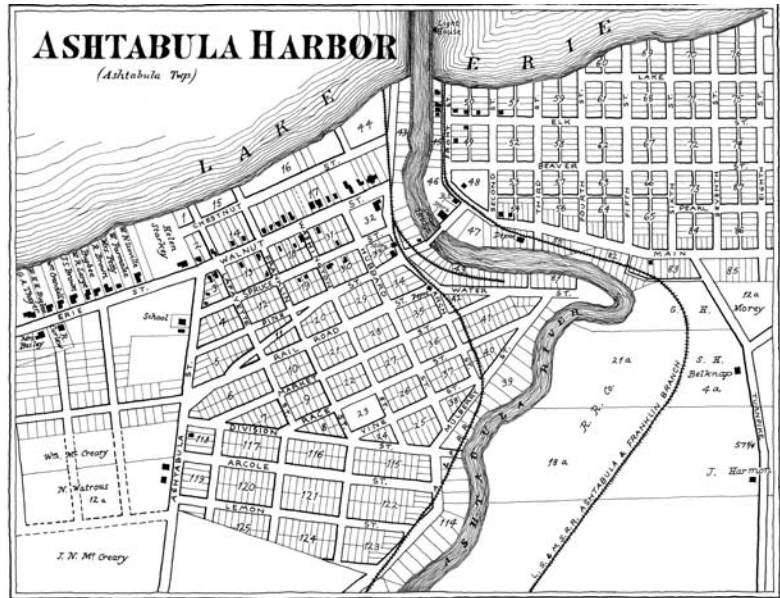


Plan of Ashtabula Harbor, 1874.
Drawing by Lauren Chattigré.
(Redrawn from *Atlas of Ashtabula County, Ohio*,
Titus, Simmons and
Titus, 1874.)



Ashtabula Harbor recapitulates the developing rituals and settings of the region. But here, all the stages can be seen in one place. First, wilderness living must respond to the rhythms of nature. Then village rites demonstrate an emerging community. Finally, the repeated acts of town life are planned to make the fact of countless lives intelligible. Over the course of time, the rhythms of parts within parts are re-created through combinations of independent rituals. The counterpoint shapes multiple possibilities for life in the place.

The City

In 1878, the old town of Ashtabula Harbor officially renamed itself Ashtabula. Later, as Great Lakes traffic faded, World War II industries gave new impetus to growth and the city's center shifted away from the harbor. The city spread outward, typical of 20th-century

sprawl. Today, the harbor area is identified as a historic district. Civil War remnants endure, like a house that once served as the last station on the “underground railroad” from which slaves were secretly moved to Canada by small boat.

The change from town to city seems less clear than the change from village to town. In some ways, a city is very much like a town, only bigger. It is still a discrete element in the landscape. Primarily a commercial center, the city has a major business district at its core. There are also smaller shopping and service centers spread to serve local neighborhoods, but people still go “down town.”

Perhaps the major difference is in the magnitude and diversity of the “outer challenge” that Lewis Mumford has spoken of as essential to change. A city serves a wide region that often includes several towns. It offers special services not available in towns. Among them are major medical and educational facilities; sports and entertainment venues; regional headquarters for businesses; convention and meeting halls; certain industries, both large and small; warehouses; and transfer points for shipping goods. Growth begets growth and when the city reaches a certain size threshold, it tends to become self-sustaining, circulating money within itself.¹⁴

It is the change now going on in the world from city to something still bigger that is more dramatic, having greater influence on our lives. The “something bigger” has variously been called “megalopolis” or “conurbation,” an aggregation or continuous network of urban communities. To understand some of the consequences of this change, and what might be needed to bring us back into balance with nature, we can look at Greater Los Angeles.