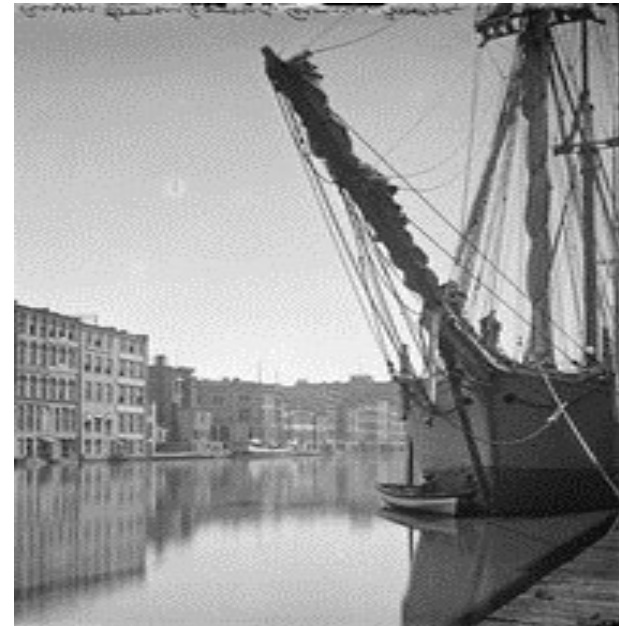


Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

# Lakeshore State Park Self-guided Tour

## The Historic Lakefront



Historic Lakefront  
Self-Guided Tour Stop Locations

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### **Park Contact Information**

For questions regarding events, volunteering, boat docks or the park in general contact:

Tom Kroeger—Lakeshore State Park Manager  
500 N. Harbor Drive  
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Phone: 414 274-4281  
Fax: 414 274-4285  
E-mail: [thomas.kroeger@wisconsin.gov](mailto:thomas.kroeger@wisconsin.gov)

### **Friends of Lakeshore State Park**

Join the many people helping Lakeshore State Park. Visit the Friends' website for more information on the Park and to view upcoming events.

Website: [www.friendslsp.org](http://www.friendslsp.org)  
Facebook: [MKELakeshoreStatePark](https://www.facebook.com/MKELakeshoreStatePark)  
Twitter: [LakeshoreSTPark](https://twitter.com/LakeshoreSTPark)

# The Historic Lakefront Tour

## For Additional Information

### Shipwrecks

Information on the shipwrecks was obtained in part from *Fathoms Deep But Not Forgotten ; Volume 1: Kenosha to Port Washington* published by the Wisconsin Underwater Archeology Association and available at the Discovery World Bookstore and online at <http://www.baillod.com/wuaa/Fathoms/>

### Historic Documents , Records and Maps

Figure 1, the 1885 map of the early landforms of Milwaukee was obtained from the Milwaukee County Historical Society, located at

910 North Old World 3rd Street  
Milwaukee, WI 53203

Phone: (414)273-8288  
Website: [www.milwaukeehistory.net](http://www.milwaukeehistory.net)

### Digital Historic Photographs

The aerial photographs in the brochure were obtained from the Milwaukee County Library's on-line Digital Photography Collection. Visit the collection at [www.mpl.org/file/digital\\_index.htm](http://www.mpl.org/file/digital_index.htm) to view thousands of photographs of historic Milwaukee.

### Schooners at Discovery World

Discovery World's *Denis Sullivan*, Milwaukee's own tall ship, is a reproduction of the type of schooners that once sailed the Great Lakes. Contact Discovery World's Reservations Department at (414) 765-8625 to arrange for a tour of the Denis Sullivan.

Visit Discovery World to see and explore a "kid-friendly" schooner inside Discovery World. Contact Joe Ewing of Discovery World at (414)765-8645 with questions about schooners.

## Tour route - See Map on back of brochure

- Start tour on the pedestrian bridge on the north side of the park.
- Follow the loop trail counterclockwise, starting with the west trail on your right.
- At the south end of the loop continue south to the red lighthouse.
- Return to the loop trail, taking the east trail to your right.

