

HISTORY OF THE 1970s

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At first, the arrival of a new decade to the Greater Cleveland area in 1970 appeared a welcomed reprieve from the political and social intensity of the past ten years. The era will be remembered as one of the most cataclysmic in city history. Now the population dropped to 750,903, and the census ranked Cleveland as the tenth largest city in the U.S.

The suburb of Parma grew to a population of over 100,000 and was the ninth largest city in Ohio, evidence of the exodus from the city which numbered more than 165,000 in over 20 years. Yet Cleveland was still the dominant political and economic entity in Northeastern Ohio.

But that role was being threatened by the development of a highway system that fanned out from the city like spokes from a hub, corridors to the bucolic beckoning of the suburbs that would in a short time change the nature of the region.

World War II disrupted long-time plans to build the Willow Freeway that would open the southern suburbs to quick downtown access. The freeway was opened in sections, beginning in the early 1950s, and ultimately became Interstate-77, which made regional travel more accessible.

By 1970 a vast Interstate system crisscrossed Northeastern Ohio, shifting development away from the traditional population centers that had originated along railroad lines. Automobiles traveled these highways on gasoline that cost 36 cents per gallon.

In the spring of 1970, America was divided over the Vietnam conflict and protests shifted from civil rights to that of opposing the war. Less than 40 miles south of Cleveland, those protests culminated on May 4, 1970, in one of the most unlikely places in the nation, Kent State University, where four students were killed by National Guardsman, who had been summoned to the campus to subdue a protest. The tragedy symbolized the ending of the tumultuous 1960s and left an exhausted nation seeking tranquility and a sense of normalcy.

If the nation was seeking relief from the anger and resentment over the Vietnam War, the City of Cleveland was in need of its own salve. The final years

of the Mayor Carl B. Stokes administration produced a series of sharp confrontations with the police department and Council Presidents James V. Stanton and Tony Garofoli. Both emerged from the 1960s as substantial political figures and antagonists of the mayor.

Throughout the final months of his term, Stokes berated the newspapers, former allies, and anyone who seemingly challenged him. The strain of managing a city in torment was taking its toll on everyone.

The city was caught in the grips of racial polarization. While Stokes had opened the way for minorities in government and business, the black organization he created—the 21st District Caucus—withdrew from the Democratic Party, making a difficult political scene even more fractious.

Meanwhile, conditions worsened in the city. Businesses were steadily abandoning downtown, plans to disperse public housing on the West Side were met with hostility in the neighborhoods, deepening the tensions at City Hall. Public services were slipping; crime was at a record pace, as drugs began an insidious and irreversible intrusion into the poor areas of the city.

In 1972, homicide in the city set a record with 333 murders. Ten years earlier there had been only 59.

Looming in the wings and ready once more to take center stage was the school issue. It had been this controversy that set off the Hough Riot, which ultimately led to Carl Stokes's rise. In the 1970s, problems in the school system would spill out over the city and touch the lives of everyone.

All of this was too much. No one could triage the issues, much less solve them, especially an embattled Carl Stokes who saw no respite, nor allies, nor even hope. The once promising City Hall that Stokes assembled dissipated and his temperament became increasingly short and accusatory toward those who challenged him.

The newspapers continued to offer support, but it was becoming clear that the community was losing confidence in Stokes. It is important in evaluating this era to understand that much of the confidence accorded Stokes was generated by an inflated expectation factor both by community business leaders and the mayor himself. When it became clear that the negative forces at work, both here and nationally, were of such magnitude that no single person could overcome them, the emotional letdown was more than Stokes or the community could bear.

The painful decade that had spawned so many hopes and dreams, and invited the world to watch, was over. Life went on, but the dynamic that drove Cleveland was changing.

Seven months into the new decade, George Szell, the great conductor of the Cleveland Orchestra and the city's legendary cultural icon, died at 73. No Clevelander in his time projected the city globally and with such grandeur as did Szell. He conducted the orchestra with a martial majesty for 24 years.

