

Charlevoix's Antrim Street Dock Area Over The Years

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Charlevoix Historical Society Museum at Harsha House



Antrim Street dock, ca. 1809, looking north from today's Ward Bros.

Charlevoix's two channels were cut in 1869, which project for the first time allowed almost all of the Great Lakes vessels of the era access to Round Lake and Lake Charlevoix. It took another thirteen years, when the lower channel finally reached its present width, for the Lakes' largest vessels to come in. By that time, the west, Bridge Street side of the harbor was jammed end to end with docks, wharves, and warehouses. The dock closest to the channel bridge was mainly reserved for passenger vessels that traversed Lake Michigan. The Clinton Street dock handled schooners, the four masts seen at far upper right, because it was so conveniently located in the middle of the business district for unloading their cargo into stores and other enterprises. The Mason Street dock handled the passenger steamer business into Lake Charlevoix. The Antrim Street dock? It handled everything, one of the busiest spots on Round Lake at its far southwest corner. If necessary, any boat of any type could utilize any one of the four docks if circumstances required it.

But Round Lake's needs changed over the years, especially after the south, Belvedere Avenue side of the lake began to be itself transformed into another commercial maritime district in the 1880s. The hodgepodge, non-specialized Antrim Street dock began to fade. Even before the Great Depression hit in 1929, the area had long outlived its usefulness. It so happened that in the '20s the pleasure boat business began to really make its mark in America. Prior to that, only Charlevoix's Belvedere and Chicago Club resort associations at the east end of Round Lake provided dockage and boathouses for their members. For the general public and small craft, Charlevoix provided nothing.

But the post-World War I '20s were booming. Pleasure craft were appearing everywhere. Thus, the city, not wishing to be left out with a reputation for not caring, decided to install its first waterfront area devoted solely to the amateur mariner. The locale was perfect, from the decrepit Antrim Street dock northward for one block to the edge of the still functioning Mason Street dock. Into that tiny area went a grand total of five boat slips, of different lengths, for ten pleasure craft.



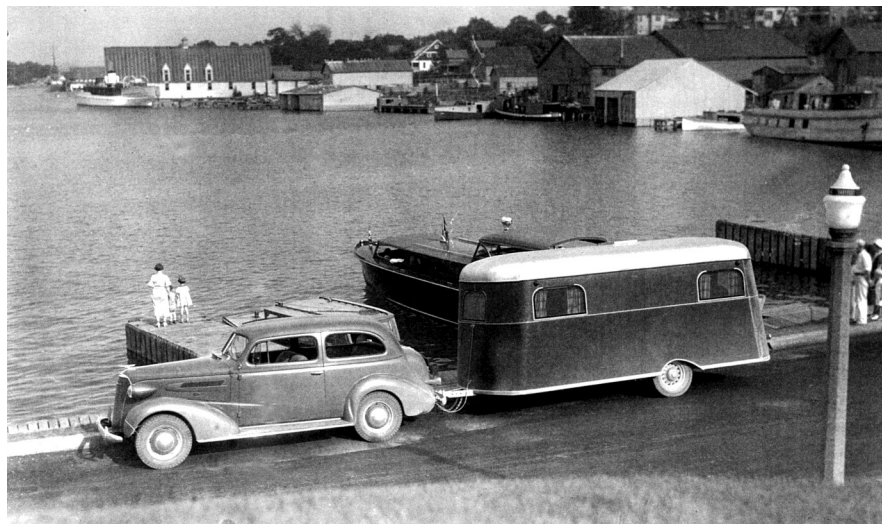
Charlevoix's first five slips for ten pleasure boaters, installed mid-1920s, Antrim Street at left, Mason Street at right, with the lone, fabled Parkside restaurant at the corner. Photo taken in the late 1950s.



Charlevoix's first five pleasure boat slips, mid-1920s, with dirt access road for cars



Paved access road with cement curbing, late 1930s



All the comforts of home for mariners along Charlevoix's waterfront, 1930s

From the beginning, access was provided to those who rented dock space by the city's installation of a vehicle parking area above the wood plank waterside walkway. All the boater had to do was drive down either Mason Street or Antrim Street, go for a sail or cruise, return, and drive back up to Bridge Street. In the '20s, the road was dirt; by the middle of the 1930s, it was paved along with enjoying cement curbing.

It took until the very late 1930's for more pleasure dockage to be provided after East Park began to be developed in 1937. The once dilapidated and dangerous waterfront section between Mason Street and Clinton Street now would provide spaces for around thirty more pleasure craft. At the same time, the original five slips were redone. That configuration lasted for almost seventy years until East Park as we know it was transformed into the award-winning crown jewel of Charlevoix's park system that continues to host untold thousands of people every year, with dockage at a premium every summer.

From nothing to really something in just under a century. From the time there were no places for visiting mariners to dock their boats, to, in 2021, USHarbors.com proclaiming Charlevoix's Round Lake to be the best harbor in the United States.



The original area transformed because of high waters, 1960s. Docks had to be built on top of docks to provide boaters direct access over the submerged walkway onto the East Park grass. This area is today just below East Park's magnificent performance pavilion.