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200 helped shape Canton

Monday, November 21, 2005

BY [Gary Brown](#) REPOSITORY LIVING SECTION EDITOR

We are retracing two centuries of Canton history. Cantonians of today are honoring those who came before us, and celebrating what those people — ancestors and strangers — did to help Canton grow.

It is difficult to choose 200 individuals, locations and dates to adequately represent such a lengthy period. For every one chosen, thousands more of equal familiarity or historical importance come to mind.

But it is as Kimberly Kenney, curator of the Wm. McKinley Presidential Library & Museum, told The Repository in a recent article celebrating Canton's Nov. 15 "founder's day": History is merely storytelling.

"Everybody loves a good story," she said. By telling the past as a series of stories, "you can show people that history has meaning, that it's connected to their lives."

So, no listing can be all inclusive. These items merely afford readers a glimpse — an interesting one, we hope — at how a few residents of Canton and a few events that occurred within its boundaries helped shape the community over 200 years.

This section tells the stories of the few, with the hope that it will illustrate the efforts of the many — notable and ordinary alike — who have made Canton their home through two centuries.

The beginning

1. "We begin where it began 20,000 to 30,000 years ago — the time of the glacier," said Ron Ponder, narrator of "History of Stark County: From Glaciers to McKinley."

Glaciers leveled off the northern part of the county, including Canton, said Ponder, dropping rich mineral deposits as they melted.

"The last one that was here we think melted 11,000 to 12,000 years ago," historian Richard McElroy said in the video in which Ponder noted that Canton's Public Square today is built over "one of the finest sand and gravel sites in the country."



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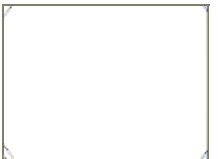
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Lake City's Mormon Temple, and Cincinnati's Music Hall.

78. Country music died on its way to Canton in 1952.

Hank Williams, the man who had a hit song "I'll Never Get Out of This World Alive," passed away in the back seat of a car headed for a New Year's Day concert at the Canton auditorium.

Finding a home for culture

79. Canton Museum of Art — Canton Art Institute when it was in the old Case Mansion on Market Avenue N — grew from a secret donation in 1939.

"An anonymous donor acquired the old Case mansion and donated it to them (Canton Art Institute trustees), along with a cash gift of over \$8,000 to renovate it," said M.J. Albacete, executive director of the Museum of Art. "Not until after his death was the donor identified as Frederick Preyer, an across-the street neighbor of the Cases'."

80. "The coach house behind (the mansion) was converted into the Players Guild Theatre," noted Albacete. The theater group stayed in its quarters and the mansion served the art community until the Canton Cultural Center for the Arts was built in 1970.

81. Canton Symphony Orchestra was formed Jan. 26, 1938. It performed in the auditorium until 1940, and in high school auditoriums until it found its current home, the William E. Umstatt Performing Arts Hall in McKinley High School.

Matters of the art

82. Christopher Columbus discovered America in the southwest corner of Timken Senior High School's library.

The Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the Civil War and World War I were fought there; Francis Scott Key wrote the "Star-Spangled Banner" in the room; and Southern slaves worked in cotton fields on one of its walls.

The murals, and others, were painted on Timken walls by Frank Marchione — while he was a student at the school.

83. Bek Nelson-Gordon was "Miss Mizzou."

An actress who graduated from Lincoln High School in the 1940s, she was the woman "Steve Canyon" comic strip artist Milton Caniff picked from a chorus line to be the trench-coated model for Miss Mizzou.

Movies and more

84. One-reel moving pictures that gave birth to the short-lived film institution, the nickelodeon, which existed only a few years before multi-reel pictures took over.

"Father of the nickelodeons in Canton was A.H. Abrams, whose 5-cent theater at 225 E. Tuscarawas St. was at the Penny Arcade under the Johnson Dancing School," wrote Heald.

85. The Palace Theatre on Market Avenue N is the most well-known of Canton's many movie houses.

But, others were equally popular to movie-goers in their day. For those who went in the '50s and '60s, even a partial list must include the Loew's, Valentine, Dueber, Ohio, Alhambra and Strand.

86. It was the biggest thing, quite literally, to hit films in Canton — the wide screen.

Loew's Theater showed "The Caddy," starring Jerry Lewis and Dean Martin. The Ohio Theater installed its wide screen shortly after, and both accompanied the huge screens with another movie innovation.

Stereophonic sound.

87. The silliest-looking audience ever to watch a movie in Canton gathered at Loew's Theater in February 1953.

Rows of bespectacled film viewers stared in earnest at the screen. In Canton, 3-D movies had arrived.

Cleaning up Canton

88. The killing of crusading newspaper editor Don Mellett is part of local folklore. Even the restaurant menu for Little Chicago Restaurant and Lounge makes note of Mellett's murder:

"During the height of Prohibition, Canton earned the nickname 'Little Chicago,' as there was rampant corruption in the community. The mayor and his brother were removed from office, and this stern-looking gent, Donald Ring Mellett, an editor of the Canton Daily News, spent his short time in Canton calling out the corrupt to account for their misdeeds. On July 26, 1926, he was rewarded for his vigilance with a bullet to the back of his head. The chief of police was convicted of being involved in the murder, but acquitted later after a retrial in a different community. The former chief of detectives and three local thugs spent the rest of their lives in prison for the murder."

89. "You are entitled to the praise of all the people of Ohio," Gov. Frank J. Lausche told Mayor Carl Wise during a community ceremony at the auditorium of Timken High School on Feb. 11, 1954.