The desire for sense of normalcy descended upon Cleveland as Carl Stokes announced, on April 16, 1971, that he would not run for a third term as the city's mayor. The progressive nature of his politics gave way to the return of the status quo to which the ethnic composite of the city lent itself.

Stokes organized the 21st District Caucus in order to counter the existing white political apparatus and gain a greater voice in that community. Black politicians began to emerge from the caucus and establish themselves as leaders, replacing Carl Stokes in the community.

Stokes withdrew the caucus and black political participation from the Democratic Party out of frustration and charges of racism. The secession of the caucus would play a role in crippling the party's efforts to retain power in City Hall.

The long tradition of a strong and united Democratic Party had been severely tested during the 1960s, with the emergence of black politics. Over time, the party had become composed of three elements: the Irish on the West Side, the Italians on the East Side, and the Eastern European population that made up the ethnic nature of Cleveland's South Side.

The evolution of black politics, which had emerged from Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, elbowed its way into Cleveland's political mosaic, creating an abrasive mix that brought charges of racism, disrupted the patterns of patronage, and circumvented the paths of political ambition for a generation of Democratic hopefuls. In the fall of 1971, when it came time to reclaim City Hall, the party was woefully unprepared to step forward and do so.

The party split internally, offering two candidates for the fall primary, City Council President Tony Garofoli and businessman James Carney, a long-time behind the scenes political figure. Representing the black community and running as an independent was Arnold Pinckney, the school board president and confidant to Carl Stokes who lent his considerable support to the campaign.

On the Republican side was Ralph J. Perk, who was elected county auditor in 1962 and enjoyed favorable support from the newspapers in that role. Perk promoted himself as an honest and ethical politician and ran on that premise. He ran for mayor against Stokes in 1969 and lost by 4,500 votes.

Running against him in the Republican primary was a rising political star whose ascension to political prominence was yet in the future. George Voinovich was in the Ohio House of Representatives when he opposed Perk.

Perk was a curious blend of politician for Cleveland. In a sense, he was not Republican, in that he did not fit in with the image so rigidly attached to the party by its critics. For instance, it was questionable whether he could even get into the Union Club in those days, let alone afford its dues. He was more comfortable amongst his neighbors on East 49th Street, where the polka and perogies were favored over the symphony and sushi.

Perk was perceived as a man of the people. He created this image largely through newspaper accounts of his challenges to the business practices of John and James M. Carney, who used political contacts and manipulations to acquire vast real estate holdings. *The Plain Dealer*, in particular, had been severely critical of the Carney brothers. It was ironic then, that Perk and Jim Carney would face each other in the race for City Hall.

Jim Carney, by many accounts, was among the smartest men in town. He was a lawyer, self-made, the ethics of his achievements dubious in the eyes of some. Nevertheless, Carney was respected by the business community. He built several buildings around a revived East 9th Street. Even though he was active in politics throughout his life, he generally spurned the rigors of public campaigning for the solitude of the strategist. It suited his personality and his pursuits.

When Pinckney failed in the primary, Carl Stokes marshaled the black vote and shifted it behind Carney. The tense feelings between Stokes and Garofoli from their earlier clashes over public housing at City Hall were still raw.

As always, the newspapers played a key role with their endorsements. *The Cleveland Press* supported Carney and *The Plain Dealer*, which had aided Perk in his attacks on the Carney brothers, supported Garofoli.

The contempt in which Carney held *The Plain Dealer* was illustrated by the fact that he became a stockholder in the newspaper, often offering embarrassing remarks as to its business practices at the annual shareholder meeting, no doubt negating the paper's support. All these diverse elements were shaping a pattern that favored Perk, despite the fact Democrats outnumbered Republican registered voters 8 to 1.

Neither candidate could match the eloquence of the Stokes campaigns. Perk tramped tirelessly through neighborhoods, adapting to one ethnic culture then another, like a chameleon crossing a rainbow. He gained what would be an unholy alliance with key labor unions, and resurrected the traditional role of the ethnic politician who played the divisions of the town as if he were conducting an orchestra.

