey Erie's early heritage.

The Interpretive Center, for example, could dedicate a space for hands-on miniature logs and other colonial style replicated tools allowing

students from kindergarten through eighth grade to learn about construction and defense, then apply their knowledge as they build a fortification of their own. A lecture hall equipped with digital capacity would allow conversation with academics, historical groups and universities around the country. The Interpretive Center would aid and stimulate the discovery process and the visitor's intellectual and emotional connection to his or her heritage. Developing close ties with local universities by providing applied field learning to students majoring in interrelated subjects such as archaeology and public history would ensure a reciprocal benefit for the community and the educational institutions. An additional goal of the Interpretive Center would be to coordinate special events and educational programming with the Erie County Historical Society and the Erie Maritime Museum to maximize significant anniversaries for the benefit of area visitors, local residents, and students throughout Erie County.

One of the distinct features the fort project would offer is exhibiting the history and significance of military architecture heritage. Of all the weapons of war, forts were the only ones intended to protect rather than destroy life. Forts were designed to maintain authority. In this sense, military architecture is the art of defense, not of attack. This unique facet would draw attention to the creative rather than the destructive aspects of human ingenuity by seeking to instill a feeling and an appreciation for architecture, engineering, and the way these elements are brought together exemplified by the three distinct colonial Forts of Presque Isle.

The theme of the exhibition focuses on the forts as a structure, their design, function, and construction. Before any fort could be put to the heavy task of defense, it first had to be designed and built, and the skills required were not the same as those essential to defend it. The military men who designed and built the forts had to be architects, engineers, and builders first and soldiers second. An aspect of the Interpretive Center would be to function as a stepping stone for the appreciation of military architecture and would introduce visitors and users to the differences of the three forts by placing each of them within their appropriate historical, architectural, technical, and military context. The architectural focus would be the foundation from which educational programming would progress. This educational direction would act as the impetus for a Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) approach to learning by elevating history and prompting behaviors like drafting, building, testing, and experimenting with designs, period tools, and material that closely relate to the process performed by the mid-18th century soldiers. By integrating

STEM into these settings, the aim is to engage students and visitors who may not think of themselves as architects, planners, scientists and engineers.

The location of the forts and interpretive center in the heart of this historic neighborhood encourages the visitor to consider exploring beyond the walls of the stockades and view the surrounding buildings and natural environs as a living exhibit hall in real time. An East Bayfront neighborhood exhibit space in the center would be designed with a panoramic map illustrating the progression of the neighborhood by explaining the landscape and how it has changed over time, identifying key sites and the structures that once existed and those that remain today. Currently in this neighborhood, two houses built in 1812 still stand. The map will highlight major events, like the clearing of land to erect the French fort above Mill Creek and Pontiac's attack on the British fort. A time-lapse chart illuminating the changes to the topography along the bluff, the shore of Lake Erie, and its proximity to the peninsula, Presque Isle Bay, and Mill Creek would offer the visitor a chance to reflect on man's impact on the land. The East Bayfront exhibit space would guide the visitor to the observation deck on the second-floor roof of Janitor Supply Company giving the sightseer not only a breathtaking aerial view of all three forts, the bay, Presque Isle State Park, and Lake Erie, but also the ability to observe how the East Bayfront neighborhood developed over time.

A Neighborhood in Transition

The most important factor of a thriving neighborhood is its aesthetic character. A low crime rate, first-rate schools, and treating fellow residents fairly are without question highly valued and essential. But is the neighborhood filled with mature trees? Are there several beautiful parks close by? Does it preserve its historic architecture? These qualities are key features that most people want in a neighborhood. Although the historic East Bayfront neighborhood currently exhibits scattered sections of blight, unkempt yards, and an elevated crime rate, the architectural, physical, cultural character, and integrity remain strong and clearly well positioned to transform into a more cohesively attractive neighborhood.

The stunning view of the waterfront from the east bayfront bluffs informs the visitor that Erie's bayfront is both a working port and one with many excellent amenities. A stroll along some of the East Bayfront's streets allows visitors to observe backyards imbued with mature Sugar Maples,



Figure 25. Erie Insurance Chairman Tom Hagen at the ceremony of the Pennsylvania National Guard 112th Infantry Regiment. The Erie Armory is in background. Christopher Millette, Erie Times-News.

Elms, Dogwoods, Red Oaks, Tulip, Poplar, and Chestnut trees. The National Guard Armory on the corner of East Sixth and Parade streets and a pair of elegant turn of the 20th century houses to its north have been exquisitely restored by Erie Insurance, creating a stately entryway to Erie's historic neighborhood. Presently, Judah Colt's house originally built in 1830 and of late located on East Front Street between German and Parade Streets, has been meticulously dismantled and will reappear as part of the Erie Insurance campus. The Pennsylvania Land Company hired Colt as general agent of all of its lands in the Erie Triangle. At the time of his death in 1832, Colt was the largest real estate owner of any Erie resident.

The neighborhood's most distinguished structure and one of Erie's oldest institutions is the Pennsylvania Soldiers' and Sailors' Home, which at one time occupied more than 100 acres of waterfront property. Located on East Third Street between Ash and Reed streets, the central portion of the building was constructed in 1867 as a Marine Hospital through the legislative efforts of State Senator Morrow B. Lowry, who conceived the idea to care for the sick and unfortunate seamen of the lake service. The building, however, sat dormant for nearly two decades and was for a brief time the quarters for the Home of the Friendless before that nonprofit moved to West 22nd and Sassafraz streets through the encouragement of Sarah Reed. In 1885, a bill was introduced by State Rep. Isaac B. Brown of Corry to establish a home for the disabled soldiers and sailors of Pennsylvania. The

Marine Hospital, being the property of the commonwealth, was selected and, following a year of restoration, the Soldiers' and Sailors' Home opened its doors on Feb. 22, 1886. It is the oldest of the six veterans homes in Pennsylvania.

