Article

Saving the Shaker Lakes: How an Alliance between Two Wealthy Suburbs and Cleveland's Black Mayor Stopped the Clark Freeway

Journal of Planning History
2023, Vol. 22(3) 241–262

DOI: 10.1177/15385132221084659
journals.sagepub.com/home/jph
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Abstract

In the 1960s, the suburbs of Cleveland Heights and Shaker Heights protested the routing of an Interstate highway through their historic park. Known as the Clark Freeway, I-290 was meant to connect downtown Cleveland with the newer suburbs located beyond the city's outer beltway. Fearing irreparable damage to their communities, a group of garden club women and a committee of citizen activists brought pressure on county, state, and federal officials to delay route selection. However, only after Cleveland Mayor Carl Stokes joined the fight, did Governor James Rhodes summon the political will to cancel the highway.

Keywords

highways, integration, urban parks, nature reserves, infrastructure, suburbs, transportation planning, resident activism, Shaker Heights, Cleveland Heights, Carl Stokes, Albert Porter, James Rhodes

Several years before the Clark Freeway (Interstate 290) became public knowledge, Walter Kelley, the Law Director of Shaker Heights, heard through the grapevine the alarming news that the city was in the path of a big new highway. This Interstate would connect downtown Cleveland with the outer beltway around the city (I-271). Kelley and Mayor Paul Jones rushed downtown to see the plans and found out that the Cuyahoga County Engineer had put a clamp of secrecy over the entire planning process. Only in late 1963, when route of the Clark Freeway was made public, did this elite suburb of Cleveland, Ohio, learn that the highway would take a swath of Shaker Lakes Park and require the razing of a group of the suburb's finest homes.[1]

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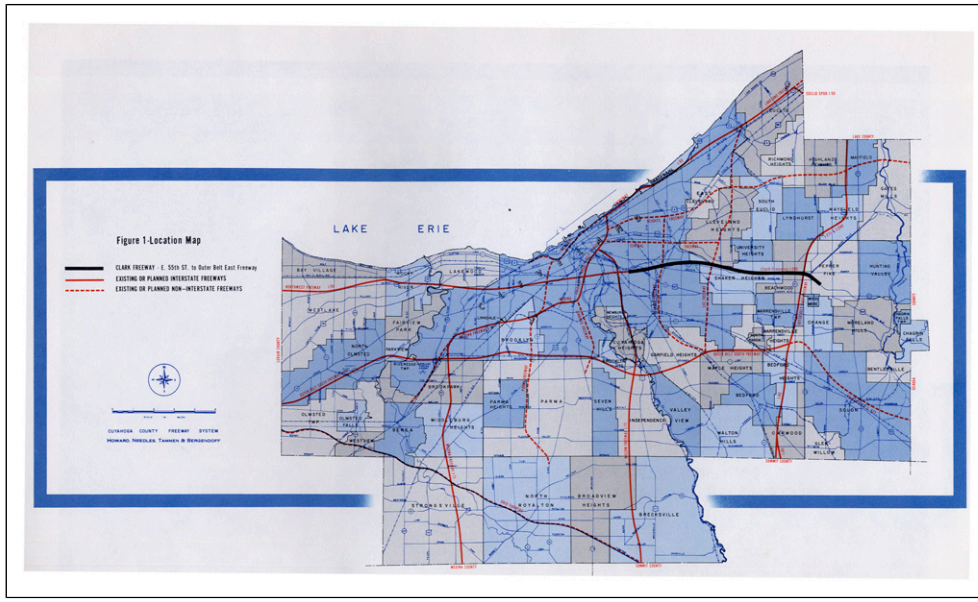
Paving over parks was standard practice for highway engineers because acquiring public land was less expensive and more efficient than taking private property which might be complicated by lawsuits. County Engineer Albert Porter already knew that the budget-strapped City of Cleveland, which owned the park, had no interest in continuing to maintain a park located on the high plateau called "The Heights" east of the city. While the park was inaccessible to city residents without automobiles, the residents of Shaker Heights and Cleveland Heights had the privilege of enjoying the scenic beauty of its two lakes and they also appreciated its historical association with the Shakers, the Christian sect that had farmed the land through much of the nineteenth century. Mary Elizabeth Croxton (Mrs. John C.), who lived across the street from Shaker Lower Lake, expressed a universal sentiment when she declared: "To exchange this park of irreplaceable beauty for a mass of concrete roadways would be an unthinkable act of vandalism."[2] When residents of the two suburbs later discovered that the Clark Freeway was the centerpiece of a system of three connecting county highways that would rip through the heart of their communities, their outrage and disbelief turned to resolve. They would fight the highways.

The Clark Freeway was part of the Interstate highway system envisioned by President Dwight Eisenhower to connect the major cities of the United States. It was the last Interstate highway scheduled to be built in Cuyahoga County, then Ohio's most populous county. The $25 billion National Highway Act of 1956 provided 90 percent of the funding for Interstate highways. For the first 5 years, the national highway program encountered little organized opposition, but rising concern over the impact of highways on the environment and the destruction of inner-city neighborhoods precipitated well-publicized freeway revolts in San Francisco, Miami, Baltimore, and the District of Columbia. In 1962, Congress responded by passing an amendment to the National Highway Act that increased the leverage of municipalities in planning highways. However, it remained extremely difficult for local communities to challenge the route of an Interstate highway. Successful highway protests, though rare, had several elements in common. They required leaders who could build coalitions that crossed class, geographical, gender, political, and racial boundaries. Local and state politicians had to be won over, and freeway opponents needed the media to promote their cause. Though lawsuits might delay a highway, ultimately only the top officials in the federal highway administration, or the governor of a state, had the power to stop a highway.[3]

The Clark Freeway, highlighted with a heavy black line on the 1955 County Highway Department map, would streamline the downtown commute of people living in the far eastern suburbs. It was also intended to to link the east and west sides of Cleveland.[4] In anticipation of this important addition to Metropolitan Cleveland's transportation infrastructure, a "stub" (or connector) had already been built at East 55th Street.

Starting at East 55th Street, the eight-lane 8.7-mile Interstate would span the New York Central rail yards, then climb a steep hill through several racially changing neighborhoods along Woodland Avenue, joining Larchmere Boulevard at the top of the hill. It would pass north of Shaker Square through the ethnic working-class neighborhood of Our Lady of Peace Parish. Upon entering Shaker Heights, the proposed route skirted the southern shore of Shaker Lower Lake before becoming an elevated roadway over the park's second lake (Horseshoe Lake). It continued east along the Shaker Rapid right-of-way up Shaker Boulevard as far as Green Road. In neighboring Beachwood, it would run up the boulevard's generous center median, connecting with the Outer Belt East (I-271) in Pepper Pike. At that time, there were no homes along Shaker Boulevard in Beachwood. Compared to the staggering loss of 810 homes and seventy-five businesses in the City of Cleveland, Shaker Heights would lose only seventy-five homes and five businesses, and Cleveland Heights, possibly one.