For all of Jim Carney's faults, the downtown business community believed in him the way they did their investment counselors. After all, he had sunk his own money into downtown, building two hotels when the city sorely needed them. He organized a Port Authority and played a role in numerous civic efforts. He was the best they had, and the business leaders believed he would be an outstanding mayor.

As a campaigner, Carney was painful to watch. He suffered from a tall man's awkwardness and was self-conscious as a speaker. He had spectacles that reporters referred to as "Coke-bottle thick" and never seemed at ease.

Together, the pair hardly presented an intoxicating campaign, but after the previous decade, the city needed to catch its collective breath, even if it involved

political boredom. There was growing alarm in the business community, for many of the projects it championed in an effort to revive the town had failed. The city needed new blood, and fast.

Instead of that transfusion, it got old politics. Perk was the first elected Republican mayor in Cleveland since Harold Burton in 1935. Perk did not suffer from the enormous expectations that burdened Stokes, but as time passed he proved to be an inept administrator and an inconsequential mayor. The Cleveland business community—always sensitive to national ridicule that the city drew over such misadventures as the Cuyahoga River burning, its aimless sports teams, and even its intemperate climate—prepared for the worse.

It did not take long for Perk to add to the miasmatic ridicule that hung so lazily over Cleveland, in what one visiting sports writer once termed as the city that represented the broken nose of America. In October of 1972, while presiding over ceremonies opening a convention Perk, wielding a welder's torch, set his hair on fire. The photograph that captured the moment was transmitted nationwide by wire services, perpetuating Cleveland jokes. Late night television shows were merciless.

When his wife reported to have turned down an invitation to a White House dinner because it conflicted with her bowling night, the jokes took on new life. Then an aide, in an attempt to defend the mayor's involvement with a computer company, said that Perk, who had served as county auditor for nearly a decade, did not know the difference between a bond and a note, and the ridicule reached a new pitch. On a visit to Rome, Perk beseeched the Pope to pray for Cleveland.

On the city's East Side, the Cleveland Clinic was emerging as a great medical center. It was capitalizing on two events that had taken place within its confines that would lead to it becoming the country's, if not the world's, leading cardiac hospital. The decade at the clinic was a time of perfecting these two procedures.

In 1958, Dr. Mason Sones had discovered, by accident, the first coronary arteriogram, which pictured the interior of an artery, thus enabling an exact determination of a diseased vessel. A maverick of sorts, Sones thrived on the independent nature of the Clinic at the time, and became a renowned figure in the cardiology community.

The other development that would propel the Clinic into the future, was the work of Dr. Rene Favaloro, a cardiothoracic surgeon, who developed the first successful coronary artery bypass procedure. These two procedures, and the work that Clinic doctors did throughout the 1970s to make them almost routine medicine, foretold the future of not only the Clinic, but good fortune for the city and ultimately the region.

Meanwhile, the announcement on the part of the Greater Cleveland Growth Association, the area's chamber of commerce, of a plan to study the creation of a huge jetport in the lake created headlines. The plan was spearheaded by James

C. Davis, the managing partner of Squires, Sanders & Dempsey, one of the city's leading law firms.

The law firms—mainly Squires and Jones, Day, Cockley & Reavis—played an influential and sometimes covert role in the governing of the city. Because so many of their large clients had business interests in and around the city, the firms were often asked to intercede or interact with government in such matters as maintaining a good school system, promoting economic growth, and dealing with other day-to-day issues.

In effect, these firms operated as a shadow government. For instance, one day in the early 1970s, Mayor Carl Stokes called Jack Reavis, then managing partner of Jones, Day, and told him that the city did not have enough money in its budget to open the swimming pools that summer. There was fear in those hot summers days, for they were one of the ingredients of the riots that had devastated the city.

Stokes called Reavis in the hopes that he could help raise the needed money to open the pools. Reavis rallied the business community in a matter of hours and the needed funds were obtained.

