



# THE PLAIN DEALER

## Scrap 'em

**Arguments over what to do with antique Hulett ore unloaders have consumed far too much energy and attention for too long**

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In their heyday, mammoth Hulett ore un loaders made Great Lakes ports more pro ductive and gave muscular testimony to America's imagination and industrial power.

Designed in 1898 by Clevelander George H. Hulett, the 100-foot-tall, 880-ton machines used cantilevered arms and enormous buckets to scoop iron ore, coal and limestone from the lake freighters that supplied steel mills across the region. Hulett's goliaths cut the time it took to unload a big ship from nearly a week to half a day. In time, 77 Hulett's served the Great Lakes, 14 in Cleveland alone.

But by 1979, other innovators had developed self-unloading freighters that were faster and more efficient than Hulett's and did not require a huge waterfront footprint. They became the industry norm; Hulett's became dinosaurs.

In December 1992, the last four Hulett's at the Cleveland Bulk Terminal on Whiskey Island shut down - and a long, emotional debate over their fate began.

First Conrail, then the Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Port Authority and its main CBT tenant, the Oglebay Norton Co., wanted to tear down the hulking machines. But a coalition of indefatigable preservationists argued that the Hulett's were an icon of Cleveland's industrial heritage. With help from some public agencies, they blocked action until late 1999, when a compromise was struck: The Hulett's would be dismantled. Two would be sold for scrap and two stored on Whiskey Island for five years, while an appropriate site and money to rebuild them were found.

Now, almost seven years later, rusty pieces of two Hulett's continue to occupy prime storage space on Whiskey Island - space Oglebay Norton says it needs to better serve its customers and attract new ones. Studies commissioned by the port estimate that it would take almost \$2 million to simply move the pile to a park elsewhere on the island. Reconstruction, assuming the soil could hold them, would be another \$2 million each.

No public agency or unit of government is willing or able to make such a commitment. The preservationists, who raised \$272,000 to save the second Hulett in 1999, have done virtually nothing since. Cleveland Councilman Matt Zone, who says he loved watching the giant machines while he was growing up in Detroit-Shoreway, has tried for months to find a sugar daddy - with no luck.

Tonight at a community meeting, Zone expects to say that the best hope for the Hulett's is to find someone - the Steamship William G. Mather Maritime Museum would be one likely candidate - willing to exhibit a few key parts and to scrap the rest. Such common sense is likely to incite the Hulett's' small but vocal fan base. Already they are railing that the port should pay to put a Hulett next to the Mather on the downtown waterfront.

No, no, no. It's time to end the Hulett debate. Oglebay Norton has shown commendable patience, but it needs the space. There's no abiding public affection for the Hulett's, especially so many years after they disappeared from view. Limited public resources would be better spent to complete the Towpath Trail and encourage waterfront access downtown.

Cleveland needs to embrace its next century, not cling to the last.

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