The very names of the streets in this neighborhood are tributes to the people and companies that helped settle Erie. French Street takes its name from the French, who were the first Europeans to settle the area by building a fort near the southeastern corner of Front and Parade streets in 1753. The French also cut a portage road through the primeval woods from the mouth of Mill Creek to the headwaters of French Creek at Fort LeBoeuf. It ran parallel to Parade Street ending at the turnpike in Marvintown at East 28th and Parade streets and continued southward on Old French Road to Waterford. It was the only road in and out of town for 50 years. Holland Street is named for the Holland Land Company, which was composed of wealthy men from Holland who purchased large tracts of land in Erie County. German Street takes its named as a tribute and a marketing strategy to encourage the industrious Germans settling the southeastern region of Pennsylvania to migrate to Erie, which they did in droves as they became Erie's largest ethnic group.



Figure 26. Civil War statue dedicated to "The Unknown Soldier" overlooks Pa. Soldiers' and Sailors' Home Cemetery.

The streets of (John) Wallace, Reed (family), (Anthony) Wayne, and (Oliver Hazard) Perry are named after individuals of great prominence and whose notable actions left an indelible mark on Erie's rise. The neighborhood's most famous street is Parade Street, where the French and British erected forts and would "parade" their troops on the garrison ground for inspection, drilling, and to hear orders read.

These existing and renewed assets are observable indicators that this neighborhood is slowly transforming its image into one that will attract new investment. Under capable director Jeremy Bloeser, the Bayfront East Side Task Force organization, representing 25 blocks in northeast Erie, has sparked neighborhood redevelopment. Started in the mid-1970s by the Rev. Steven Simon of the Russian Church of the Nativity, Erie Insurance Group and [UPMC] Hamot, B.E.S.T. has a longstanding affiliation with companies committed to preservation and regeneration. The Neighborhood Watch group under the leadership of Del Birch, together with B.E.S.T., developed strong dealings with many of their neighborhood residents who understand that the essence of a neighborhood is not just a set of individuals, but a set of relationships that they are continuously forging.

The establishment of the American Fort of Presque Isle in Erie in 1795 led to the settlement first of New Englanders, New Yorkers and the Pennsylvania Dutch [Deutsch]. African Americans who moved to the area and waves of immigrants, such as the Germans, Irish, Russians, and Polish, stamped their imprint on the East Bayfront neighborhood, creating the cultural heritage we have inherited today. The legacy they left behind are the places of worship and social halls built in part to retain a sense of unity with their people and pass on their values and customs to the next generation.

The Irish, for example, started St. Patrick Church in 1837. The current church on East Fourth Street between French and Holland streets was begun in 1897 and remains known for its nearly life-size, hand-carved wooden Stations of the Cross, and hand-painted windows. The Irish found work in the local tanneries, brickyards and foundries, but it was on the docks just below the bluff that many Irish found steady work. Some of the African American families of the 1840s owned homes on East Third Street between Holland and German streets. The Waters family, for example, lived at 137 East Third Street where Harry T. Burleigh, the grandson of a slave, was born in 1866. He was Erie's and possibly America's most famous singer, composer and arranger of the early 20th century and bridged classically trained singers to black spiritual music and essentially saved much of

the musical form by creating formal compositions. In 1925, the Booker T. Washington building opened at 133 East Third Street.

Russian immigrants, who clashed with the Irish for better paying jobs on the docks, built Holy Trinity Church of Russian Old Believers and the Church of the Nativity at the turn of the 20th century. The Russians also brought with them the love of dark breads and sweet pastries. The Balkan Bakery on East Second Street and George's Bakery on East Fourth Street were legendary and drew customers from all over the city.

One of the hidden gems of this neighborhood is St. Hedwig's Church, which was built as a result of the large Polish community developing on Erie's east side. The parish formed in 1911 and quickly outgrew its first church. In 1934, a new church was erected on the corner of East Third and Wallace streets. A slender copper spire stands magnificently atop the bell tower of this Gothic Tudor-style church, decked with a sea-green roof of thick slate. The Polish Falcons Nest 610 social hall is just down the street. There is not another neighborhood in Erie that has as many beautiful places of worship servicing such a diverse mix of Americans than the historic East Bayfront.

All are worthy of visiting. The investment in this neighborhood, where the story of Erie's beginning awaits to be told, could transform the East Bayfront planning area and become the pride of Erie.

Connecting Local Landmarks with Existing Urban Trail

A well-organized urban trail system is a highly desirable feature that could add to the economic strength of the community. A trail could guide both visitors and residents through diverse neighborhoods, observe local architecture and experience landmarks, find interesting shops, restaurants, and other businesses around the downtown area. Urban trails also allow us to explore, discover, and experience moments of elation and wonder. They provide vantage points and perspectives that allow us to see the whole of a place and to understand where we stand within this urban mix. There is much to be said for neighborhoods that are physically connected to bordering neighborhoods since they can bring people together.

Erie has made great strides in developing urban trails starting with the Bayfront Bikeway connecting the campus of Penn State Behrend to Frontier Park via the Bayfront Parkway in a 10-mile stretch. Cyclists and

pedestrians can continue to Presque Isle State Park by taking West Sixth Street to Peninsula Drive. The Urban Bike Trail proposed by Bike Erie is an example of grassroots efforts to bring the city up to par by investing in corridors through urban environments with outcomes in better health, alternative means of transportation, and social fulfillment. The Port Authority recently opened two pathways that connect to the Bayfront Promenade, which runs along the bluff of West Bayfront neighborhoods from State to Cascade streets, further connecting people to the Bayfront Parkway. Yet, on the bluffs of Erie's east side, three of the most venerated landmarks, the Wayne Memorial Blockhouse, the Soldiers' and Sailors' Home, and Land Lighthouse, stand disconnected from the urban trail system and out of sight of most residents and potential visitors. Incorporating and promoting these two historic destinations into Erie's urban trail system would not be difficult and would offer a more complete and enriching experience for Erie residents and visitors. What better way to begin the urban renewal process than by bringing the community together on the common ground of a shared history?



Figure 27.