The firms played a large role in the community in other ways. They recruited young lawyers from the best law schools, bringing a steady stream of intellectual capital to the city. These young lawyers fanned out to volunteer for countless civic and cultural boards, and some became candidates for public office. The legal community provided stability to a city whose political foundation was fractional and inbred.

To understand the impact of the big firms on the town, it must be noted that they served the interests of their clients well. That is what they were paid to do, and sometimes the interests of those clients were not always aligned with that of the city.

The jetport plan became lost in a debate between conflicting interests. It also may have been stillborn out of the frustration of the business community over decades of political ineptness in its efforts to regain the greatness that the city enjoyed in the earlier part of the century.

Prior to the Depression, Cleveland had a reputation of acting in a grand manner. When it was conceived, the Terminal Tower was the second tallest building in the world, the airport was the largest in the world at one time, and the first ever to be lighted for night operations. Cleveland manufactured the first commercially sold automobiles, and for a time was the aviation capital of America. It had the largest convention center in the country.

There was a desire and a need to do something on a greater scale. It was clear, however, that the leadership necessary for large scale endeavor was not going to come from City Hall.

When James C. Davis, managing partner of Squires, Sanders & Dempsey, took over as chairman of the Growth Association, it was a jumbled and ineffective

body. Davis reorganized it, drew the business community and newspapers together, and launched the jetport idea, with a warning that Cleveland could not afford to miss this opportunity if it was to regain its prominence.

The object was to raise \$1.2 million for a feasibility plan for a jetport that could be completed by 1985. It would serve as a catalyst for 70,000 new jobs with a payroll of \$500,000,000, according to preliminary studies. Projections were for substantial increase in air travel and the use of supersonic transports which would link Europe to Cleveland in a few hours. The federal government was studying the establishment of a series of hub airports around the county to accommodate these flights.

Because of a lack of trust or competence or simply out of naivete, there grew a reluctance on the part of the business community to engage openly with the city's political and civic grass roots. Ideas involving the expenditure of public money were packaged in back rooms, sold to willing and eager newspapers who presented plans as *faits accomplis*.

If the city's leaders yearned for the return of the city, they failed to study the past and understand how citizens contributed to the growth of the city.

Contrast that to the way the town handled the building of the Public Auditorium and the Terminal Tower. Those issues were voted upon; and, in the case of the auditorium, the bond issue passed 4 to 1 in 1916. More people voted in that election than cast ballots in the presidential primary that year. Voters approved the moving of the train terminal to Public Square in 1919.

The failure to involve the public in succeeding years cast suspicion and doomed more than one public project. This division between the sectors of the community would continue to haunt the city for years to come.

Environmental groups, civic watchdog organizations, and other good government groups bridled at being treated in such a manner. They organized opposition that made politicians reluctant to engage in visionary plans, no matter what promise they held for the common prosperity of the community. So was the fate of the jetport, which died from ridicule and added to the city's cynicism.

Chief among the critics was a young city councilman named Dennis J. Kucinich. He used the jetport issue as a platform, gaining notoriety citywide for his opposing view. As the decade progressed, Kucinich's public presence would become as familiar as the newspaper at your door.

Was the jetport a missed opportunity? No one will ever know, because the necessary studies to determine its feasibility were never completed, having been lost somewhere amidst the dissent. Nearly 40 years later, former City Council President George Forbes, who was present at the debates, said the project was 50 years ahead of its time.

Despite the failure of the jetport, a spirit of restoration and revival seemed to permeate the city. A band of young and dedicated investors began to refurbish

aging Ohio City, struggling against the odds to remake the neighborhood, in a project that would continue on for a half century and reflect the pride of a community like nowhere else in the city.

When the great theaters, the hallmarks of Playhouse Square, were threatened with demolition, the Junior League and others mounted a Herculean effort to save them, thus ensuring that a celebrated part of the city survived and regained its vibrancy.