Albert Porter, the public official responsible for the design of the Cuyahoga County highway system, relished the power and budget increases the federal highway program had brought to his



The 1955 Freeway Plan for Cuyahoga County prepared by the engineering firm of Needles, Tammen and Bergendoff for the State Highway Department. Department of Special Collections, Cleveland State University.

job. A graduate of Lakewood High School, he had earned a degree in civil engineering in 1928 from The Ohio State University, then worked his way up in the County Highway Department. In 1947, he was elected County Engineer, an office he held for the next 30 years. Defeated in the Cleveland mayoral race in 1953 and thwarted in his run for governor of Ohio in 1958, Porter was almost as arrogant, politically savvy, and driven as his contemporary, highway czar Robert Moses, New York City's Park Commissioner. In 1962, Porter had moved from the west side of Cleveland to a home in Pepper Pike, an affluent postwar suburb located beyond Cleveland's outer beltway (I-271). The elevation of "Boss Porter" to Chair of the Cuyahoga County Democratic Party the next year coincided with the opening salvo of the battle by the two suburbs on the Heights to save Shaker Lakes Park.[5]

Most accounts of the protest have attributed the defeat of the Clark Freeway to a group of local garden club women. Dismissed by county officials as "the little ladies in tennis shoes," they were motivated by their desire to protect the natural beauty of the park, its history, and the careful planning of the neighborhoods laid out along the parkways flanking the park by the developers of Shaker Heights, Oris Paxton and Mantis James Van Sweringen. In the early 1960s, Shaker Heights was dealing with racial integration and the effects of white flight to the more distant eastern suburbs of Beachwood, Pepper Pike, Gates Mills, and Hunting Valley. The protest included an independent effort by a group of progressive lawyers and academics to foil a plan for a huge multi-layer freeway interchange over one of the park's lakes.[6] However, neither effort was sufficient to stop the Clark Freeway.

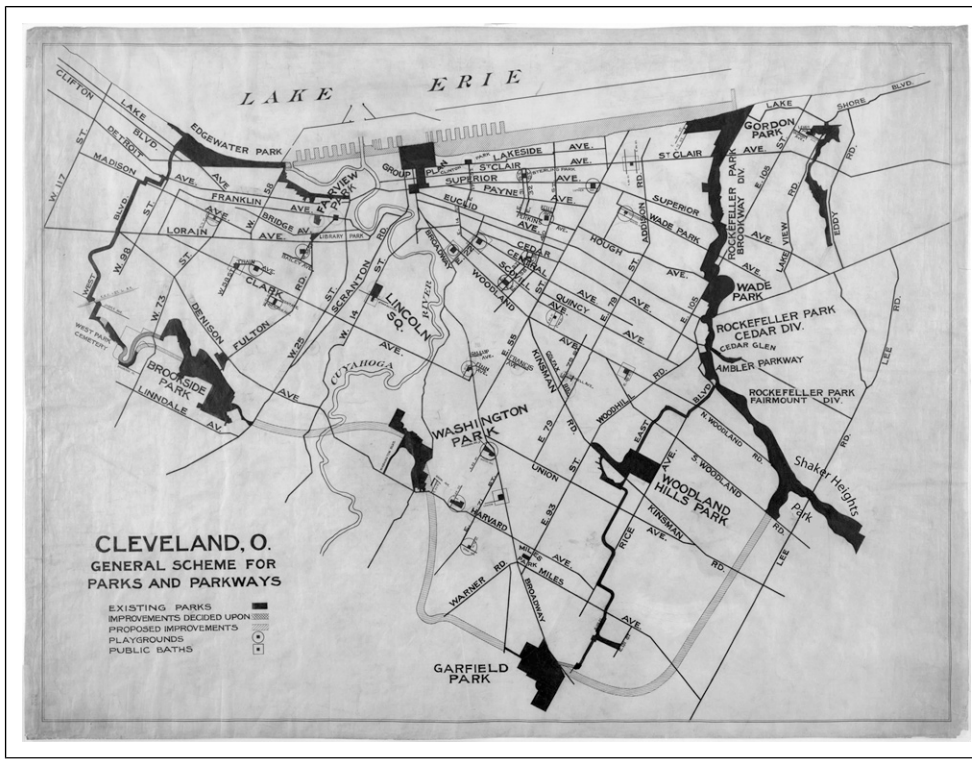
The Clark Freeway revolt had a political dimension that reflected a demographic and political shift in Cleveland that empowered the Black electorate in the late 1960s. In 1967, Carl Stokes became the nation's first Black mayor of a major American city. Shortly before this election, Stokes changed sides on the freeway issue for reasons that were both personal and political. As Porter's star fell, the new politics of Black Cleveland trumped the old Democratic spoils system

the County Engineer had controlled. The six-year battle by the two suburbs over the Clark Freeway ended in 1970 when Governor James Rhodes canceled the Clark Freeway.

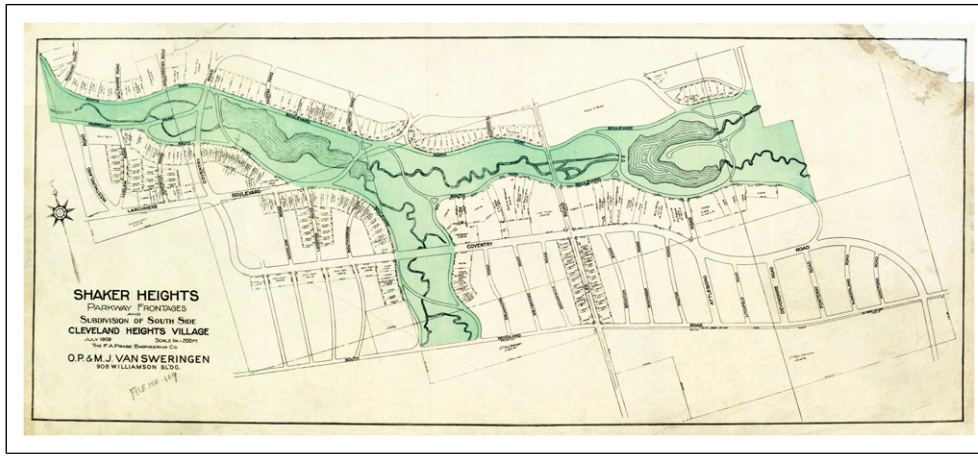
The Park on "The Heights"

The history of the park, kept alive by generations of upper-class Clevelanders, must be acknowledged as a factor in its passionate defense. Ernest Bowditch, a noted Boston civil engineer, planned Shaker Lakes Park in 1891.[7] By that time most of Cleveland's open space and lakefront had been sacrificed for industrial development. Bowditch found a way to connect undeveloped greenspace along Doan Brook to create a park modeled on the more famous Buffalo municipal park system designed by Frederick Law Olmsted. The system was anchored at its western end by Gordon Park on Lake Erie and by "Shaker Heights Park" (its original name) at its far eastern end. Between the two anchors were a series of smaller parks connected by parkways, which were considered "divisions" of Rockefeller Park, named for the park's benefactor. It was anticipated that the land surrounding Shaker Heights Park would be annexed by Cleveland, but the Panic of 1893 stalled development until 1906.