IV. Heritage Tourism as a Means for Urban Renewal

Since the mid-1980s, nearly a half billion dollars has been spent to redevelop Erie's waterfront. More than \$180 million of it has been expended to construct the Bayfront Parkway and Connector linking Interstate 79 with a two-mile stretch of expressway along the bayfront's shoreline, then turning southeast about seven miles as the Bayfront Connector to intersect with Interstate 90. For nearly 200 years, Erie's waterfront has been principally a working port, starting in 1805 with the inception of the salt trade. Industry ended on the west bayfront with the closing of the former GAF site in 2007, while the east bayfront continues with businesses, such as Donjon Shipbuilding, Erie Sand & Gravel, Erie Coke Corp., and many others. The redevelopment of Erie's bayfront over the past 35 years has been, in many ways, remarkable as evident with impressive public facilities such as Liberty Park, the Bayfront Convention Center, Sheraton and Marriott hotels, Blasco Library, Erie Maritime Museum, Bicentennial Tower, Intermodal Transportation Center, and Lampe Marina.

Yet even with these impressive amenities in place, the bayfront remains only on the verge of developing private commercial development and continues to struggle to attract a critical mass of people necessary to support it. In time, when Scott Enterprises moves forward with its proposed \$150 million investment of Harbor Place and the Erie County Convention Center Authority (Erie Events) attracts investors to develop the remaining parcels available at its Bayfront Place, the bayfront will become a more high-traffic locale. Still, the question remains whether the substantial public funding in the redevelopment of the bayfront will be utilized in such a way as to leverage its investment intentionally to support downtown regeneration. In his open letter to the public, planner Charles Buki did not pull any punches, writing: "If there is a more squandered asset in America than the City of Erie's shoreline, it is hard to imagine. For more than 100 years now, the community has acknowledged the need to integrate the city's downtown and neighborhoods with the bayfront – and much has been done in the past 50 years in an effort to realize that goal. But those efforts have been inadequate and have, in many ways, worsened the physical separation of the shoreline from the rest of the city."²⁹

²⁹ Grasping Erie's Comprehensive Plan, Letter of Transmittal, Erie Reader, April 13, 2016
Published: Vol. 6, No. 8.

One way to bridge this divide is to build the Three Forts of Presque Isle, which would be a 15-minute walk from Perry Square, and connect it to the bayfront with a pedestrian overpass from the bluff at East Front Street to the Intermodal Center traversing the parkway. By committing to this investment, Erie would take a giant step toward connecting the downtown and its historic eastside neighborhood to the waterfront, thus creating an environment not only supporting tourism but attracting millennials and empty-nesters to consider living in the downtown area. The forts project and its iconic pedestrian bridges would significantly contribute to attracting that critical mass of pedestrians Erie desperately needs for bayfront development. Edward Glaeser, Professor of Economics at Harvard University and who has been writing about cities for 25 years, has described cities as mankind's greatest invention. While urban cores have a reputation of being "dirty, poor, unhealthy, crime-ridden, expensive and environmentally unfriendly," he noted, they are actually the "healthiest, greenest, and richest (in cultural and economic terms) places to live."³⁰ Glaeser has made a convincing case for a city's importance and provides economic proof that cities are our best hope for the future. If Erie County wants to reverse its declining population rate (losing up to 10,000 people since 2010) and grow its economy, a healthy and strong city with a vibrant downtown buzzing with lots of people is a prerequisite.

Pittsburgh, Chattanooga, and Rome, N.Y.: How to leverage Heritage Tourism for Urban Renewal

Historic tourist destinations, like forts, add tremendous value to the quality of life of a community. They can be a premier attraction stimulating the local economy and reinforcing urban renewal. At a time when companies can move to just about any city of their choosing, a city's unique amenities can be the deciding factor in securing new business. Fort Pitt Museum, located in the heart of downtown Pittsburgh, drew 40,000 visitors in 2014, while Fort Stanwix in the center of Rome, N.Y., had 129,000 visitors that same year. Fort Ticonderoga, on Lake Champlain in northern New York State, drew 73,000 visitors in 2015. Old Fort Niagara, located at the junction of Lake Ontario and the Niagara River, welcomed more than 200,000 visitors in 2016. Forts Niagara and Ticonderoga generate more than half of their revenue from the price of admissions. Fort Stanwix is operated by

³⁰Edward Glaeser, *Triumph of the City: How our Greatest Invention Makes Us Richer, Smarter, Greener, Healthier and Happier* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2011).



Figure 28. Old Fort Niagara, courtesy of New York State Parks & Historic Sites.

the National Parks Service requiring no admissions fee for visitors, but the tourists it attracts are a major revenue driver for the city of Rome.

While the exact revenues that would accrue with the completion of the Three Forts of Presque Isle are hard to estimate with precision, the developments in Pittsburgh, Rome, N.Y., and Chattanooga, Tenn., show the positive economic impacts of heritage tourism. Pittsburgh and Chattanooga have been spotlighted because they share similar characteristics to Erie. Both Pittsburgh and Chattanooga reenergized their economies in large part by investing in their waterfronts to attract a critical mass of people who now patronize their downtowns. Rome was spotlighted because civic officials relied almost exclusively on tourism to renew their economy in the early 1970s. Should Erie move forward with the Three Forts of Presque Isle project, these urban renewal projects provide excellent case studies.

Rome, just west of Utica, N.Y., cleared a 16-acre parcel in the city's oldest section of downtown to reconstruct the colonial Fort Stanwix on its original site. First built in 1758 under the direction of British General John Stanwix, the rebuilding of the fort became the principal component of Rome's urban renewal project, which also conveniently tied into the country's

Bicentennial Anniversary in 1976. With considerable early support from then-junior U.S. Senator Robert F. Kennedy, the new Fort Stanwix opened to the public at a total cost of \$4.2 million or about \$22 million today. Much of the money came from the federal urban renewal fund through the Department of Housing and Urban Development. The National Park Service, which constructed and continues to operate the fort, reported that “86,678 visitors attended Fort Stanwix National Monument in 2015 with visitors spending approximately \$4.7 million in communities near the park. That spending supported 63 jobs in the local area and had a cumulative benefit to the local economy of \$5.7 million.”³¹ These strong attendance numbers and the annual infusion of visitors’ dollars were and continue to be critical to buoying Rome’s modest economy and diminishing population.

