

A blast from the past

BY Mark J. Price

Copley Township's historic cannon helped the United States defeat the British in the War of 1812. Strangely enough, its biggest battles were yet to come.

The 300-pound iron cannon in front of Copley's Town Hall is older than the township that surrounds it. When Copley was founded in 1819, the cannon already had weathered years of combat. It was in Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry's fleet, which bombarded British ships into submission during the Battle of Lake Erie on Sept. 10, 1813.

Historical accounts vary as to when the cannon was given to Copley. Some say the relic stood vigil in Copley as far back as the 1830s. Others say Republican politicians brought it to the township after the Civil War.

Public officials liked to shoot the war ornament at Copley Circle during patriotic gatherings such as July 4 celebrations or election rallies. Its roar could be heard for miles.

"The cannon was fired after every GOP victory — all too frequently for tender Democratic ears," reported Beacon Journal staff writer Robert Henretty on Sept. 14, 1958. "One night in 1880, the gun disappeared."

Legend has it that Democrats hid the relic in Seth Minor's barn.

"They pulled the cannon to a cow stable, led bossy (a generic term for a pet cow) out of her stall, removed the straw, dug a hole in the center of the stall, put the cannon in

the hole, filled in the dirt, replaced the straw and led bossy back to her stall," wrote historian Arthur H. Blower in the Summit County Historical Society Bulletin from October 1949.

For 18 years, the cannon remained hidden. It wasn't returned to the village until 1898 when America found itself on the verge of another war.

"In a burst of bipartisan patriotism, the Democrats returned the cannon . . . to a permanent mounting in the square on the eve of the Spanish-American War," Henretty reported.

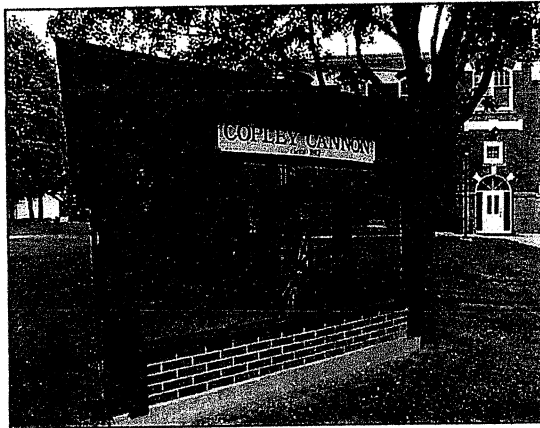
Despite having been buried for so long, the cannon was still in excellent condition and reclaimed its role in patriotic celebrations, Blower said.

It stood undisturbed on its cement base for nearly 60 years until one night in September 1958 when young pranksters tried to carry it away.

The three Barberton brothers, ages 15, 17 and 20, made quite a ruckus as they tried to drag the heavy cannon to their waiting car. The noise awoke a neighbor who confronted the youths, scolded them and made the boys drag the cannon back to its proper place.

The next theft proved to be more serious and more costly.

In April 1974, a thief took the cannon and it wasn't seen for three years. In December 1977, Copley police tracked the relic to a Canal Fulton man who had purchased the weapon without knowing it



A display case keeps the historic Copley Cannon secure as it stands guard in front of Town Hall.

KAREN SCHIELY/Beacon Journal photo

was stolen.

A weapons expert identified the cannon as the missing Copley cannon, but there was no legal proof.

The Copley Historical Society and Copley Heritage Committees of 1978 and 1979 donated money to buy the cannon back.

"A purchase price of \$1,800

was negotiated and the Canal Fulton man returned the cannon on Nov. 8, 1979 . . . We had to buy

her back but she was home at last," reported Suzanne Wasick in Village Views on July 21, 1982.

The historical society didn't take any more chances at Copley Circle. The cannon was hidden for more than five years in Wasick's barn until a safe place could be found to house it, said society treasurer Marty Knapp.

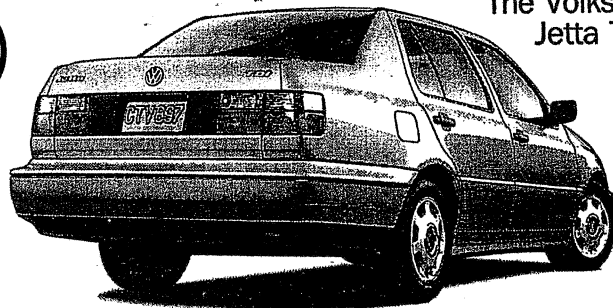
Boy Scout Robert J. Gill

came up with a solution in 1987 when he designed a brick display case as his Eagle Scout project.

The cannon is now padlocked, chained and cemented to the display case at Copley's Town Hall on Cleveland-Massillon Road, where public officials can keep a watchful eye on it.

After nearly 200 years, Copley's war relic is finally at peace. □

Mark J. Price is a Beacon Journal copy editor.



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