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Bringing Romanticism To Urban Landscapes

How investment in parks helped revitalize the City of Chattanooga, TN



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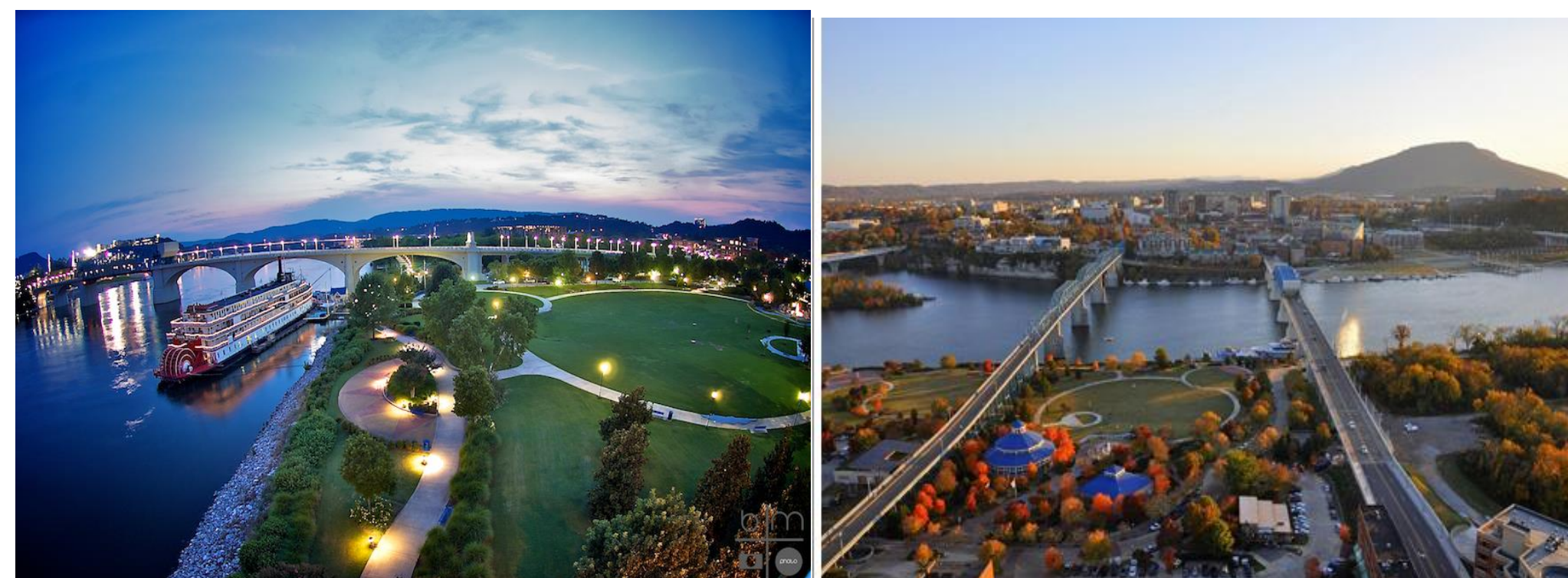
Introduction

After rising to 9th largest industrial city in United States, Chattanooga died in the late 1960s and 70s when the city became the most polluted in the country. Industries left, the population shrank by more than 10%; businesses and residents left the downtown area and the urban core was left dotted by abandoned buildings, superfund sites and a contaminated riverfront.

- ◆ Tennessee Riverpark system
 - TN Aquarium
 - Walnut Street Bridge
 - TN Riverwalk
- ◆ 21 Century urban parks
 - Main Terrain Park
 - Coolidge Park
 - Renaissance Park