Perhaps surprising to some, a decreasing population base doesn’t always spell economic ruin for a city. Shortly after World War II, when Pittsburgh’s population crested at 676,806, civic leaders agreed to transform the grimy industrial downtown into “the Golden Triangle,” where the Ohio and Monongahela rivers meet to form the Ohio River. The first major step was to make the Point, where Forts Duquesne and Pitt were once erected in the mid-18th century, the epicenter for urban renewal by transforming the triangle into Point State Park. The objective was to attract residents and tourists to the waterfront and the downtown area to experience the rich history of one of America’s most important cities.



Figure 29. Pittsburgh’s The Point at Golden Triangle, where the three rivers meet.

³¹ *Rome Sentinel*, Published May 2, 2016.

Starting in the mid-1950s, a small group of civic leaders led by Richard King Mellon raised the capital to demolish 133 warehouses, freight yards, and old buildings that clustered the 60-acre sector. They ultimately repositioned two major bridges that crossed the Monongahela and the Allegheny rivers at the Point's tip, 350 yards to the east, to make way for the Fort Duquesne Bridge. Driven in large part by the leadership of the Allegheny Conference and tremendous support from dedicated philanthropists and foundations, the results of this long-range plan have been transformational for the City of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County's economy, resulting in \$5.7 billion in visitor spending in 2014. Even as Pittsburgh's population continues to wane and has become less affordable for many middle- to low-income families, Pittsburgh, nevertheless, continues to be ranked as one of the most livable cities in the U.S. and an economic force for the region.

Rome, N.Y., and Pittsburgh played to their strengths, leveraging their early history for urban renewal by rebuilding their old fort sites in the heart of their downtowns. Chattanooga, although the center of numerous Civil War battles, has no military fort to rally urban renewal. Chattanooga does possess, however, a formidable industrial past that at the turn of the 20th century brought it national recognition as "the Pittsburgh of the South." Like Pittsburgh, it once thrived as an industrial powerhouse but faced declining population, poverty, and urban blight. Starting in the late 1980s, Chattanooga began to transform itself from an industrial ghost town to one of the most vibrant cities in America today. As in Pittsburgh, a handful of civic leaders agreed to concentrate their downtown renewal efforts on their most valuable natural asset, the riverfront. In initial efforts to revitalize the downtown, a 22-mile stretch along the Tennessee River, dubbed the River Park system, is now a world-class corridor of linear parks that provides attractive amenities for residents and visitors as a major regional attraction.

The Chattanooga Plan not only urged development of the riverfront trail system, it also initiated urban core revitalization by building a signature attraction that would draw hundreds of thousands of tourists to the downtown area. The attraction was intentionally leveraged to bring the downtown to the riverfront and connect it to the urban trail system providing pedestrian access to the river. This signature attraction – the largest fresh water aquarium in the United States – was built on the banks of the Tennessee River on the northern cusp of Chattanooga's central business district. One of the main purposes of investing in the aquarium was to create an environment where investors felt confident to commit to rebuilding

Chattanooga's urban core. Within the first five months of its opening, more than one million people visited the aquarium, establishing the baseline for a critical mass of visitors. In 2014, Chattanooga and Hamilton County generated more than \$1 billion through tourism.

Unlike many large public projects, the cost of the aquarium was paid completely by private dollars. Chattanooga was fortunate to have the support of resident Jack Lupton, heir to the Coca-Cola Bottling Company. Lupton was also chairman of his family's Lyndhurst Foundation, and became a chief advocate and funder of the city's Riverfront revitalization project. The aquarium opened in 1992 at a cost of \$42 million (about \$75 million today); \$10 million came from the Lyndhurst Foundation, \$11 million from Jack Lupton, and the remainder he chased in from other private sources in the area. The perfect combination of the newly created urban trails system along the Tennessee River and the opening of the country's largest freshwater aquarium supported by one of Chattanooga's titans of industry proved to be the right mix at the right time for Chattanooga's renewal efforts.

Examining costs, Revenue for the Three Forts of Presque Isle and Interpretive Center

It is not possible to make a reliable estimate of cost for the Three Forts of Presque Isle and the repurposing of Janitor Supply buildings until the completion of a feasibility study showing the plans, elevations, buildings and their sections, layout of the grounds, and other specifications. When this is known, a practical budget can be created. The land on which the French and British forts are to be constructed, the Wallace Street Playground and the adjacent Amendola Field, respectively, must be acquired from the City of Erie. Also, an agreement must be reached with the Pa. Soldiers' and Sailors' Home administration and the Department of Veterans Affairs for the use and partial development of the former garrison grounds for the American Fort. The only land acquisition of significance would be Janitor Supply Company for the Interpretive Center and parking lot. Every effort should be made to encourage Janitor Supply Company to remain in the City of Erie, where they have been for their entire existence. However, one of the most important questions that will need to be answered early in the process is, do the residents of this historic neighborhood want to live next to the Heritage Commons?

Some preliminary investigation of cost has been initiated by the author of this essay. Historic preservationist Brad Mooney, owner of Heritage Restorations, has dedicated the past 20 years of his career toward restoration and preservation, almost exclusively involving colonial forts. He has worked on projects for Fort Pitt, Fort Michilimackinac, Saratoga Battlefield, and is currently under contract with Colonial Williamsburg. Mooney has been under contract at Fort Ligonier since 1996.

After a couple of site visits to Erie and a thorough understanding of the scope of work, Mooney estimated that the total project cost for reconstructing the three colonial forts and retrofitting the interpretive center would range from \$14 million to \$17 million. Reconstruction of the three forts using historic materials where applicable and conversion of Janitor Supply Company for the interpretive center are included in this estimate. This cost spread is based primarily on the insurance value of reconstructing the entire 15-acre Fort Ligonier facility, including the onsite museum, parking lot, artifacts, and intellectual property, all of which share many similarities to the Forts of Presque Isle project. This estimate does not include the construction of a pedestrian bridge across the Bayfront Parkway or reinstalling one onsite over the railroad tracks, linking the American fort to a pathway leading back to the Interpretive Center. Finally, the price range does not include the cost of a traffic light at Ore Dock Road and East Bayfront Parkway for visitor access to the fort complex.