Historians James and Susan Borchert pointed out in their comparative study of the residential patterns of upper-class Cleveland, Buffalo, and Pittsburgh, that Cleveland's millionaires were unusual in their strong predilection for "deep, grassy, treed front yards." Unable to hold back the encroachment of industry and commerce, about 1900, they abandoned their mansions along Euclid Avenue for park-like allotments next to Rockefeller Park. As the area (now called



Shaker Heights Park (Shaker Lakes Park) is at the far eastern end (lower right) of the municipal park system collectively known as Rockefeller Park. Cleveland Public Library.



1909 plan of Shaker Heights Park, showing the parkway frontages. Shaker Historical Society, Shaker Heights, OH.

Glenville) became Jewish, Cleveland's upper-class retreated to sylvan Cleveland Heights in the 1910s, and to Shaker Heights in the 1920s, where deed restrictions and other discriminatory real estate practices protected their property values.[8]

Shaker Heights retained its attraction for high-income, socially prominent Protestant families even after wealthy Catholics, Jews, and African Americans, began moving there in the 1950s. By 1960, Shaker Heights (population of 36,460) had the highest median income of any city in the United States. While the suburb was fighting the freeway in the 1960s, it was engaged in managing racial change through a tax-supported effort to encourage white middle-class couples to buy homes in its integrating sections. While this slowed white flight, by 1970, 15 percent of Shaker's population was Black. Cleveland Heights was a larger, more economically diverse suburb with large Jewish and Catholic communities. African Americans were one percent of its population in 1970.[9] Both suburbs anticipated the loss of white residents, as upwardly mobile African Americans moved from the inner city to affordable neighborhoods in their cities. They feared the highways would accelerate this transition.

Fighting A Concrete Noose

Shaker Heights took the lead in the fight against the Clark Freeway. In early 1964, Mayor Jones appointed a blue-ribbon "Citizens Freeway Committee" charged with finding a way to defeat the County's highway plans. Asking influential citizens to become involved in finding solutions to municipal problems had begun during the Depression when a a group of residents formed a "Citizens Committee" to assess the quality of candidates for the city's school board. Such committees, advised by the best experts they could hire, typified the city's response to any civic crisis.

The Citizens' Freeway Committee was made up of men with political, social, and financial clout. Its chair, Douglas Wick, was a partner in the law firm of McAfee Hanning. The Wick fortune dated back to the early twentieth century when Ohio's Mahoning Valley was the center of the nation's iron and steel industry. Civil rights lawyer, Howard Metzenbaum, and Raphael Silver, son of Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver gave the citizens' committee a strong Jewish voice. Because of the

threat of the highway to the future viability of the city-owned light rail system, Robert Landgraf, Chief Engineer of the Shaker Rapid, was asked to serve on the committee. The mayor asked Father William A. Bachmann, the parish priest of Our Lady of Peace Catholic Church, to join the group, perhaps expecting him to convince Catholic Mayor Ralph Locher to save their parish. Locker's tepid support for the freeway protest may have reflected his reluctance to challenge the County Engineer's authority on whom he depended for patronage.[10]

Shaker Heights' residents rallied behind the Citizens Freeway Committee. In January 1964, more than 650 citizens turned out for a meeting at the High School auditorium. Law Director Kelley warned that, if necessary, the city would take the fight all the way to the Supreme Court. This was no idle threat since some of the nation's top law firms were headquartered in Cleveland. Kelley questioned the need for the freeway. To put some teeth into the city's claim that the County's needs assessment was based on out-of-date traffic data, the city hired the engineering firm of Tippetts, Abbett, McCarthy and Stratton to compile new traffic data.

Freeway opponents made sure every hearing received wide media coverage. The editor of the local *Sun-Press* called the Clark Freeway "a concrete dagger poised at the heart of Shaker Heights" and warned that freeways caused decline. He pointed out that Porter needed to get the freeway authorized before July 1, 1965 (when the 1962 amendment to the National Highway Act went into effect) "so that he will be subject to no one's dictates except his own."[12]

About 600 citizens of Shaker Heights attended one of the first meetings in February 1964 at the high school to protest the Clark Freeway. Shaker Historical Society.

In March, as the freeway revolt gained traction, Porter went on the offensive. At a meeting sponsored by the League of Women Voters, he lambasted the citizens of Shaker Heights for calling him "a heel, a bum, and arrogant bureaucrat when all he (Porter) is doing is a job required by law." Before announcing the plans for the Clark Freeway, he said his department had consulted Senators Frank Lausche and Stephen Young; Representatives Michael Feighan, Charles Vanik, William Minshall, and Frances Payne Bolton. Not one had raised any objection.[13] Later, they all opposed the freeway.

Working independently of the Citizens Freeway Committee, members of the Shaker Historical Society launched a letter-writing campaign orchestrated by Frank Myers, who owned a large home on South Park Boulevard (now the Shaker Historical Society) At his own expense, Myers sent 6,000 letters to Shaker residents with fourteen pages of information on the freeway prefaced by the question: which deserved higher priority, the "concrete noose" of a freeway or the "emerald necklace" of Shaker Lakes Park. Standing in a doorway of Stouffer's Restaurant on Shaker Square, eighty-three-year-old Elizabeth B. Nord, secretary of the Historical Society and curator of the Shaker Museum, collected 1,500 signatures in one week. The president of the Society, William R. Van Aken, a former Republican state representative, personally delivered the petition signed by 16,000 citizens of both suburbs to Governor James Rhodes. A local historian documented the two Shaker mill sites for designation as national landmarks, but without the mills, the Department of the Interior ruled the dams did not qualify.[14]

Mass meetings, petition drives, and pressure on Capitol Hill raised such a ruckus in Washington D. C and Columbus that opponents won a delay in the setting the center line of the Clark Freeway, a *pro forma* public hearing necessary before construction could start. In July 1964, the Mayor of Shaker Heights and Elizabeth Nord received letters from Bureau Chief Rex Whitton assuring them that the BPR would respect the 1962 legislation that gave communities a voice in highway planning.[15] As required by the new law, Governor James Rhodes set up a task force called the Cleveland/Seven County Land-Use Transportation Study (SCOTS), headed by William B. Henry, the director of the Cuyahoga County Regional Planning Commission. SCOTS was charged with providing an "updated traffic finance study" and an assessment of the recommended routes through the suburbs. As one official optimistically stated: "The effect of the act is not to disrupt the natural liaison between the county engineer, the state and the U. S. Bureau of Public Roads, but to bring municipalities into the act."[16]