The Depression and then World War II had arrested downtown development decades before but, as the 1970s progressed, new buildings began to rise with the encouragement of tax cuts. The city began to take on a new look. On Euclid Avenue and East 9th Street, the venerable Cleveland Trust, now called Ameritrust, erected a 29-story tower and promised a companion to it in the future, and the Diamond Shamrock Corporation built a 22-story headquarters at Superior and East 12th Street.

The 20-story Bond Court office building at East 9th Street and Superior Avenue was completed in 1971; and in 1973, the 526-room Bond Court Hotel was constructed adjacent to it on Superior Avenue, forming a complex along with a parking garage. The city had been painfully short on hotel rooms.

By 1973 the sprawling apartment complex known as Park Centre opened. It was hailed as the set piece of the embattled Erieview urban renewal project first begun in the late 1950s. The twin 22-story apartment towers between a two-story shopping complex cost \$42 million and was the second most expensive downtown investment behind the Terminal Tower. Not far from the Park Centre on Superior Avenue, the Ernest Bohn Tower, a public housing project, rose another 22 stories, a monument to urban renewal and to the father of public housing.

The signal project of the decade for local government was the construction of the Justice Center Complex, which occupies a city block between St. Clair and Lakeside Avenues on Ontario Street. The 26-story building houses the Cleveland Police Department, the Cuyahoga County and Cleveland Municipal Courts, and the County Jail. Its planning had been a nightmare of negotiations between city and county officials, with Mayor Perk at one time threatening to withdraw from the project because of cost overruns.

Originally budgeted to cost \$61 million, the controversial project ended up costing more than \$125 million, and was stigmatized by rumors of illegalities associated with its construction that were never proven. It was also burdened with construction flaws, the latest discovered in 2010, when it was found that the lights in the police department headquarters had been on continuously since it was constructed in 1976. No provision had been made for light switches.

Downtown development, under the guise of saving the city, opened a Pandora's box from which sprung tax abatement, an issue that would be used in such projects as the National City Bank Building at East 9th and Euclid Avenue

and other development. Tax abatement was an issue with which opponents would tar Ralph Perk. The town lived on tax abatement well into the next century, eroding the tax base that would support the schools.

One of the most significant downtown projects of the time was the expansion of Cleveland State University, which had begun in 1964, an offshoot of old Fenn College.

By the time the 1970s arrived, the school, sorely needed by the city, had become a new economic engine driving the eastern side of downtown. The construction of the James A. Rhodes Tower in 1971 gave CSU its own landmark, with the campus spreading out around it as the decade passed.

If things were improving in the city's higher education picture, the Cleveland school system was caught on the other end of the spectrum, perched precariously amidst racial and financial issues in search of a solution.

The school system had been at the forefront of the agitation and strife that caused the unrest leading to the Hough Riot in 1966. Despite increased civic involvement and the awareness of a festering situation, no real progress was made toward a solution. In fact, the school problem was getting worse.

School Superintendent Paul Briggs took over the Cleveland school system in 1964 and tried to meet the growing racial protest by building new schools. By the 1970s, he had built 50 neighborhood schools, and that was the problem.

By 1971, two out of three black students were attending classes in schools made up of mostly minorities. That ratio was increasing in Cleveland, while across the nation the integration of school systems was on the rise.

When the Cleveland Board of Education announced it would build new schools on the city's East Side, black citizens and civil rights leaders balked, arguing and demonstrating that to do so would be a furtherance of segregation in an already divided city. Finally in 1973, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People filed a federal lawsuit claiming that it was impossible to receive a quality education in an illegally segregated situation such as Cleveland.

After five years of proceedings, U.S. District Judge Frank J. Battisti ruled that the school system was guilty of de facto and de jure segregation, which led to the bussing of students across town and even further tormented an already divided city. Critics say that Battisti overlooked the opportunity to build magnet schools that drew students of like interest, instead of spending millions on bussing.

There has long been a debate over how seriously bussing affected the city's population loss, but the fact remains that it proved to be unpopular among both blacks and whites, and added to the embittered legacy of racial discontent. Ultimately, it helped to drive more families from both races to the suburbs, but was only a part of the migratory motivation, for drugs and crime were flourishing in unprecedented numbers.