Projecting revenue is equally conditional and caution is advised not to inflate projected revenue. All indicators show, however, that it is likely that the number of prospective visitors would generate substantial ticket revenue. According to Mooney, the uniqueness of three distinct colonial forts reconstructed on a 20-acre site, overlooking Lake Erie and within walking distance of both the downtown and bayfront would put this historic destination in a unique category.

The proximity of the Three Forts of Presque Isle to Presque Isle State Park and the fact that Erie is located about an hour and a half from metropolitan regions of Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and Buffalo with a collective population of nearly seven million people are to its advantage in terms of drawing visitors. Further, both the French and British Forts of Presque Isle would attract Canadian visitors whose history is deeply entwined with France and England and their struggle to control North America. It could be realistically expected that admissions would generate perhaps half or more of the operating revenue. Primarily because of Presque Isle State Park, the potential to attract visitors across the Middle Atlantic and beyond to the Forts

of Presque Isle is also likely. According to the U.S. Travel Association, “In 2015, domestic and international travelers spent \$947.1 billion in the U.S. This spending supported more than 8.1 million jobs directly, and generated \$231.7 billion in payroll income and \$147.9 billion in tax revenues for federal, state, and local governments.”³² Tourists in Pennsylvania spent more than \$40 billion that same year, ranking the Keystone State in the top ten in the U.S. for tourist spending. Building on this strength by investing in the Forts of Presque Isle and the necessary infrastructure would go a long way toward revitalizing Erie’s urban core.

Functionality versus City Beautiful

In addition to having clean, affordable housing, a low crime rate and a variety of consumer goods, a city’s downtown must have an aesthetic allure to attract people to live there. One of the most remarkably beautiful public buildings in Erie is the former U.S. Post Office at West 14th and Peach streets. It also shares possibly the loveliest city park, Griswold Plaza, with Union Station. The Post Office was built in the neoclassical architectural style of Beaux Arts in 1932 intentionally adjacent to the Art Deco style of Union Station that was erected six years prior. These handsome yet stylish public buildings reflect a time in American history when the government invested amply in public buildings to show that a city was a great place to live and to start a business. Moreover, both public and many commercial structures embodied a soaring civic vision that bespoke the highest democratic virtues of the republic.



Figure 30. Former U.S. Post Office at Griswold Park in Erie, courtesy of Sisinni Legal.

³² U.S. Travel Association, *The Impact of Travel on State Economies 2016 Edition*.

At the turn of the 20th century, the Erie Chamber of Commerce and Board of Trade, like economic elites in other great cities across America, determined to emphasize those qualities of Erie that made it a wonderful and rewarding place in which to invest. An inspiring Beaux Arts structure like the former Erie Public Library at the corner of South Park Row and French streets, to cite just one example, made clear to industrial magnates that Erie was a city on the move. Unfortunately, over the past 50 years, our attitudes toward public buildings have changed from expressions of grandeur to the parsimony of functionality. Erie's Central Fire Hall and the Erie WaterWorks buildings between Myrtle and Sassafras Streets on the West 12 Street corridor, for example, and the former Unemployment Office at 13th and State streets can hardly be called inspiring. As Charles Buki pointed out in his letter of transmittal, "Since the 1960s, a once proud and beautiful Erie has permitted too many cheap projects. City Hall, for instance, or the Bayfront Connector – (don't reflect) lasting beauty or value."³³ Typically, mediocre communities have mediocre design and great communities have great design.

Yet, modern Erie is capable of building strikingly attractive public edifices as realized by the Bayfront Convention Center, which subtly captures the nautical theme of the waterfront and gives the impression of being briefly docked ready at a moment's notice to cast off. Blasco Library also is a wonderfully designed facility with its broad bowed shipyard roofs and expansive bay windows allowing natural light to illuminate the reading rooms as visitors take in a bird's eye view of Presque Isle Bay and the Erie Maritime Museum's berth for the U.S. Brig Niagara. Both public buildings were not inexpensive. The construction cost alone for the library in 1995 was just over \$18 million (nearly \$30 million today) and the convention center was \$70 million. They have become, however, visible affirmations of civic leadership that the opportunity to do something notable in Erie's best interest first requires the will to do so. Securing the funding is only part of the equation.

The opportunity to create a market niche through a world class historic destination that promotes the Erie story occurs only when community leadership is aligned with public, private, and philanthropic funding. This moment has arrived and beckons immediate action. Today, Erie's leadership, both private and public, is entirely capable of advancing interrelated projects on the city's behalf that can propel us into an exciting

³³ U.S. Travel Association, *The Impact of Travel on State Economies 2016 Edition*.

future. If the Three Forts of Presque Isle is to have the desired impact on the morale of the community and on the local economy as a signature attraction drawing tens of thousands of visitors to the bayfront and downtown, it cannot, nor should it be achieved, on the cheap. It must be designed and built to add long-lasting value to the City of Erie and stand as a testimony of great civic achievement.

A big question remains regarding how to fund such a project, but by examining how forts in other communities across the Northeast have handled the funding question, Erie leaders can gain insight on funding strategies that may work best. In the 1950s, a triumvirate of government, private and philanthropic leaders in the city of Pittsburgh came together to design and construct Point State Park, which has since sparked an unstoppable urban renaissance that continues presently. Today Allegheny County government funds and maintains the Point's iconic fountain; the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources funds and manages Point State Park; and the Heinz Foundation built and operates Fort Pitt Museum in coordination with the Fort Pitt Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution that funds the 253-year-old Blockhouse. This collaboration of capable entities works for Pittsburgh, even if it would not necessarily work for communities such as Erie.