**Tour distance:** 1.5 miles

**Tour time:** 30 to 45 minutes



## **Introduction**

The current lake front bears little resemblance to what was originally here. In fact, this entire park is located on former lake bed. Filling and development have dramatically changed the land, and the current appearance hides a varied and sometimes surprising past.

This self-guided tour provides an overview of some of the changes and a little of the history in the Lakeshore State Park area, starting with the landscape in the early 1800's. Additional sources of information and pictures are included on the last page.

## **Stop No. 1 – Bridge**

### **Lakeshore State Park**

Lakeshore State Park is the newest and most urban park in the Wisconsin State Park system. The 22-acre Park is entirely constructed from fill placed on what once was lake bed.

The “island” portion of the Park (actually a peninsula) to the south of the bridge was constructed in the 1980's from limestone bedrock removed as part of the deep tunnel project designed to reduce combined sanitary and storm water flow into the lake. Known as “Harbor Island”, it was used by area residents for birding, fishing and dog-walking until 2005 when construction of the Park was started. The Park opened in June of 2007.

### **Prehistory Landscape**

All of the land you see to the south and west was once the lake. Much of what is now lakefront, downtown and the Third Ward was water and wetland separated from the upland areas by steep bluffs. Figure 1 shows the Milwaukee downtown area in 1835. Notice the extensive marshes and wet woodlands surrounding the three rivers that define the city: the Milwaukee, Menomonee and Kinnickinnick. It was these rivers and the associated wetlands and wildlife that first attracted Native Americans to the area. The natural harbor, considered one of the finest on the Great Lakes, later attracted European settlers at a time when cargo was almost entirely transported by shipping.

The island near the mouth of the river on the map is the original “Jones Island”. The Walker's Point area south of the Third Ward was truly a point. Also note the narrow sand spit formed by lake currents that separated the marshes from the Lake and diverted the river mouth to the south. Some early maps indicate that pine trees (probably white pines) grew on this spit, which was located approximately where Erie Street is now, well to the west of the present shoreline.



### **The Milwaukee Clipper entering the harbor in 1953.**

Maitland Field is located on the land between the water and downtown. Some of the same buildings shown in this picture are still Milwaukee landmarks, such as the white Cudahy Towers building on the right, and the former Wisconsin Gas Company building and the Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance buildings located above the middle of the clipper.



## Stop 6- Lakeshore Docks

### **Municipal Pier**

To the north of the Park docks is the white Discovery World building. Discovery World is located where the Milwaukee Municipal Passenger and Auto Pier once stood. The area was filled and the Pier built in the mid 1950's. The pier is best known as the dock for the S.S. Milwaukee Clipper, a ferry that regularly crossed Lake Michigan from Milwaukee to Muskegon, Michigan.

The Clipper, nicknamed "the Queen of the Great Lakes", was a Milwaukee icon for many years, appearing on postcards and other City marketing material. The Clipper was built on the hull of the Juniata, a ship built in 1904. Until 1937, the Juniata carried up to 350 passengers and freight across Lake Michigan in elegance, including mahogany woodwork and oak staircases.

In the late 1940, the Juniata's wooden superstructure was replaced with a modern, streamlined steel superstructure, the first of its type in the world. In 1941, the ship was rechristened the Clipper, and the striking white ship with red trim made its maiden voyage to Muskegon. The Clipper featured air-conditioned staterooms, a children's playroom, live entertainment and a dance floor. The Clipper was in service until 1970, almost 30 years.

With the Clipper no longer in service, the Pier continued to be used until 1973 for shipping by the American Motors Company automotive plant formerly located on Capitol Drive. In 1975, the Port of Milwaukee moved their offices to the building on the pier built to support Clipper. The Port moved to its present location on Jones island in 1993. The Pier remained relatively unchanged until the construction of Discovery World in 2004.



**Figure 1—Milwaukee in 1835**

## Stop 2 - Bioretention Pond Area

### **Festival Grounds**

Look to the west across the Quiet Water Basin at the Henry Maier Festival (Summerfest) Grounds, home of the largest US music festival and many ethnic festivals. All of the Festival property is on filled lake bed. As typical with much of the lakefront, the area had an interesting and varied past.