Meanwhile, with Carl Stokes in New York City, where he was getting mixed reviews in his role as a news anchor on WABC-TV, racial politics flourished here, and three black political figures emerged in his shadow.

The first, was Louis Stokes, Carl's older brother. Reserved, respected, and reticent, by comparison to his brother's sophisticated and strident manner, Louis Stokes established himself as a fine lawyer and gained esteem in legal circles after a successful appearance before the United States Supreme Court. His quiet ways masked a strong and effective leader.

He was elected in 1968 to the U.S. House of Representatives. He later became chairman of the House Select Committee on Assassinations, which investigated the murders of President John F. Kennedy and the Reverence Martin Luther King, Jr.

The next was Arnold Pinckney, an insurance broker, who was one of Carl Stokes's closest confidants. Stokes supported him as his successor at City Hall, but Pinckney failed as an independent candidate. Moderate in the public's view, he served in several positions, but was best known for his work on the school board, where he opposed school bussing.

The third emerging political figure would be the most prominent and controversial in the eyes of the citizenry, and a lightning rod for racial issues. Bold in his pronouncements and quick to act, George Forbes was elected to the presidency of City Council in 1973 and served for 16 years, the longest term in Cleveland City Council history.

Forbes had a sense of humor, when it came to race issues. For a time, he hosted a daily talk radio show and often made remarks about the city's racial climate. Those who knew the man and understood downtown politics often found it amusing. But for the many white West Siders, Forbes came across as exacerbating the already sensitive feelings about race.

It did not help that Forbes was accused of taking \$500 in a scheme involving a visiting carnival. Charged by County Prosecutor John T. Corrigan, Forbes was defended by Squires, Sanders in a well-covered trial where he was found innocent. The trial added to the existing racial tensions.

Elsewhere, the quixotic nature of City Hall became bewildering. There was something about being mayor that seemed to change a person. Carl Stokes became embittered and, for Ralph Perk, the office took on a dream-like quality. Perk campaigned throughout his career as a proponent of the city's "little people," but as time passed his personality took on a sense of wanderlust.

In 1973, the Democrats made another feeble attempt at City Hall, running Jim Carney again, but his performance in the primary was so bad that he withdrew, and the party was forced to put Council Clerk Mercedes Cotner on the ballot, which resulted in the reelection of Ralph Perk.

Perk stunned many of his followers and friends when, in 1974, he decided to run for the U.S. Senate, a decision that cost him some of his valued advisers, who quit in protest. He was roundly defeated, by former astronaut John Glenn, but worse, the decision to run and abandon the city created a political stigma that would haunt him.

Organized crime in Cleveland reached far back into the century and attained its zenith during Prohibition, when it made a fortune in extortion and the sale of illegal alcohol. The mob was comprised of three elements: the Irish on the West Side and the Jews and Italian factions elsewhere.

By the time World War II ended, Jewish members of the organization could see that the future of criminal prosperity in Cleveland was limited. They sought legitimacy and became original investors in the development of Las Vegas.

To placate former partners, skim money from the casinos was sent back to Cleveland to the remaining mob members, mostly Italians who headquartered in and around Murray Hill. The regular flow of money from Las Vegas created a lethargy in mob operations here. Adding members to the organization meant splitting the cash flow further, which was not economical.

Over time, the organization became more myth than mob, but Clevelanders enjoyed perpetuating the legend, so the once dark specter of organized crime continued to have a presence, exaggerated as it might be. The mob did manage to make its influence felt in labor unions, where its extortion was manifested in many ways. Some of these labor leaders were part of Perk's City Hall.

Shondor Birns was not a made member of the mob, but a consultant of sorts, a contractor who projected the mob's will in a no-nonsense manner that required intimidation or even murder. For years, he was known as the enforcer of the numbers games in the black neighborhoods. He also specialized in loansharking.