Former U.S. Rep. Phil English found out that no matter how many times he tried to persuade his fellow congressmen to pass legislation to have the National Parks Service reconstruct and operate the American Fort Presque Isle in Erie, it simply was not going to happen. It did happen, however, for Rome, N.Y., because the right people were in the right positions at the right time to pull the right levers unlocking funds necessary to have the National Parks Service reconstruct and operate Fort Stanwix on its original site. Sixteen acres in the heart of Rome's oldest section of downtown was cleared for the fort complex as part of that city's downtown urban renewal program. This development worked brilliantly for the Romans but Congress is likely unwilling to direct the National Park Service for Fort Presque Isle anytime soon. It would be safe to say this road, if taken, may be long and winding.

Possible Ways to Fund a Fort

For this essay, the author studied and visited Fort Pitt and Fort Ligonier in Pennsylvania and seven forts in New York State. The objective was to understand how fort complexes are funded and what forces drive their revenue and expenses, what effects the forts have on the surrounding community, what programs they offer and how they attract and maintain visitors and supporters. Following is a brief description explaining how a few of the nationally recognized forts were initially funded. This information provided the author alternative views to consider how best to propose funding for the Three Forts of Presque Isle and Interpretive Center.

Since 1927, the Old Fort Niagara Association has operated Old Fort Niagara and does not receive substantial operating support from New York's State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. Income is derived from admission fees, shop sales and community support and a committed regiment of volunteers. In 2016, about 216,000 tourists visited the Old Fort Niagara with many coming from China, creating a substantial surplus that has been put back into its endowment. Fort Ontario at the confluence of the Oswego River and Lake Ontario is funded by New York's State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. A volunteer organization called the Friends of Fort Ontario, established in 1989, assists in connecting the community to historic programming centered on the fort.

In 1820, William Ferris Pell (yes, the Pell Grant people) purchased 546 acres near the southern end of Lake Champlain, where Fort Ticonderoga is located, and did much to restore and preserve the garrison. The Pells endowed the Fort Ticonderoga Association to manage the site in perpetuity. In 2007, Deborah Mars, a Ticonderoga native married to the billionaire co-owner of the Mars candy company, Forrest Mars Jr., gave \$23 million for the Deborah Clarke Mars Education Center, a state-of-the-art facility for public events, learning experiences, and exhibitions. Less than an hour southeast of Pittsburgh is the charming borough of Ligonier, where for more than 100 years the Mellon family has lived. In the center of town is the superbly reconstructed 1758 American fort overlooking Loyalhanna Creek, attracting about 25,000 visitors annually. In the late 1950s, the Mellons initiated the recreation of Fort Ligonier, which is currently carrying out a \$13 million capital campaign "to secure Fort Ligonier as a vital community and regional asset and as a world class education and interpretive center for the French and Indian War."³⁴ In 2015, the Mellon Foundation gave

³⁴ Richard King Mellon Foundation 2015 Annual Report.

\$3.5 million for restoration and educational upgrades, and a director of history and collections to curate and expand programming.

All of the examples used in this essay are forts that have been either rebuilt from the ground up like Fort Stanwix and Fort Ligonier or have been refortified and expanded like forts Ticonderoga and Old Fort Niagara. There appears to be three basic ways a fort complex is funded: 1. the National Park Service takes ownership like Forts Stanwix, McHenry or Ontario; 2. A wealthy family with ties to local history and augmented by public/private dollars supports forts like Ligonier and Ticonderoga; or 3. An association or a private nonprofit organization takes ownership and relies on grants, ticket and visitor center sales and community support like Old Fort Niagara. The question remains, are any of these options the right fit for Erie and, if not, is there another way to fund the Forts of Presque Isle project?

It's clear that the National Park Service would present a difficult path to pursue as noted by former Rep. English's repeated unfulfilled efforts. This leaves options two and three. The challenge with pursuing option three is the amount of funds needed to construct the Forts of Presque Isle from scratch and repurposing the Janitor Supply Company for the Interpretive Center. Old Fort Niagara and Castillo de San Marcos in St. Augusta, for example, were never demolished or allowed to fall into disrepair but retained their structural integrity over the centuries. Thus, funds are directed toward operations and not retiring a large initial debt. Perhaps a better option for Erie is some combination of options two and three. Any developer leading a large civic project that taps the wellspring of Erie's heritage and one that has the drawing power to spur downtown revitalization would naturally seek support from esteemed local families that may have an interest and the capacity to support such a venture. Coming up with matching funds, private or public, is a prerequisite to attracting philanthropic support.

As discussed earlier, the initial challenge for such a transformational project like the Forts of Presque Isle is obtaining construction financing. This is where strong, healthy relationships with both the private sector and elected officials come into play. Over the course of a few years, the State Department of Community and Economic Development has infused Erie with tens of millions of dollars toward economic growth. The redevelopment of the former GAF site, the expansion of Erie Insurance Arena, and the Bayfront Convention Center, for example, could not have occurred without substantial state funding. The two state programs the forts project would seek funding from are the Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program and the Keystone Communities Program. Both programs are designed

to encourage private and public partnerships in the “acquisition and construction of regional economic, cultural, civic, recreational, and historical improvements.” Public funding joined with private and philanthropic support would be needed to cover the forts project startup costs. The forts location in a vibrant local tourism market, coupled with its historical uniqueness and if marketed correctly, would generate substantial admissions revenue. Further revenue streams, such as grants, sponsorships, fundraising efforts, and gift shop sales complete the income picture.

There is another way to consider funding not only the Forts of Presque Isle project but many of the core public amenities within Erie County. The concept is to create a Regional Asset District and a revenue sharing program for local governments in the county that is funded by a 1 percent sales tax to be collected in Erie County. In 1993, the Pennsylvania Legislature adopted a law (Act 77) to create a regional asset district and tax-sharing program for Allegheny County. This law authorized the county to levy a 1 percent local option sales and use tax, which yielded \$189.7 million in 2016. All the revenue remains in Allegheny County. Half of the tax proceeds go directly to county and municipal governments (all 128). The other half supports regional assets such as libraries, parks and recreation, cultural, sports and civic facilities and programs. In 2006, Penn State Behrend's Economic Research Institute of Erie, under the direction of Dr. James Kurrie, produced a report on the potential revenue in Erie County of a 1 percent sales tax and concluded that a conservative estimate would be about \$25 million in fiscal year 2005-06, noting that this money would remain in Erie County. Kurrie also surmised that 25 percent of the revenue would be exported to tourists and visitors to Erie County. Assuming Erie County's economy has increased somewhat since 2006, \$12.5 million could be distributed to all of the county's 38 municipal governments while another \$12.5 million could support regional assets. Either an act of Pennsylvania legislation or a referendum could create a local option sales tax for Erie County.

