SAWYER POINT PUBLIC ART FEATURES

GATEWAY SCULPTURE
It was the mighty Ohio River that brought early settlers to the fertile valley that gave birth to Cincinnati. It was also the river that influenced the direction the young city would grow — as a busy riverboat port, as the terminus of the famed Miami-Erie Canal, as a major industrial and commercial center, and, today, as America’s most beautiful inland river city. Therefore, it seems appropriate to honor the Ohio River with this spectacular environmental sculpture by Andrew Leicester which serves as a dramatic gateway to Bicentennial Commons and to the city’s history as it tells the story of our ties to one of the nation’s great waterways.

FLOOD COLUMN
The tremendous power of the river is symbolized by this column which rises 115 feet above the riverbed and bears markings of the three great floods of this area, including the devastating flood of 1937 when the waters crested at 79.9 feet. Today’s 52 foot flood stage is just about where you are standing. A sculpted piece of driftwood perched in a cleft at an elevation of 100 feet poses the question, “Can the raging flood waters ever reach this high?”

GOLDEN ARK
At the top of the Flood Column sits a miniature ark, probably the best known symbol of the power of floods throughout time.

TALL STACKS
Four pairs of smokestacks surround the Flood Column, each with a different stack top to represent the riverboats which were a major form of transportation and commerce in the 1880s.

CANAL LOCK
You will pass through the accurately scaled replica of a canal lock like the ones that once made possible the passage of boats along the waters of the Miami-Erie Canal. The lock provides you with a realistic feel of the original size of these structures; it serves, too, as the inspiring entranceway to Bicentennial Commons.

MIAMI-ERIE CANAL
The lock wall on your left shows the route of the Miami-Erie Canal as it flowed from Toledo, Ohio to Cincinnati with a total elevation drop of 512 feet. Limestone inserts mark the many towns along the way serviced by the canal.

SEVEN HILLS
Which are the “seven hills” of Cincinnati? Perhaps no one will ever know (or sure which seven were referred to in early prose). The right wall of the lock is dedicated to these hills which are, in reality, tops of plateaus carved out by the river. It also serves as a Recognition Wall, a fitting salute to the generosity of state and local governments, corporations, foundations and individuals which have contributed to Greater Cincinnati’s Bicentennial.

CANAL CUT
Standing in front of the 40-foot wide pool of water and looking north, you will see Eggleston Avenue. This was the route used to connect the Miami-Erie Canal to the Ohio River via a series of ten locks that dropped the water level 110 feet along this final section.

CINCINNATI ARCH
Cincinnati sits on top of a geological phenomenon — a gentle upward fold in the bedrock called the Cincinnati Arch. The wall behind the pool portrays the layers of the material left behind by the glaciers. To imagine the actual size of the underground incline, look over at the interstate bridge and multiply its height by at least ten!

INDIAN MASKS
This wall also depicts the various fossils and artifacts that can be found in the area. The fountain head masks which empty into the pool below were inspired by the numerous artifacts produced by the Indian cultures which inhabited the Ohio River Valley. At the base of the stair banisters, sky masks face heavenward, symbolizing the Indians respect for nature and the surrounding world.

SERPENT STEPS
The railing on this stairway recalls the famous Serpent Mound in Peebles, Ohio which dates back to the Middle Woodland Period, 100 B.C. to 500 A.D. Perhaps the snake-like shape of this unusual earthwork indicated the...
reverence held for the river by the area’s earliest inhabitants. The top level of the sculpture sits on a berm that suggests a section of an earthwork similar to the Serpent Mound.

**RIVER SOURCE**
At the top of the stairs you find yourself standing at the source of the mighty Ohio River — in miniaturization, of course — at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where the confluence of the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers form its beginning. The triangular shape represents the three rivers.

**RIVER NAVIGATION**
The triangular monument also represents the “limit of navigation” or the port limits of the navigable portion of the river. In 1929 the Army Corps of Engineers canalized the Ohio River with the construction of fifty “wooden wicket” dams, providing a six-foot deep channel to allow for year-round navigation. The entire system has been undergoing modernization to include a total of twenty locks and dams that will provide a channel with a minimum depth of nine feet along the river’s 981 mile length, and allow for the passage of larger craft.

**OHIO RIVER**
As you stroll along the river’s length you will see that it is not a river at all but a series of lakes between the 20 locks and dams, duplicated in miniature and bearing the names and elevations of each. Cincinnati’s pool is 95 miles long between the Meldahl Dam and the Markland Dam downstream. The average drop per pool is twenty feet (less than six inches per mile), with a total descent of 432 feet from Pittsburgh to Cairo.

**BRIDGES**
At the midpoint of the river sits its center of commerce, Cincinnati, with its nine bridges viewed by river pilots as true navigation obstacles. The plaques you see adjacent to the river depict the 1988 boundary of the Cincinnati city limits as well as the five communities of Northern Kentucky which share the banks of the Ohio River. The bridge you see here pays homage to the John A. Roebling Suspension Bridge, the first single span bridge of its kind in the country and a forerunner of Roebling’s Brooklyn Bridge.

**QUEEN CITY**
The crown suspended between the support columns of the bridge represents the Queen City. The origin of the name comes from a Henry Wadsworth Longfellow poem about Cincinnati called “Catawba Wine.”

“And this Song of the Vine, This greeting of mine, The winds and the birds shall deliver To the Queen of the West, In her garlands dressed, On the Banks of the Beautiful River.”

**FISH HEADS**
Decorative fish heads at the base of each bridge column appear as though they are being reeled in by the bridge cable extending from their mouths. Imagine the fish stories being told about this Ohio River catch!

**RIVER MOUTH**
The terminus of the Ohio River is in Cairo, Illinois, where the mouth empties into the Mississippi River. The pyramid here, although three-sided, is reference to its namesake, Cairo, Egypt.

**PORKOPOLIS**
Cincinnati owes a great deal of its rapid growth and prosperity to the pig. Hog processing plants and the resultant by-products were greatly responsible for the founding of many of Cincinnati’s nationally prominent industries. The “Indian Pictograph” mosaic on the South-facing lock wall depicts a local pork-processing plant where the modern-day assembly line was invented in the mid-1800’s. The flying pigs whimsically commemorate a time when Cincinnati was the world’s major pork processing center, thereby being tagged with its once-famous nickname, Porkopolis.

Once you have toured “Cincinnati Gateway” you will realize that history can be fun and refreshing. Each visit will offer endless new discoveries that will put you closer in touch with your city.

#cincyparks