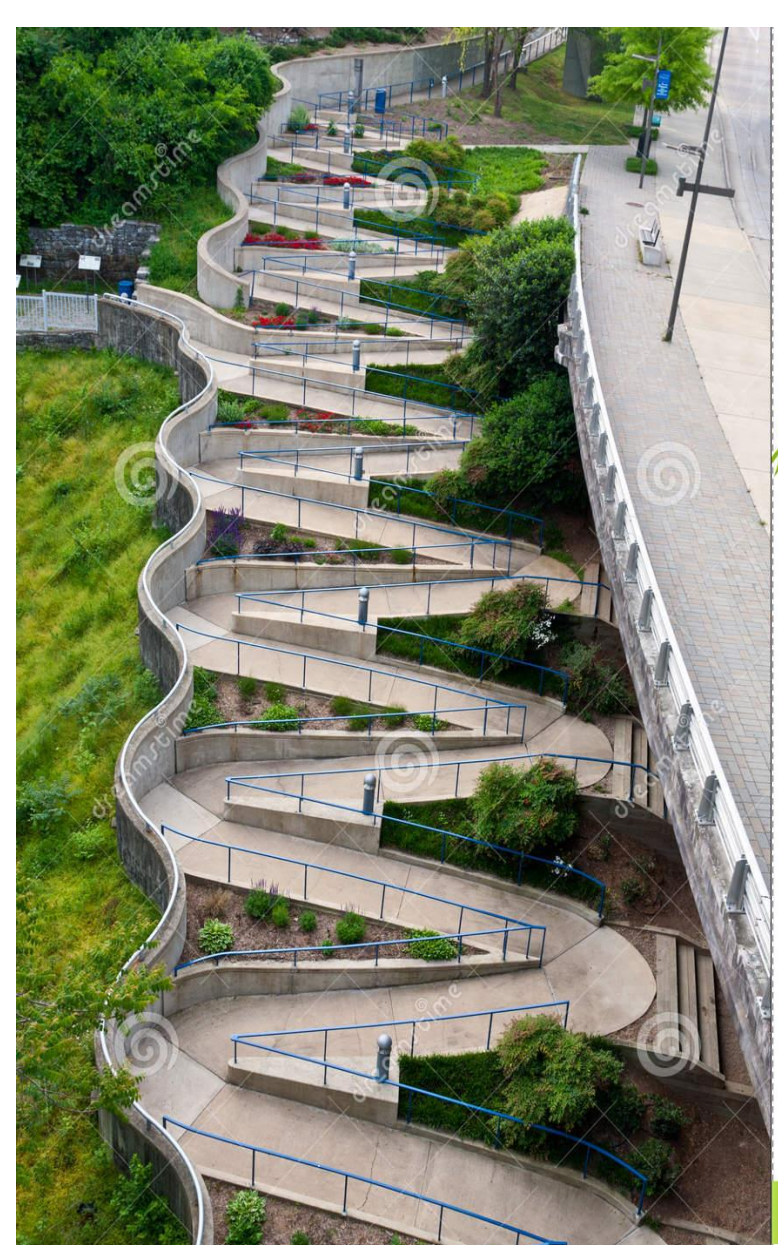
TN Aquarium, revitalization flagship project and anchor of tourism