Another rising criminal figure in town was Danny Greene, an Irishman who at one time ran the longshoremen's union and gained prominence through his flamboyance and fearlessness. He, Birns, and the mob were on a collision course over money and power.

Numerous bombings and killings rocked the city throughout this period. The mob read Birns's death as a threat and hired a hit man to kill Greene. In October, 1977, he was killed by a bomb in a suburban parking lot, after visiting his dentist.

Then, in a flurry of events resulting from the capture of Greene's killer, mob members here and elsewhere fell like dominoes. Now only sepia-toned memories remain, a legacy best experienced over a dish of pasta on Murray Hill.

Ralph Perk's tenure in City Hall continued to be marked by one awkward incident after another, all of which enlivened the work of the newspaper and television reporters who covered him. The mood of restoration extended into City Hall, where the mayor hired two interior decorators with questionable credentials, who later would end up with unquestionable criminal records.

These decorators, Richard G. Eberling and Obie Henderson, set out to make the Perk administration more exclusive than ethnic, ordering costly appointments, including an expensive toilet for the mayor's private office. The two also managed to make off with some valuable paintings from City Hall, spiriting them off to a hide-a-way in Tennessee.

The two went on to be tried and convicted of the murder of an elderly woman. Eberling was suspected of killing four others, including his stepfather. There were other miscreants in the Perk administration. One former aide, James Dickerson, celebrated for his educational achievement, combat heroics, and administrative skills, turned out to be a charlatan of the first degree. His resume was pure fiction.

But the city benefited tremendously under Perk from the fact that he was one of the few big city mayors who was Republican while President Richard Nixon was in the White House. Perk took over a cash-strapped city from Stokes and was able to get millions in federal grants to help the city limp along. The city was living on the dole.

It was becoming increasingly evident that the city's financial woes were rendering it impossible to maintain its status as the dominant political entity in the region.

Because of the nature of Cleveland politics, there was no foresight regarding the need to accept this fact and create the metro government which many were heralding. Two events occurred during the Perk administration to underscore the changing nature of the city.

The city was forced by court action to sell the sewer system to a regional authority in 1972 for \$32 million and did the same with its transit system in 1975 for \$8.9 million. Despite these harbingers of the need for a regional government, it was business as usual at City Hall, now living off federal grants, the sale of assets, and borrowing.

For those who recalled the remark about the mayor not knowing the "difference between a bond and a note," the financial state of the city took on a chilling reality that would have consequences in the future.

As Ralph Perk's image and political currency waned, perhaps the most tempestuous political figure in recent history emerged to command attention and act out his own drama, which would further darken the city's image and once more make mockery of it in the national news.

Plain Dealer reporters in the late 1960s remember Dennis J. Kucinich as an alert and ambitious copy boy, who absorbed every detail of how the news was made and covered. He listened to the way reporters privately described political figures, not the way their stories appeared in print, thereby gaining insight into the reporting process. There was little that escaped his eye, as he collected copy and chased for coffee.

This education undoubtedly served him well, and when he was elected to City Council in 1969, he positioned himself as a young and refreshing populist, which contrasted with the dissolute nature of the city. In its inaugural issue in 1972, *Cleveland Magazine* ran a cover story on Kucinich, predicting that he would run for President of the United States, which he later did.

Alert, witty, with the careless energy of youth, and tactical by nature, Kucinich morphed Ralph Perk into the image of an old, tired city, one run by political hacks and self-interested businessmen. He then went on to run against Perk for mayor in 1977, defeating him to become, at 31, the youngest mayor in the city's history.

Perk left behind a veritable financial mess, fraught with such distress that it threatened the viability of the city's treasury. To add to the peril was the status of the Municipal Light Plant, forever a political conductor in the community

The light plant, or Muny Light as it was called then, existed as a competitor of the Cleveland Electric Illuminating Company. Proposed by Mayor Tom L. Johnson in 1903, Muny Light was underwritten by the city in an effort to provide cheap electricity for its citizens and to make CEI reduce its rates.