The Festival area was filled in the late 1800's (Figure 3) to provide access for transportation. The Chicago and North Western Railroad dominated the lakefront at that time, blocking the public from much of the lakefront.

In 1927 the city opened Maitland Field at the site, one of the first downtown airports in the country (Figure 2). The airport never prospered, in part because the tall downtown buildings and lake fogs caused hazardous conditions for takeoffs and landings.

In 1956, the U.S. Army took over the site, which then became a Nike missile anti-aircraft base in response to Cold War tensions. Nike sites were fairly common at the time, with eight bases in Milwaukee alone. Oddly, the site locations were not kept secret. During the 1950's and 1960's many Milwaukee residents went on base tours and missiles were often prominently displayed.

In 1970 Summerfest took over the site through a lease agreement with the City of Milwaukee, and is still going strong after 50 years.



**Figure 2**

**1968 aerial photograph looking south at Maitland Field on what is now the Festival Grounds.**

### Brig Cumberland

In 1859, the Cumberland was tied to the south pier of the harbor entrance when it was stuck by a passing schooner. The Cumberland started to sink, and was pounded against the pier until the ship broke up. The Cumberland had been carrying lumber on a run from Oconto to Chicago.

### Schooner Free Mason

Ships were not necessarily safe once snug inside Milwaukee's river harbors. The Free Mason, built in 1854, was moored by a bridge at Walker's point in 1866 when it was swept out through the Harbor entrance into the lake. A tug brought the heavily damaged ship back and tied it to the harbor piers, but the Free Mason never sailed again.



### Above

A schooner docked in downtown Milwaukee. The rivers in the city were filled with large sailing ships lining the riverbanks.

### Left

A scene taken just outside Milwaukee's harbor. Over a hundred sailing ships could pass an observer in a day.





## **Stop 5 - East Walkway**

### **Breakwater Lighthouse**

The Breakwater Lighthouse is the large structure located on the breakwater to the east of the Park. Built in 1926, one of the last lighthouses built on the Great Lakes. The lighthouse is bigger than it appears, standing 53 feet tall with a base of 29 by 44 feet. Originally, the lighthouse was operated by two 2-man crews that each worked 12-hour shifts on a three-days-on and three-days-off schedule. The lighthouse was automated in the 1960's, and crews now visit only for maintenance.

The lighthouse receives a pounding when strong east winds build up the waves. The staff at the Park have seen waves splashing over the building on several occasions. The lighthouse is built to take that punishment, and is constructed with ¼ inch steel plates equipped with windows and portals with ½ inch thick glass.

### **Shipwrecks**

Milwaukee was a busy harbor in the 1800's, and Lake Michigan was the interstate of the day, transporting goods and people to Milwaukee and other cities through an area that was largely still wilderness. Tall-masted schooners like the Denis Sullivan anchored at Discovery World were the workhorses of the fleet at that time. Lake Michigan was (and still is) a dangerous lake, and shipwrecks were not uncommon before GPS, radar, and radios. A few of the shipwrecks that occurred near the park are discussed below.

#### **Schooner *Solomon Juneau***

The Solomon Juneau, built in 1837, the first ship ever built in Milwaukee. The schooner had a relatively short and difficult life, with a number of mishaps ending in a stranding on the beach in November of 1846 at the eastern end of Chicago Street. The ship spent the winter on the beach, and was probably removed sometime thereafter.

#### **Schooner *Liberty***

The Liberty was a 2-masted wooden schooner, 55-feet long with a beam (width) of 17 feet. Built in 1832, it was the oldest ship on the Lakes when in 1872 it hit the new unlit pier heads at the harbor entrance and sank there in a severe snowstorm. The efforts of the crew and citizens on-shore were chronicled in a Milwaukee Sentinel article written at the time, which praised the "gallant commander, Capt. James Gunderson" who "after defying the furious elements he rode into the very jaws of death...". The ship was lost, and all but one crew member made it safely to shore. The vessel, valued at \$2,700, was owned in part by Capt. Gunderson and was uninsured.

