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The History and Archaeology of Cleveland's Historic Central Market District

Katie Fry
Cleveland State University

Rachel Daley
Cleveland State University

Kyle Riordan
Cleveland State University

Phillip J. Wanyerka
Cleveland State University, P.WANYERKA@csuohio.edu

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The History and Archaeology of Cleveland's Historic Central Market District

College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences

Student Researchers: Katie Fry, Rachel Daley, and Kyle Riordan

Faculty Advisor: Phil Wanyerka

Abstract

In the early 1990's archaeologists and historians from Cleveland State University and the Cleveland Museum of Natural History explored and excavated an early frontier community located south and east of Public Square in the area known locally as the Central Market District. To most Clevelanders the Central Market District brings to mind the bustle of busy nightclubs or the aging facades of old Cleveland landmarks. Few people, if any, would associate this area with archaeology, let alone remember that from 1796 through the 1860's this area was home to one of Cleveland's earliest English and Welsh working-class communities. From the founding of the Central Market in 1856 through the mid-1950's, this district was a booming commercial area that included groceries, saloons, apothecaries, shoemakers, and other commercial businesses. By the start of the 20th century, this area was the main commercial hub for most of downtown Cleveland. However, by the late-1950's the businesses in this area began to wither and decline ultimately leading to the demise and abandonment of this once thriving commercial district. Things would dramatically change in the late 1980's when plans were announced that would revitalize this area with the construction of a new sports-entertainment complex known as Gateway. Today, the Gateway Complex is home to Progressive Field and to Quicken Loans Arena. Presented here on our poster are the results of our summer research which involved a historical examination and investigation of the residential, commercial, and entertainment eras of the Central Market District based on our analysis of more than 100,000 artifacts collected from this area. Our project demonstrates how archaeology can be used as a critical tool in understanding the history and archaeology of Cleveland's historic Central Market District.