V. All Hands on Deck – Make Sail!

In the summer of 1807, when the Borough of Erie was 2 years old, a small party of travelers aboard a British schooner, the *Dover*, dropped anchor just off the entrance to Presque Isle Bay. A sandbar running across its mouth prevented vessels drafting more than four feet to enter; therefore, a flat boat had to collect them. One of the voyagers, Christian Schultz, kept a detailed journal of his excursion that took him from Albany to New Orleans mostly via water routes.

Once ashore, Schultz observed Erie's orderly layout and its commanding view of the lake. The remarkably beautiful bay, expansive and deep, provided the town protection from wind and sea. He quickly fell in conversation with some of the locals who were being sued as illegal squatters by Judah Colt, agent of the Population Land Company, over settling some of their properties. The pioneers claimed an act of state legislation permitted them to settle small tracks of "wild western lands of the state," which they did prior to the arrival of the Population Land Company, which was delayed because the United States was warring with neighboring Indians. As stated earlier, not until General Wayne's victory over the Western Confederacy at Fallen Timbers and subsequent signing of the Treaty of Greenville did the land company have secure access to northwestern Pennsylvania to conduct its business affairs. Schultz surmised that "from the spirit and determination of some of the unfortunate sufferers with whom I have conversed, they are determined to defend what they consider as their lawful acquisitions with the last drop of their blood."³⁵

Before departing Erie, Schultz went to pay his respects to "that gallant old soldier General Anthony Wayne," whose remains, per his request, were interred at the foot of the flagstaff at Fort Presque Isle on Garrison Hill east of the Mill Creek ravine. With great expectancy in beholding a "sumptuous monument erected to his deserving memory," Schultz was appalled to discover the absence of any memorial to Wayne. Only the remnants of the dilapidated fort were visible and a large flat gray stone, no doubt plucked from the rubble, marked the grave of this American hero. The initials AW were scratched on the stone's face. No dates marked Wayne's life and no epitaph recounted his rank, character or achievements. Filled with indignation that General Wayne's service to America could be so quickly neglected and forgotten, Schultz retrieved a penknife from his pocket and etched on the general's headstone the phrase: "Shame on my Country."

³⁵ Christian Schultz, *Travels on An Inland Voyage*, I Riley 1810. p. 103.

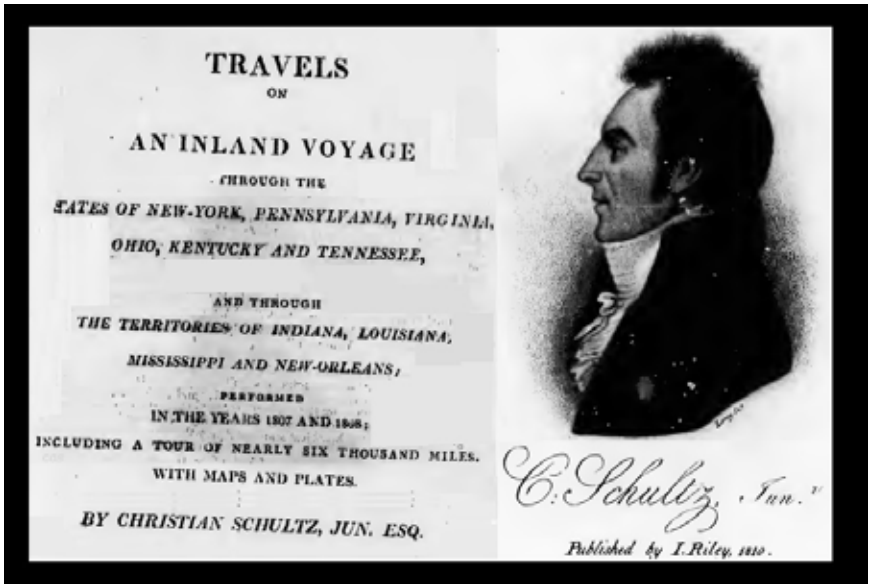


Figure 31.

What galled Schultz was the utter disregard of national standards he believed the young country should uphold in honoring those venerated soldiers who died in the line of duty, especially one who had fought fearlessly in the Revolution, and opened the western frontier for American expansion. Schultz felt personally the weight of national responsibility to act and correct the wrong he perceived. It would take 73 years before the people of Erie persuaded state legislators to appropriate funds to construct a memorial befitting General Wayne, a man whose momentous accomplishments aided in the creation of a new republic and a new town called Erie.

Today, alone on Garrison Hill, where history is so fraught with military events, stands the Wayne Memorial Blockhouse. It is shrouded on all sides by lofty yellow poplars, American chestnuts, and Bur oaks. Railroad tracks cut across its south parade grounds, while the Bayfront Parkway borders off the north and east, enclosing the old fort site with the palisades of progress. It is now nearly forgotten, hidden even to the traffic whizzing below. Yet, it can be restored, if we could only see the possibilities.

Instead of an unexploited track of venerated land tucked away on the bluff of Erie's most historic neighborhood, Garrison Hill and the entire Heritage Commons encompassing the French and British forts and Interpretive Center could be pulsating with thousands of visitors from all parts of the Northeast, pumping money into the local economy and creating an environment that encourages future investment for the entire

area surrounding the East Bayfront neighborhood. The Three Forts of Presque Isle, supported by an overpass crossing the Bayfront Parkway to the waterfront, could become that signature attraction helping to build a critical mass of pedestrian urbanism so urgently needed to foster downtown revitalization. The great American Helen Keller, who lost her hearing and sight at 19 months yet went on to be the first deaf and blind person to graduate from college, once said, “The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision.”