Because it had fallen into disrepair, Muny Light did not produce its own power, but purchased it and paid to have it delivered through power lines owned by CEI. There were several attempts to organize a sale of the Municipal Light plant to CEI, but the vortex of political history—dating back to the height of the progressive movement at the turn of the century—ignited each time the issue was raised.

Kucinich, as municipal Clerk of Courts, had organized a drive that defeated a referendum to sell Muny Light in 1977. He defined the issue perfectly for his mayoralty bid against Perk

Thus, when he became mayor, Kucinich found himself pitted against CEI and the business community, which contended that part of the city's financial problems stemmed from the cost of subsidizing Muny Light. Applying pressure to City Hall, six banks which held bonds that had matured, refused to roll them over unless the light plant was sold.

Meanwhile, the Kucinich administration had become an odd collection of youthful exuberance, anti-establishment zealots, and novice bureaucrats, all off on their own. Confusion and confrontation welled out of City Hall, as if it were volcanic, affecting a city bewildered and demoralized.

Then a week before Christmas in 1978, in a symbol of protest, Kucinich held a press conference on the steps of the old Cleveland Trust rotunda at East Ninth Street and Euclid Avenue. He withdrew his personal savings account of \$9,200.

At the same time, across town, in a moment that seemed to define the chaos, Kucinich's youngest brother, Perry, held up a branch of Central National Bank, making off with \$1,396. He had been under psychiatric care for years, and was immediately apprehended.

Again a beleaguered Cleveland became the butt of jokes nationally. Locally, an angry movement to recall Kucinich was launched, which he barely survived, winning by 236 votes out of 120,300 cast.

In retrospect, there were no winners in the confrontations between City Hall and the business community. Kucinich destroyed his credibility as mayor and the bankers added to the pall of ridicule that had already gathered over the city. There was more national commentary on the quirky nature of the city. In the midst of default, former mayor candidate James M. Carney mused aloud to a reporter asking why, under the circumstances, would anyone want to do business in Cleveland?

The Munny Light plant continued its tenuous existence and the threat of default was lifted and consigned to the archives of inglorious history.

The last year of another exhausting decade presented yet another election. A defiant and determined Dennis Kucinich stood for reelection and a desperate business community rallied behind George Voinovich, who by now had paid his political dues in an efficient and steadfast fashion, having served as county auditor, county commissioner, and lieutenant governor of Ohio.

Voinovich was counter to Kucinich in almost every way. Conservative in personality as well as politically, he worshiped at the altar of fiscal responsibility, offered the media little fodder and, despite being a Republican, possessed that same allure to ethnic voters that many of his predecessors had. He was charged with another quality, as well. He seemed to be immune to scandal and catastrophic political events. Later in his career, reporters would refer to the Teflon nature of his character.

The 1979 election was non-partisan, with the top two vote-getters in the primary running off in the general election. It was not surprising that Voinovich and Kucinich made the cut. Voinovich's margin of victory was 11,000 votes.

The decade, painful, mercurial, and paved with foibles, was only months away from ending when a tragedy struck that would severely affect the general election and plunge the city into sadness. Voinovich's nine-year-old daughter, Molly, on her way back to school after lunch, was struck and killed by a van.

While the Voinovich family mourned, Kucinich ceased campaigning and a moratorium of political activity was observed by both camps. Molly's death was a somber reality of life, paling the paltriness of politics. The city could feel the hurt. It was a sad moment.

The hiatus clearly hurt Kucinich, who appeared to be fighting for his political life. When the election was over, Voinovich won 94,541 votes to 73,755 for the boy mayor. The decade was done, and none to soon.

The two men who vied to lead the city into the 1980s would take separate but interesting journeys. The town would, too, as it charted a new course that would

see the nation doff its cap as Cleveland emerged from its morass of misery to once more be toasted as an admirable American city.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael D. Roberts was a reporter for *The Plain Dealer* in the 1960s and covered many of the events in that decade, including the Vietnam War. He later edited *Cleveland Magazine* for 17 years.