To provide SCOTS with documentation on community values and the effect of the highway on other modes of transportation, Shaker Heights and Cleveland Heights each set up Transportation Committees. In its report, Shaker Heights emphasized that the park was an important recreational open space and a symbol of the city's Shaker heritage. It defended public transportation, challenged the County Engineer's claim that the Shaker Rapid was antiquated and expensive-to-run, and recommended increasing its service area to include Beachwood and Pepper Pike, two suburbs beyond I-271. The report also attempted to dispel the idea that racial integration caused urban blight by calling attention to the city's master plan for the renewal of the Moreland Elementary School District, then on the verge of resegregation. Cleveland Heights' Transportation Report stressed its excellent public schools, range of housing options, recreational areas, and efficient bus service. It suggested that the freeways would benefit commuters living beyond I-271, while inviting the decline of the suburbs next to the city.[17]

The Lee Freeway Citizens Committee

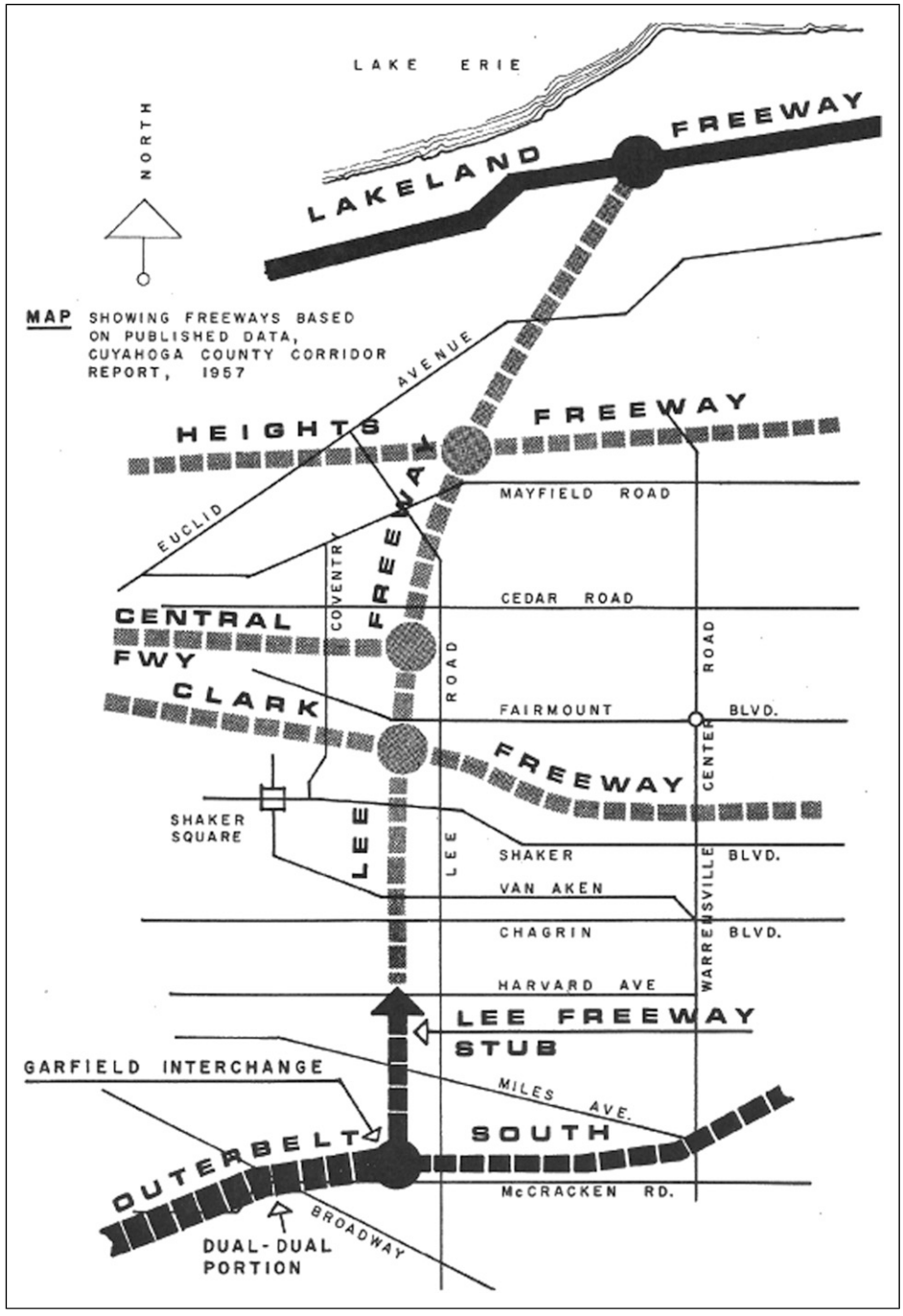
It is unclear exactly when Sonja Unger, the newly elected Democratic ward leader for Shaker Heights, chanced to learn of county plans for a huge highway interchange in the middle of

The 60-acre Clark-Lee Interchange over Horseshoe Lake from a 1966 stody by Needles, Tammen and Bergendoff. The interchange would have obliterated Horseshoe Lake and much of the susrrounding parkland. Department of Special Collections, Cleveland State University.

Horseshoe Lake Park. Unger was the feisty wife of Paul A. Unger, a retired diplomat, and former Secretary of the Interior under President Truman. Breaking ranks with the Cuyahoga County Democratic Party, the Shaker Heights Democratic Club had endorsed Carl Stokes in the coming election for Mayor of Cleveland. Porter was angry. He demanded a meeting. Unger recalled how she and another member of the club were kept waiting by Porter in his outer offices where they saw the plans for the Clark-Lee interchange left carelessly mounted on a wall. This interchange, they realized, was right in the center of Horseshoe Lake Park. The two women hurried home and lost no time in communicating their alarm to the mayor and the other members of the Shaker Democratic Club.[18]

The Shaker Democratic Club then learned that construction had already begun on a "stub" or connector for the Lee Freeway. The Lee Freeway would have been far more destructive for the two suburbs than the Clark Freeway, and was not scheduled to be built until after 1972 when the federal funding of the Interstate Highway System ended. The Lee Freeway, named for Lee Road, a major north-south artery through both suburbs, would connect with the Outer Belt South (I-80) in Maple Heights. The Lee Freeway would have taken 735 homes and seventy-five businesses in Cleveland Heights, part of Cain Park, St. Louis Catholic Church, and Forest Hills Church. A second county highway called the Central Freeway would come up the hill from University Circle through the Doan Brook watershed between Cedar Road and Fairmount Boulevard, connecting with the Lee Freeway across the street from the Cleveland Heights High School. The third county highway, the Heights Freeway, would pass north of Mayfield Road, cross the Lee Freeway, and continue through Richmond Heights and Highland Heights to its connection with I-271.[19] This grid of highways through the Heights would have taken a staggering toll on residential real estate, schools, and businesses.