The Three Forts of Presque Isle and Interpretive Center project is in step with Erie’s Comprehensive Plan, which recommends the investment in historical landmarks and underscores the importance of creating a sense of place and social engagement for people who work and live in the downtown area. If the Forts of Presque Isle project is initiated in sequence with UPMC Hamot’s \$111 million patient care tower just three blocks away and Erie Insurance’s \$135 million office building six blocks away, it will have the energy to reawaken residential investment in the East Bayfront neighborhood. Consequently, retail, grocery stores, restaurants and similar development could begin to renew lower Parade Street as a viable artery of economic activity. Moreover, these three conjoining investments have the power to attract people to the downtown area, raise property values, generate tourism revenue, and enhance the process of creating an attractive, safe, and vibrant urban core.

Although still nascent, the public and private forces to accomplish sweeping change are afoot in the Erie community. There are visible signs of revitalization from the bayfront to the 14th street uptown corridor in addition to substantial philanthropic commitments in post-secondary education, struggling neighborhoods, and an innovation district. If we seize this opportunity and strike while the iron is hot, chances are it will forge broad community connections necessary to energize civic incentive to trek the tough road ahead. But the City of Erie needs reliable leadership to sustain this pressing expedition. The path to revitalizing Erie’s struggling urban core will be long, and success will be determined perhaps more by historical factors than by some magic formula. It is the investment in human capital and the city’s ability to adapt to change through collaboration that could become the engine that drives and sustains the local economy for generations to come.

If Erie is going to grow and prosper, then people must want to live close to one another preferably in downtown and its adjoining neighborhoods. Erie’s future depends on this demand for density. Writing in

the 1960s, urbanist Jane Jacobs argued that what makes a society vibrant and prosperous requires good timing. Innovation happens when people interact in a fertile urban environment and their ideas unexpectedly collide to create something that did not exist before. This scenario has played out repeatedly from the time Erie became a town in 1795. A handful of pioneers gathered on the parade ground at Fort Presque Isle to discuss how they were going to build a new community. Traveling from Waterford in pursuit of land, Captain Martin Strong and others helped build Erie's first public house for Seth and Hannah Reed just west of the mouth of Mill Creek. It was a rough building they called the Presque Isle Tavern.

Whatever they thought of one another, these pioneers were compelled to feel connected and co-dependent. This interconnectedness is the American archetype that links us to the seedbed of our nation's independence. Unlike European cities, which were controlled by the long arm of their governments from the top down, Erie and other fledgling American communities grew from the bottom up because people of varied backgrounds understood that, to develop, it was in their best interest to come to terms with their differences instead of holding on to them. Forced by necessity, the time has come again for Erie to work together for all of Erie. The City of Erie needs leadership that can involve all segments of the community to the task of reinventing itself.

Writing to the Minister of France in 1753, Governor Marquis Duquesne described Presque Isle [Erie] as "the finest spot in nature." Erie has the honor and distinction of being the namesake of one of the five Great Lakes of North America and whose name derives its meaning from the indigenous peoples who flourished in this region centuries before the Iroquois Confederacy. Erie indeed has a rich legacy created by remarkable men and women whose broad shoulders we stand on today. The visionary city planner John Nolen, who gave Erie its first comprehensive plan in 1913, wrote in the opening line of his report that "Erie is destined to be a great city. No city is probably in better position than Erie to command phenomenal prosperity through the utilization of natural advantages."³⁶ Of course, Nolen was referring to Erie's outstanding natural harbor and its strategic location on Lake Erie, where it could move bulk cargo both by water and rail west to Chicago, east to New York, and south to Pittsburgh. Erie's beauty and natural advantages have not gone away. Presque Isle State Park attracts millions of visitors to its beaches each year, more than ever imagined by Nolen, and has increasingly played a factor in the stability of the local economy. Yet, natural advantages alone do not bring growth and prosperity to a town,

³⁶ John Nolen, *Greater Erie*, p. 15.

any more than a physically gifted body alone enables a man or woman to acquire either riches or fame. It is the enterprise of its people that forges a great city. Buki admonished leaders that “the time has long passed when Erie had the luxury of assuming future prosperity, and of not having to make hard choices. The only reality now is that future prosperity might come from making choices few will enjoy making.”³⁷ Hard choices are made easier when believing the benefits will be appreciated by generations to come.

The English writer John Reader put it this way: “Cities are the defining artifacts of civilization. All the achievements and failings of humanity are here. Civic buildings, monuments, archives and institutions are the touchstones by which our cultural heritage is passed from one generation to the next. We shape the city, then it shapes us.”³⁸ The question on everyone’s mind should be: “What kind of city do we want to fashion for future generations?” As Charles Buki observed:

There is no doubt some in the community will want an easier, softer way. With all the earnestness at our command, we beg of you to be fearless in the face of resistance to change and be thorough from the very start. By holding onto old ideas, the result for Erie will be nil. Half measures will avail Erie nothing because your city is at a turning point.³⁹

Erie will become a great city if its people come to understand the value in reinventing themselves. For this to occur, they must be familiar with Erie’s story. After three years of visiting cities throughout the U.S., covering 54,000 miles, including several stops in Erie, James Fallows of *The Atlantic* magazine observed that a city where things seem to work is a city that knows its civic story. He wrote that the value of a city’s story “is in giving citizens a sense of how today’s efforts are connected to what happened yesterday and what they hope for tomorrow.”⁴⁰ The Three Forts of Presque and Interpretive Center present a way to view the past as a window to the future. The strategy driving the Heritage Commons is for the construction of a unique historic destination intended to draw tens of thousands of visitors to the city and bolster downtown revitalization. More importantly, this signature attraction can become a community symbol of great civic achievement that binds tightly the interests of Erie and its proud citizens.

³⁷ Charles Buki, *Letter of Transmittal*.

³⁸ John Reader, *Cities*, Grove Press, New York 2004. p.1.

³⁹ Charles Buki, *Letter of Transmittal*

⁴⁰ James Fallow, *The Atlantic*, March 2016 Issue



Figure 32.



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