## **Stop 3 - Beach**

### **The Development of the Lakefront and City**

As the city developed it pushed out into the lake. New land was created by filling lake bed from Kenwood Avenue and the water filtration plant to the north all the way to the end of Jones Island to the south. In the area of the Park, the shoreline was extended approximately 800 to 1,400 feet to the east. The Jones Island area was dredged, creating the current inner harbor. Luckily for the Park, the docks and piers planned for the Lakeshore State Park area in the 1930's and 40's were never completed.

The filling wasn't confined to the lakefront, but extended to the vast wetlands that covered the Menomonee river valley, to the present day Miller Park stadium and along deep river valleys in downtown Milwaukee (Figure 1). These wetlands teemed with wildlife. Native Americans lived, hunted and gathered wild rice in what was later Milwaukee's industrial corridor. The rich organic soils that developed in the wetlands were buried under soil, foundry sands, waste and whatever else could be gathered to create the dry land. To this day, deeply -driven pile foundations are used to support building constructed over the soft former marsh soils. Methane gas is still generated by the buried organic soils, and many buildings have venting systems to safely remove it.

Like Milwaukee, cities all along the shores of the Great Lakes filled wetlands, beaches and lake beds, channelized rivers and constructed harbors to enhance shipping and meet the demand for buildable land near the busy ports. As a result, many of the Great Lake's estuaries and marshes that provided wildlife habitat, fish spawning grounds and flood control were destroyed.

**Figure 3**



**Looking north from the waste water treatment plant in early 1920s.**

The treatment plant is under construction and the future Festival Grounds are being filled. The dock wall defining the fill area is approximately the present shore line.

## **Stop 4 - Harbor Entrance**

### **Harbor Entrance**

The current harbor entrance was one of the first major modifications made to Milwaukee's lakefront. Constructed in 1857, the "Straight Cut" was excavated through the sand spit shown on Figure 1 approximately ½ mile north of the natural river mouth. Boats then entered the harbor near what is now Erie Street. Over time additional filling lengthened the channeled entrance by over 1,000 feet to the east.

### **Milwaukee Pier head Light**

The original harbor entrance light was installed shortly after the "Straight Cut" was completed. Following further filling, the present red tower was installed in 1907. The tower is constructed with 3/8-inch steel plates and stands approximately 42 feet tall with base 11.5-feet in diameter. The light flashes every 4 seconds, and can be seen 12 miles out in the lake.

### **Marcus Amphitheatre Fill**

The last of the big fills to occur in this area was located on the land you are now standing. The area from the lake to just east of where the Hoan Bridge crosses the harbor entrance was filled in the 1950s, for reasons lost to history. The Marcus Amphitheatre, completed in 1987, was subsequently built on this fill, as are those sections of Lakeshore State Park between the Festival Grounds and the lake/harbor entrance. Sponsorship of the amphitheatre changed hands in 2017, and it is now known as the American Family Amphitheatre.

### **Jones Island**

"Jones Island" is the name given to the area south of the harbor entrance. Named after a small island that once was just south of current inner harbor entrance, the area was extensively filled and expanded. No longer an island, the area is now home to Milwaukee's waste water treatment plant, visible immediately across the harbor entrance, as well as the Port of Milwaukee. The area is also used for bulk material storage like fuel and the salt used for the streets in the winter.

The original island size and location can be seen on the map of early Milwaukee shown on Figure 1. For many years Jones Island was the home of a squatter's village of European fishermen from Germany, East Prussia and Poland, known as the "Kashubs". For decades Jones Island was the place to go for a fish fry. Figure 4 on the opposite page shows the village in its last days, after filling had increased the size of the original island and the village was under pressure to make way for development. The last fishermen left in the 1940's.



**Figure 4**  
**Jones Island in 1922 looking southeast from the inner harbor.**  
Note the recently filled land behind the village that was located on the original island. The boat docks are visible along the waterfront, as are the fishing nets stored on the square racks between the houses.