Up to this point, Shaker Heights had been fighting the Clark Freeway alone. News of the proposed county highways brought Cleveland Heights into the freeway fight. William P. Irvin, a professor in the Political Science Department and Western Reserve University, invited William



The Lee Freeway stub from the Outer Belt South and the connecting Lee, Heights, and Central freeways through the Heights (lighter broken lines). This map, not drawn to scale, was produced by the Lee Freeway Committee. Local History Collection, Shaker Heights Public Library.

Henry, the Executive Director of SCOTS, to address the Town Meeting Committee of Cleveland Heights, an organization he had founded to tackle community issues. On the heels of this meeting, a group of politically active citizens from both communities organized the Lee Freeway Citizens Committee, chaired by Richard Stoddard, a lawyer at Thompson, Hine and Flory.[20] This committee was dominated by lawyers from Cleveland's large law firms. Many were veterans of World War II and may have attended college or law school on the GI Bill. Comfortably middle-class, they sent their children to the suburbs' excellent public schools.

Members of the Lee Freeway Committee discovered that the state highway department had begun construction of the Maple Heights Interchange and a 1.7-mile section or "stub" of the Lee Freeway between Harvard Road and the Outer Belt South (I-80) and a public hearing to approve the stub's centerline had been scheduled. Because federal rules required that the portion of any county highway that connected to an Interstate had to be constructed *concurrently* with the interchange, the group came to the realization that if the stub were built, traffic congestion on Lee and Harvard Roads would require the completion the Lee Freeway and the Clark-Lee Interchange in the park.

The group's strategy was to exert enough political pressure on their elected representatives to get Ohio Department of Highways (ODH) to postpone the hearing setting the Lee Freeway's centerline until SCOTS had issued its recommendations.[21] "We were working all the systems we could," Phil Hart, a member of the faculty of the Western Reserve University School of Architecture, recalled. "We got the grassroots going. Raised money. We grew because we made connections; we got the newspapers."[22] In July 1965, the Lee Freeway Committee dispatched its most articulate Democrats, Hart and lawyers Burt Griffin and Charles Miller, to Capitol Hill to gain the support of Senator Stephen Young, and Congressmen Robert Sweeney and Charles Vanik. At the end of their pitch, Hart recalled that Vanik shot back: "Let me get this straight. You guys from these rich suburbs of Shaker Heights and Cleveland Heights are coming to me to stop a freeway through your city? We live in Maple Heights. Where were you rich guys when they put a freeway through our community?" Vanik had already been fighting the County Engineer and said, yes, he would join them in opposing the Clark Freeway.[23]

Next, the members of the Lee Freeway Committee contacted Bureau Chief Rex Whitton. He agreed to reconsider the federal policy to build the stub *concurrently* with the interchange but insisted that regulations required that the initiative for this change must come from the State of Ohio.[24] Pearl Masheter, Director of the Ohio Department of Highways, simply refused to stop the stub. He reassured the committee that the rest of the Lee Freeway would not be completed until the route of the Clark Freeway had been determined. "Some people in the eastern Cleveland suburbs think this is pointing a rifle along the line to be followed for a later Lee Freeway extension," Masheter told the *Cleveland Press*. "This is not so and we want the people to believe us. We can swing the line almost 180 degrees in determining a future route. This may be exaggerated a bit, but, actually, the line is very flexible."[25] No one was fooled. Once the centerline was set, that rifle was pointed directly at the Clark-Lee Interchange in the park.

Freeway opponents used the media to put pressure on Masheter. The lead editorial in the *Plain Dealer* (a Democratic newspaper edited by Philip Porter, Albert's brother) assured Masheter, "No one, not the ODH, various citizens groups, the BPR, wants to delay building the Outer Belt South. This is a much-needed strip across the southern edges of the Greater Cleveland area…But the initiative to approach the BPR, which is interested in community outlook on freeway plans, must come from the State."[26]

Up to this point, the mayors and city councils of Cleveland Heights and Shaker Heights had taken no official position on stopping the stub because of its location in Cleveland. However, in early August, the Cleveland Heights City Council passed a resolution stating that the stub "would be a menace to the City and a decided threat to the residents of the City." City Council directed

Mayor Kenneth Nash to send a copy of the resolution to the mayors of Cleveland, Shaker Heights, and Garfield Heights; Governor James Rhodes, Rex Whitton, Pearl Masheter, Senators Lausche and Young, and Congressional representatives Sweeney, Bolton, and William E. Minshall, Jr (R-23), whose district included Shaker Heights and parts of Beachwood. The Shaker Heights City Council and the school boards of both cities also passed resolutions to stop the stub.[27] Not surprisingly, Cleveland Mayor Locher, beholden to Albert Porter, did not participate in this effort.

Next, members of the Lee Freeway Committee turned to Republican Congresswoman Frances Payne Bolton for help.[28] Cleveland Heights was part of the 22nd Congressional District she represented. She was one of a handful of women in Congress at that time. One of the heirs of a Standard Oil fortune from her uncle, Oliver Hazard Payne, Bolton had been in office for more than two decades. She immediately sent fellow Republican Governor James Rhodes a polite letter informing him that the Lee Freeway Citizens Committee had met with Rex Whitton, and his top aides. Whitton, she said, had made it clear that the request to change the federal requirement had to come from the state. With the consummate tact of a seasoned politician who recognized the delicacy of federal-state relations, she encouraged fellow Republican Governor James Rhodes to "nudge" Masheter to meet with the Lee Freeway Committee and elected officials of Cleveland, Cleveland Heights, and Shaker Heights. "In this way," she wrote, "the Congressional delegation from Ohio could be of maximum service in Washington in an effort both to speed the final approval of the financing of the Outer Belt South and to safeguard the integrity of the Seven County Study SCOTS."[29]

A short time later, Masheter made the necessary request to the BPR to allow the Outer Belt South to go forward without the need for the concurrent construction of the stub and interchange.[30] Whitton then informed the state highway department that it was reversing its four-year-old policy of "no stage construction" and would permit the Outer Belt South to be constructed in stages and still receive federal funding. In September 1965, the BPR gave the go-ahead for an eight-lane highway rather than the planned ten lanes needed for the interchange.[31] For a federal agency known for its intransigence, this was an extraordinary concession. After five months of mass meetings, letter writing, fundraising, and trips to Washington, D.C. and Columbus, the Lee Freeway Citizens Committee had stopped the stub—an important step toward the goal of stopping the Clark Freeway.