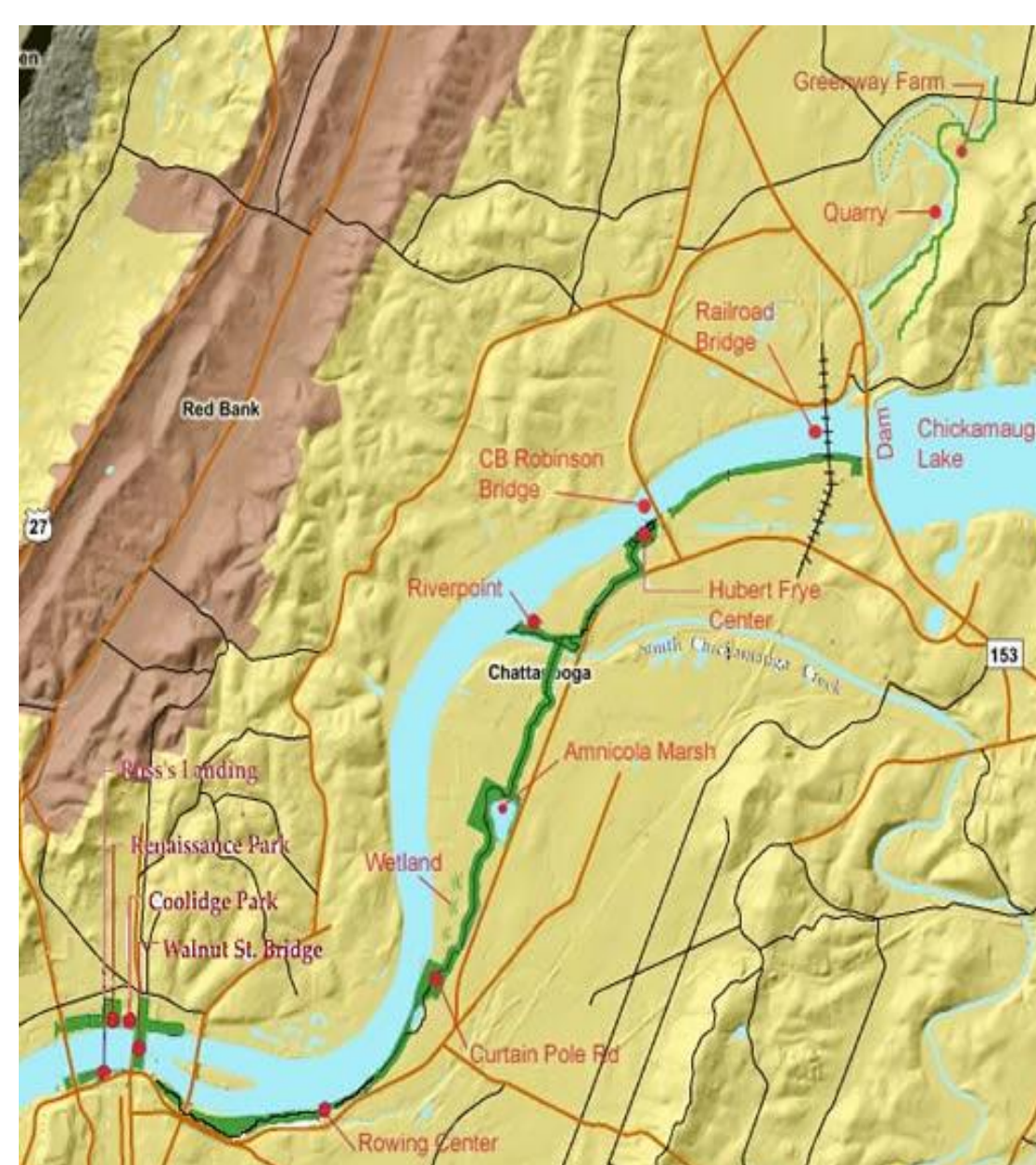
Coolidge park, a leading outdoor attraction for families