The Garden Clubs Mobilize

Meanwhile, the women of the Village Garden Club had been working independently to defeat the Clark Freeway. A generation older than the men involved in the Lee Freeway Committee, they were, as a member of the Lee Freeway Committee put it, simply not part of the "male influence network."[32] This club had a longstanding commitment to park conservation. Inspired by the cherry trees given by the Japanese government and planted around the Tidal Basin in Washington, D.C., the club had been founded in 1930 to plant cherry trees on the banks of Horseshoe Lake. In 1935, the club obtained a grant of $34,000 and employed Works Progress Administration labor to build bridle paths, a wading pool, and a sandy beach.[33]

During the first year of the freeway fight, the Village Garden Club had orchestrated a letter-writing campaign directed at their elected representatives in Congress. Croxton, Jean Eakin (Mrs. Paul J.) and Katherine Fuller (Mrs. John L.), a talented amateur nature photographer, hand delivered scrapbooks of Fuller's photographs of the park's wildlife to their representatives' offices to highlight the importance of preserving the beauty and diversity of the park's flora and fauna. A short article by Croxton in *Your Garden Center* warned readers that the freeway would destroy stands of great northern white oaks and groves of larches, pines, birches, and shadblow, and

obliterate the last undisturbed marshland in Cleveland. The parkways would lose the "Victory Oaks," each marked with a bronze medallion to honor a fallen soldier of World War I. Covering a large area with concrete would compromise the lakes and the wetlands along Doan Brook, which functioned as storm sewers for runoff during storms. Their loss would leave University Circle vulnerable to flooding during heavy rains.[34]

Like other upper-class women of their generation, members of this garden club had been privately educated and were graduates of the elite eastern colleges known as the Seven Sisters. Croxton, a graduate of Smith College, lived on North Park Boulevard across the street from Shaker Lower Lake. Before John Croxton's death in 1961, the couple had traveled—he to pursue an interest in archeology, she to cultivate her knowledge of Japanese gardens. Fuller, Vice-president of the club, was a fifth generation Clevelander. She recalled watching her mother plant cherry trees at Horseshoe Lake. Eakin, a Wellesley graduate, had earned a Master's in Social Work from Western Reserve University. She served on the Board of the Cleveland Day Nursery Association, which ran five inner-city day-care centers and the Florence Harkness Camp in Willoughby, Ohio, a fresh-air camp for inner-city children. Eakin was also a licensed bird-bander and had worked for 15 years on a project at the Holden Arboretum to reintroduce the eastern bluebird.[35]

In 1966, the Village Garden Club joined forces with the even more exclusive Shaker Lakes Garden Club. Founded in 1912 by four women whose homes fronted on the park, the club's mission was horticulture and park conservation. In 1921, its members had created a wildflower garden on the site of the Shaker sawmill and installed a picturesque bridge near the dam at Shaker Lower Lake.[36] Working together the two clubs created the Park Conservation Committee of Greater Cleveland, and elected Croxton president. This consortium of thirty-five local garden clubs represented about 1,500 suburban women.

Croxton, Eakin, and Fuller closely monitored national highway protests. In 1966, to save a park in San Antonio, Texas, Senator Ralph Yarborough won President Johnson's support for an amendment to the National Highway Act, making the construction of federally funded highways through parks and historic sites more difficult. President Lyndon Johnson set up the U.S. Department of Transportation, giving it jurisdiction over more than thirty agencies involved in regulating transportation, including that of highways. Lady Bird Johnson assured the women in a long letter of encouragement that new national legislation would protect parks and historic areas.[37]

It is unclear how they came up with the idea of applying for National Natural Landmark status for Shaker Lakes Park as a means of protecting it. To build support for the idea, in September 1966, Croxton called a meeting of Cleveland area people involved in parks and natural history. The group included Henry Norweb, Director of the Holden Arboretum in Kirtland, Ohio, among the largest and well-funded arboreta and botanical gardens in the United States; Ashley Norcross, Director of the Cleveland Garden Center, Betty Miller, Chair of the Shaker Lakes Garden Club's Conservation Committee, Henry Wallin, head of the Metroparks System, Sally Griswold, an elected member of the Shaker Heights School Board, and Alfred M. Rankin of Hunting Valley, a partner at Thompson, Hine and Flory. Rankin's wife, Clara Taplin Rankin, had grown up on Fairmount Boulevard whose back yard looked over an old Shaker lane. He was a trustee of the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, the Cleveland Zoological Society, and head the Cleveland Orchestra's Musical Arts Association. Shortly after this meeting, with the help of a lawyer from Rankin's firm, they incorporated the Shaker Lakes Regional Nature Center.[38]

Coached by Congresswoman Bolton, Croxton met with National Park Service officials, who may have suggested that a survey of the park's flora and fauna would strengthen their application for designation of the park as a National Natural Landmark. The Shaker Lakes Garden Club agreed to fund the survey through its Charitable Education Fund, but before the members could

put the proposal to a vote, an anonymous donor wrote a check for the entire amount. When Byron Ashbaugh, Associate Director of the Nature Centers Division of the National Audubon Society, arrived to conduct the survey, the same donor underwrote a large reception at the Cleveland Garden Center (now the Cleveland Botanical Garden). Guests included members of the Park Conservation Committee of Greater Cleveland, natural science teachers, and anyone else connected with the fight to save Shaker Lakes Park.[39] However, after reviewing the survey, the National Park Service concluded that there was nothing unique about Shaker Lakes Park's natural history. Indeed, since the lakes had been created by the damming of Doan Brook, they were "manmade" and could not qualify as natural landmarks.[40]

Undaunted, Croxton and her allies focused on the new national legislation that gave Secretary of the Interior Udall authority to intervene in preventing the destruction of nature preserves and historic sites by federally supported highways.[41] When Udall came to Cleveland in October 1968 to campaign for Charles Vanik who was running for Congress in the 22nd District against 29-year incumbent, Frances Bolton, they persuaded Udall and Vanik to visit the park. When they stopped at the dam at the western end of Horseshoe Lake for press photographs, they were joined by Bolton's grandson who lived nearby on Eaton Road and happened to be jogging in the park. As Udall stood in the woods east of the future nature center, Croxton recalled he remarked that the area "must be preserved, just as it is, in its wild state."[42]

The next month, the board of the nature center obtained a 30-year lease for 5.5 acres of parkland from the City of Shaker Heights after the city had renewed its lease for Horseshoe Lake Park.[43] A committee headed by real estate developer and conservationist David W. Swetland raised more than $100,000 in private donations for a nature center building designed by Maxwell Norcross. However, even though the Board of the Nature Center cavalierly built the nature center on the site of the proposed Clark-Lee interchange, no one had any doubt that Pearl Masheter would immediately have the building bulldozed should the route through the park be approved. Then the unexpected happened. During the 1967 Democratic mayoral primary, Albert Porter committed an unforgiveable gaffe that helped elect Carl Stokes Mayor of Cleveland.