Problem Statement

Chattanooga transformed from the “dirtiest city” in U.S.A. to become one of the greenest today. Much of this change was done against the backdrop of investment in parks and preservation of green spaces within the urban core. However, although widely acknowledged among residents, this is hardly reported. No empirical research has been done to ascertain the role of parks and green spaces in helping revitalize the city and improve quality of life for the residents. This study is an attempt to answer the question: who was behind the investment in parks and green spaces and what was the overarching motivation?



The 13-mile TN Riverwalk, core to the TN Riverpark System: picnic areas; playgrounds; overlooks; wetlands; fishing piers; public art; public gardens



Literature Review

- ◆ American Romantic Movement - scenic and aesthetic aspects of nature as important to physical and spiritual health and communing with nature as communing with God. Values espoused by R. W. Emerson, H. D. Thoreau and J. Muir (Nash, 2012; Floyd, 2001).
- ◆ Biophilia (Lee, et al, 2009; Heerwagen, 2009)
- ◆ Parks and quality of Life (Chiesura, 2004)



Renaissance Park, a remediated site

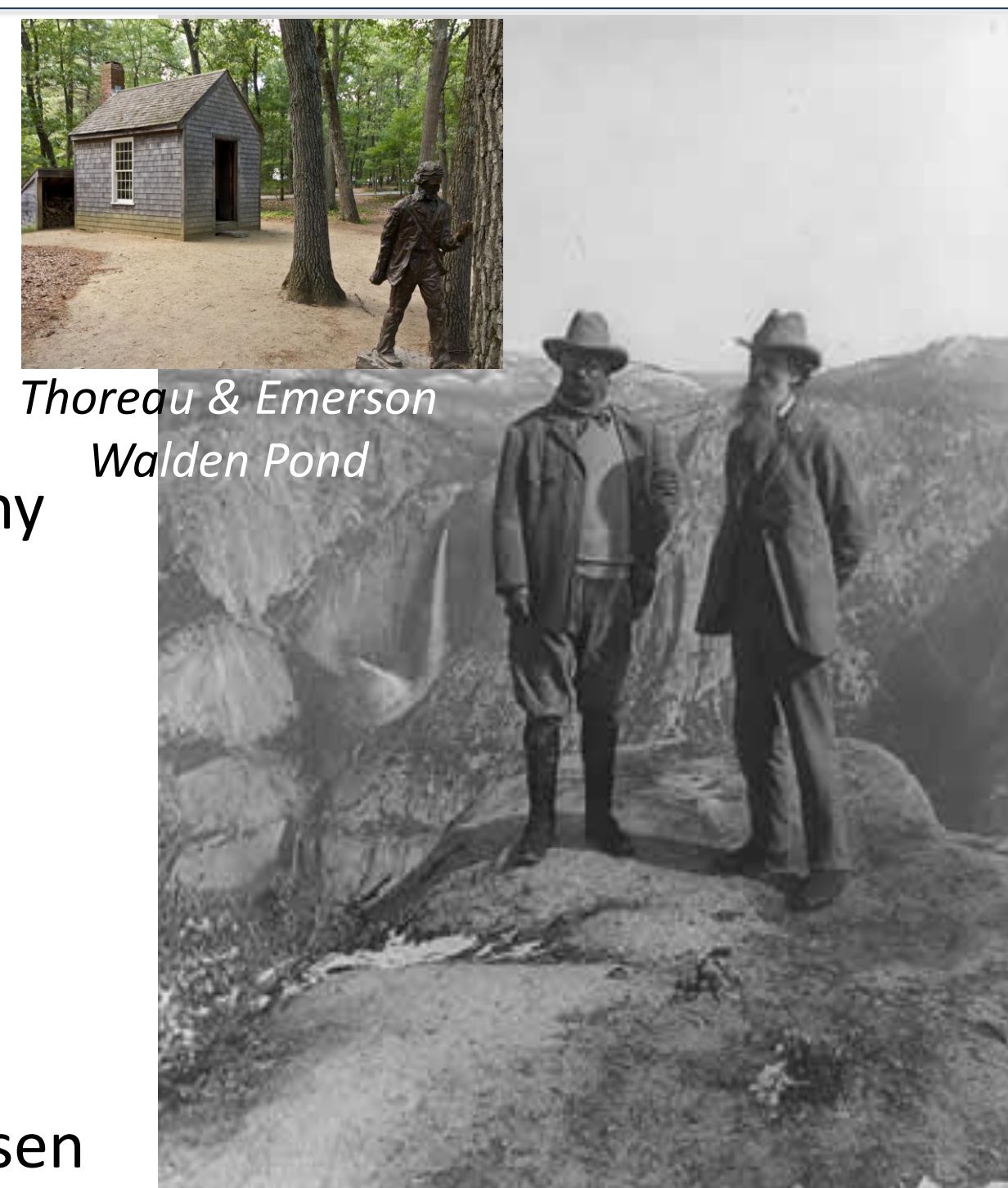


Montague Park, set aside to foster creativity and sculpture exhibition

Methods

Data Collection Strategies

- ◆ Key Informant interviews; N=30
 - (27% female; 43 min avg)
- ◆ Information rich sampling
- ◆ Document review, repeat visits, detailed field notes, photography



Thoreau & Emerson
Walden Pond

Data Analysis

- ◆ Verbatim transcriptions; review
- ◆ MAXQDa software
 - Themes, categories, codes

Dealing with Validity Issues

- ◆ Coverage bias: participants chosen from public, private and non-profits
- ◆ Researcher bias: passed sample questions through research committee and colleagues

T. Roosevelt & J. Muir played key role in the Romantic Movement



Miller Park, famous for the Nightfall Concert Series



Main Terrain Park, a unique outdoor recreation facility beautified with interactive art

Results

The Tennessee Riverpark System was an effort by Moccasin River Bend Task Force established by city and local county government. The task force established River City Company as the implementing agency with funding by Lyndhurst Foundation and other local financial institutions. According to participants, the motivation for establishing the system of parks and greenspaces along the river, dubbed “Return to the river”, was to:

- ◆ Give the river back to the people after decades of isolation.
- ◆ Bring residents back to downtown from the suburbs.
- ◆ Create place where people would want to live, work and play.
- ◆ Attract young professionals, creative class.
- ◆ Clean up your front porch and visitors, businesses will come.



Historic Ross' Landing, base for River commerce and origin of the Trail of Tears

Conclusions

- ◆ Understanding and highlighting importance of natural assets.
- ◆ Strong public-private partnership portfolio led by civic leaders.
- ◆ Effort brought back residents to the downtown & riverfront.
- ◆ Parks and green spaces improved the quality of life of residents.
- ◆ Parks and greenspaces acted as antecedent for tourism industry.
- ◆ A sense of pride, confidence and place restored among residents.
- ◆ Chattanooga a model of sustainability and citizen engagement.
- ◆ Chattanooga success model for other former industrial cities.

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