Carl Stokes and Freeway Politics

There were three candidates in the 1967 Democratic Mayoral Primary: Mayor Locher (backed by Albert Porter and the County Democratic Party), Judge Frank Celeste, and Carl Stokes, a rising star then serving in the Ohio House of Representatives. Though Locher had won the County endorsement, the Stokes' candidacy captured newspaper headlines both locally and nationally. High on Stokes' agenda was building public housing for the low-income residents of Cleveland displaced by urban renewal and highways.[44]

During the primary, Albert Porter's fealty to Mayor Locher became a liability. Voters were dissatisfied with the mayor's poor handling of the city's race relations, culminating in rioting and loss of life in the Hough neighborhood the previous year. Still convinced that Locher would win, Porter demonstrated a spectacular lack of judgment when he allowed the Cuyahoga County Democratic Party newsletter, which he controlled, to stoke the racism of ethnic voters by suggesting that Stokes was a pawn of Martin Luther King Jr. Porter resented and feared Dr. King's interference in local politics. The voter-registration drives Dr. King had orchestrated in 1966 and 1967 had vastly increased the numbers of Black voters. The County newsletter warned that a Stokes' victory would signal a takeover of City Hall by Black nationalists. Stokes won the primary handily thanks to a massive turnout of Black voters and immediately demanded Porter's resignation as Democratic Party Chair. After Porter refused to step down, Stokes and Porter patched up their differences in the interest of Party unity and attended a large Democratic fundraising event where they shook hands and managed to smile for a *Plain Dealer* photographer.[45]

County Engineer Albert Porter, left, and his nemesis, Carl Stokes, *Plain Dealer* Oct. 12, 1967, the month before Stokes won the mayoral election. The Cleveland Press Collection, Cleveland State University.

The November general election pitted Stokes, the great grandson of a slave, against progressive Republican Seth Taft, the grandson of President William Howard Taft. Stokes was the more attractive, articulate, and charismatic candidate, but faced an uphill battle because two-thirds of Cleveland voters were white. In addition to the entire Black vote, Stokes needed a portion of the white electorate to win. Stokes tried to bridge the racial divide by expressing his optimism for the future of the city. He told voters they had a choice: "continued stagnation and dismal decay of both our physical surrounds and our spirits, or an energetic and enthusiastic forward thrust."[46] Both candidates avoided any mention of race until two weeks before the election. During the candidates' second debate at a high school on Cleveland's West Side, Stokes declared that the only reason that Taft might win was because he was white. This was the tactical blunder that Taft had been waiting for. He immediately turned the election into a referendum on Black power and stoked the racism of voters by portraying Stokes as its personification.[47]

One week before the election, Stokes found a way to pick up additional white votes by reversing the position he had taken on the Clark Freeway just two months earlier when he had questioned why the owners of small homes in Cleveland should have to pay for a park for "the exclusive use of folks who live in big houses in Shaker Heights."[48] Calling the route through the

park an example of Albert Porter's "arrogant dictatorship," he declared he intended to "fight its construction through Our Lady of Peace Parish west of Shaker Square in Cleveland and through the Shaker Lakes area."[49] Thanks in part to the white votes he likely won in Our Lady of Peace Parish, Stokes eked out a victory by a mere 1,679 votes.[50]

As soon as he took office in January 1968, Mayor Stokes informed Governor Rhodes by letter that he opposed the route of the freeway through the park. A. Q. Mobray, quoting a member of the Lee Freeway Committee, said Stokes' letter "hit like a bombshell in the [State] highway department and in the county engineer's office." Nevertheless, Mobray, whose book was published in 1968, thought it was doubtful that Governor Rhodes would cancel the Clark Freeway, because "there's probably between $70 million and $215 million riding on it." Mobray stressed the difficulty of getting freeways canceled. Out of thirty appeals in 1969, the BPR had granted a complete reversal only one highway plan, that of New Orleans.[51]

In May 1969, the SCOTS task force finally issued its report recommending shifting the route several miles to the north so that it went through Highland Heights and Richmond Heights.[52] It also concluded that only one of the four east side county highways was necessary. The citizens of Shaker Heights and Cleveland Heights were jubilant. Governor Rhodes, infuriated by the prospect of another delay, retaliated by ordering that the seven counties represented by SCOTS be absorbed into the Northeast Ohio Area-wide Coordinating Committee (NOACA), a new government agency set up by the Department of Housing and Urban Development. In addition to the county representatives, Porter made sure that the highway engineers on the payrolls of these counties (including himself) were appointed to NOACA. Rhodes gave NOACA a deadline of six months to decide between the "northern corridor" through Highland Heights and Richmond Heights and the "southern corridor" through the park.[53]

Norman Krumholz, Stokes' new Planning Director, had just taken up his post at City Hall in December 1969 when the mayor asked him to represent the city at the first meeting of NOACA. To find out what the freeway fight was all about, Krumholz invited himself to a breakfast meeting with the group of Heights lawyers who had stopped the stub. What impressed him was the group's depth of talent and commitment.[54] They had organized a new umbrella organization called the Committee for Sane Transportation and Environmental Policy (CSTEP) that included all the groups fighting the Clark Freeway: the Lee Freeway Citizens Committee, the Transportation Committees of Shaker Heights and Cleveland Heights, the Park Conservation Committee of Greater Cleveland, the Shaker Historical Society's Anti-Freeway Committee, the Audubon Society, the Natural Science Museum, and the League of Women Voters' Transportation Committee representing Cleveland, Cleveland Heights/University Heights, and Shaker Heights.

On the eve of the governor's December deadline for the NOACA decision, *Plain Dealer* reporter Michael Kelly reviewed the Clark Freeway saga in a full-page article entitled, "Clark Freeway? The name Sticks but Tempers Flare." This article was accompanied by a large cartoon caricaturing the state and local politicians involved in the Clark Freeway saga. State Highway Director Pearl Masheter, seated in his bulldozer, and Porter in his truck are the protagonists surrounded by lesser players. Masheter is reassuring Porter that he is working as fast as he can. Out-of-touch and reduced in size, Governor Rhodes (lower left) is musing on the silly notion of saving the Shaker lakes so they can be stocked with salmon. Mayor Stokes (lower right) repeats his campaign promise: "We must find places for the people, first," to which Lee Freeway opponent William Irwin retorts: "Yeah…for you too Carl!"—a reference to the mayor's homeless future should his home on Larchmere Boulevard be taken for the Clark Freeway. The cartoon included Lilliputian-sized throngs of historical society and garden club women holding placards (top right), next to the small-fry citizens of Richmond Heights and Highland Heights defending their suburbs with rolling pins, golf clubs, and bats. The accompanying article pointed out that the Clark Freeway was now the only interstate highway in Ohio that did not yet have a definite route. No

Cartoon by Dick Dugan showing the cast of characters in the freeway drama, *Plain Dealer*, Dec. 9, 1969.

lawsuits had been filed "for the simple reason there is no official freeway line to fight," but, he warned, the threat was still there and federal, state, and county officials were fed up with the years of delay.[55]

Freeway opponents were stunned a week later when NOACA announced its decision in favor of the route through the park. Krumholz recalled: "Here I was, proudly representing the mayor of the central city that would bear most of the costs of dislocation and the other burdens of highway construction, being almost casually overwhelmed by a regional group, some of whose members boasted that they had no idea of where the route was."[56]

Porter was elated. He was convinced that the long and bitter fight was over. Asked during a news conference whether he considered the decision a personal triumph, he bragged, it was "peanuts." He said he had never lost a highway battle in 40 years. "Is a dinky little park and a two-bit duck pond worth the extra $12 to $14 million and 400 homes it would cost to go around it?"[57] Opponents of the Clark Freeway were just a "chintzy, spoiled bunch," more concerned with looking out for their own interests than the county's transportation needs. But was it over? Six weeks later, the freeway fight took another unexpected twist after Governor Rhodes, still hoping for a compromise, suggested saving the park by routing the freeway along the Shaker Rapid right-of-way. Porter called this idea idiotic and compared it to building a bridge across Lake Erie to Canada, once proposed in all seriousness by the governor.[58]

The NOACA report, Porter's insulting remarks about his "spoiled" opponents' affection for a "two-bit duck pond," and the Governor's bizarre proposal prompted a mass meeting of Shaker Heights and Cleveland Heights residents organized by the League of Women Voters on January 28, 1970. As a blizzard raged outside, more than 1,500 citizens filled the Byron Junior High School auditorium and several classrooms to hear presentations by the leaders of CSTEP. The cities of Shaker Heights and Cleveland Heights announced they were prepared to hire Thompson, Hine and Flory to sue the state.[59]

Everyone involved in the freeway protest was dumbfounded when just one week later, Governor Rhodes called the mayors of Cleveland, Shaker Heights, Cleveland Heights, Pepper Pike, and East Cleveland to a breakfast meeting and told them that the Clark Freeway would not be routed through their municipalities.[60] However, days passed, and the Cuyahoga County Engineer's Office and the Ohio Department of Highways took no action. Mayor Stokes, now the point person for the issue, requested the governor to "officially communicate" his decision to these agencies and to the NOACA.[61] In his formal reply, the Governor advised Mayor Stokes that the Director of ODH had informed him that the cities of Cleveland, Shaker Heights, Cleveland Heights, East Cleveland, and Pepper Pike needed to submit formal statements of opposition to the highway and request abandonment of the project. Rhodes then confessed: "It has been my position since 1964 that the State of Ohio will not construct a highway that destroys Shaker Lakes or needlessly disturbs public and private life or otherwise disrupts community values."[62] Upon receipt of the resolutions from the five municipalities, on March 20, 1970, Governor Rhodes directed the Ohio Department of Highways to "initiate action for removal of the Clark Freeway from the interstate system and to seek reallocation of federal funds presently designated for the Clark Freeway to other highway projects in Ohio, giving preference so far as possible to Cuyahoga County."[63]

Why the governor canceled the Clark Freeway is unclear. Historian Marian Morton has suggested that political expediency drove the decision: he was running for the U. S. Senate and needed the financial support of the wealthy Republican donors living on the Heights. It could be that he was just tired of northeast Ohio's turmoil. He had mobilized the National Guard three times since July 1966 to quell civil disturbances. Two days after the Kent State shootings, the beleaguered governor lost the Republican primary to Robert Taft, Jr.[64]

In 1969, Mayor Stokes forced Porter to step down as head of the County Democratic Party. Remarkably, even after the cancellation of the Clark Freeway, Porter managed to hang on to his job as County Engineer until 1977 when he failed to win reelection. That year, he pled guilty to twenty-two counts of theft in office and no contest to seven additional counts for requiring county employees to contribute 2 percent of their paychecks to the "Flower Fund" he had used to finance his elections. He received a fine of $1,000 and a 2-year suspended prison sentence and died two years later.[65]

James Rhodes had already canceled the Clark Freeway by the time the National Parks Service created an entirely new landmark category and designated the Shaker Lakes Regional Nature Center a National Environmental Education Landmark in 1971. In 1974, the Department of the Interior reversed its earlier decision and named Shaker Lakes Park a National Historic Site, which protects the Shaker Lakes Park from rezoning, and prohibits any building not related to history.[66]

Timing was a major factor in the Clark Freeway protest. Before the mid-1960s, Interstate highways were built through major U. S. cities with lightning speed. Even after the passage of the 1962 Highway Act, giving local communities limited leverage over routing, only a few cities succeeded in standing up to the nation's highwaymen. It was even more unusual for a suburb to prevail in a freeway fight. The author knows of only two examples. The well-heeled citizens of Bedford, located in the exurbs of Westchester County, New York, brought a successful lawsuit that stopped the routing of a highway through their picturesque village. In Marin County, California,

protesters saved hundreds of miles of undeveloped land north of San Francisco.[67] In contrast, Shaker Heights and Cleveland Heights were near suburbs of a city on the cusp of deindustrialization. The two suburbs, already fully built out, faced decline and resegregation, should any of the proposed highways have been built. Their focus on saving the park proved a key to stopping the highways.

Porter's arrogance helped to unite the opponents of his plans. He had counted on getting the Clark Freeway approved before the new provisions of the National Highway Act went into effect. He was so cocksure he could win against the "spoiled" citizens of the Heights that compromise was impossible. His cynical attempt to play on the racism of West Side voters not only failed to swing the mayoral primary in favor of Mayor Locher, but also contributed to Stokes' decision to oppose the route through the park. In the end, Porter was beaten at his own game—politics.

Looking back on the freeway saga, Cleveland Planning Director Norm Krumholz reflected: "You know it was an extraordinarily interesting time. It was fun to be involved, though at the time I didn't think it was fun. I was tearing my hair out. It was really kind of thrilling. There was a lot of money at stake. There were major specific improvements at stake. There were larger-than-life political figures. Jimmy Rhodes. Carl Stokes. Albert Porter." Rhodes and Stokes had entirely different political agendas, he said, but both recognized that opposing the route through Shaker Heights was politically expedient. "It was less, I think, the fact that Shaker Heights was a wealthy community and more the fact that some bright, aggressive, and capable lawyers lived in that community." Just as important, he said, were the women who dared to build a Nature Center on the site of the Clark-Lee interchange. "The lawyers handled the downtown city angle. The women worked the conservation angle. That's what you call a coalition."[68]

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Jane Rothstein, Sabine Kretzschmar, and Meghan Hays for their assistence in the research for this article, and Clayton Koppes, Mark Rose, and David Stradling for their critiques of earlier drafts. I am also indebted to the two anonymous reviewers who greatly improved its organization.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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