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Canton Historical Society  
(Michigan)

## MUSEUM HOURS

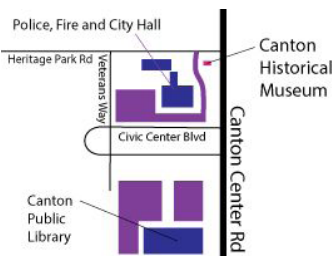
CLOSED FOR THE SEASON

REOPENING MAY 2024



## VISIT THE MUSEUM

1022 Canton Center Rd.  
Canton, MI 48188



The Canton Historical Society would like to thank all of the dedicated members who continue to show interest in the museum's education and preservation efforts. We appreciate your ongoing support!

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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# CANTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWS

Est. 1834

Winter 2023-24 · Edition CXIX

Canton, Michigan

## WHO WAS JOHN STRONG HAGGERTY? AND HOW HAGGERTY HOUSE ON CANTON CENTER ROAD CAME TO BE

by Dave Curtis

John S. Haggerty built the large house on Canton Center Road north of Geddes Road. He had a lot of political friends and a very active life. But who was he and what led him to build the historic home?



The John S. Haggerty House on South Canton Center Road.

John Strong Haggerty completed courses at Goldsmith Business University and on May 4, 1887 production of his brickyard began in Springwells Township in Wayne County, Michigan. Springwells is now part of the city of Dearborn. In the 1890s the brick business diversified into the production of extension ladders. This sister business was called the Newton-Haggerty Ladder Company and was run in partnership with Frank Newton, a native of Cherry Hill.

In 1896 Haggerty was appointed school commissioner of Springwells Township, and in the same year his mother Elizabeth died and left her sons John and Floyd an estate of over a quarter million dollars, mostly tied up in land that she had speculated in after inheriting part of the John Strong fortune. In 1906 with Henry Ford, Henry Joy, and Edward Hines, Haggerty began campaigning for quality roads in Wayne County. Henry Ford loaned him a car to drive out to the small towns of Wayne County to give speeches and hand out literature. He was largely responsible for the adoption of concrete roads in Wayne County, and the example set by Wayne County was followed by governments across the country and throughout the world.

Haggerty, with Edward Hines and William Murdoch, were appointed the first official Wayne County Road Commissioners in 1907. Haggerty remained on the commission for over 27 years. For nearly 20 years he was an advisor to the State Highway Department.  
*(continued on page 4)*

## CANTON BIDS FAREWELL TO HISTORIC HOUSE

Driving past the southeast corner of Warren and Morton Taylor, you may have noticed a longstanding icon of Canton history is no more. The 1850's 2 story brick farmhouse on approximately 3 acres at 43425 Warren was demolished due to the sale of the property.

The house was long believed to have been a station for the temporary housing of runaway slaves as part of the Underground Railroad as slaves made their way to Canada, two days' travel from the Canton area. Local historian and CHS board member Dave Curtis has spent 200 hours researching the property's records in an attempt to learn whether runaway slaves were being housed on the property. Dave has stated that it is difficult to ascertain definitive information because extreme secrecy *(continued on page 3)*

# CANTONS ACROSS THE US

Whether we say Canton or Canton Township when asked for our address, we live in the only "Canton" located in Michigan. Seventeen other US states have their own Canton. Four states have townships, while others have cities, villages, towns, or boroughs with Canton in their name. Ohio tops the list with four Cantons! Here's a list of all Cantons that received ARPA funding as compiled by the federal government. Do you know of any others?

Canton, Connecticut

Canton, Georgia

Canton City, Illinois

New Canton Town, Illinois

Canton City, Kansas

Canton Town, Maine

Canton, Massachusetts

Canton Township, Michigan

Canton Township, Minnesota

Canton City, Minnesota

Canton, Mississippi

Canton City, Missouri

Village of Canton, New York

Town of Canton, New York

Town of Canton, North Carolina

Canton Township, Ohio

Canton, Ohio

Village of East Canton, Ohio

City of North Canton, Ohio

Town of Canton, Oklahoma

Canton Township, Pennsylvania

Borough of Canton, Pennsylvania

City of Canton, South Dakota

Canton, Texas

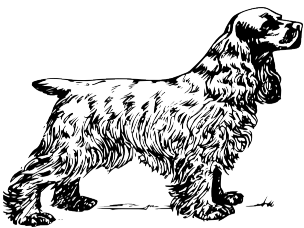
Town of Canton, Wisconsin



## MY CANTON MEMORIES

by Kim Mabie

I grew up in Ann Arbor and when I was ten years old my family settled into our first house with our very own backyard. When my parents told us that we would be getting a dog my younger sister and I were so excited. It was to be a cocker spaniel and my mom and dad would take us to pick him up at the breeder's house the next weekend. We could hardly contain ourselves in the backseat of my dad's enormous Ford LTD. With windows rolled down, we enjoyed the sweet summer air as we bounced up and down on the back bench seat. My dad took pleasure in our squeals of delight as he accelerated at the top of hilly dirt roads where, for a moment, we became airborne. That was in 1974 and seatbelts were still optional at the time. As we made the seemingly endless journey, it felt as if we were driving across the entire state of Michigan.



When we finally arrived, we entered a breezeway and were greeted by lots of puppies in a large whelping box. My sister and I would have smuggled the entire litter home with us if it had been winter and we had coats and hats to hide them in. My parents settled on an adorable golden male pup then my sister and I took turns holding him on the car ride home while we debated what we should name him. My choice was Rex while my sister wanted to call him Fluffy. My grandfather broke the stalemate with the name Clancy and my parents sighed with relief at this suggestion and declared

the debate over.

Our puppy grew into a dog, and my sister and I grew into adults. Childhood memories faded to remote places in my brain as life's activities took over. Thirteen years later, my husband and I decided it was time to buy our first house. But where should we look? Practical priorities for finding a home were our driving goal. With a baby on the way, quality schools were a key factor. It needed to be in a safe and affordable community that was close to expressways for commuting. Then I recalled statements from friends and acquaintances about the growing Canton community. I had never been to Canton, and I didn't know the streets or neighborhoods, but positive school rankings, low crime rate, and an abundance of housing opportunities made me take notice. I knew little else about Canton but declared it the winner. And so, the house hunting began in earnest, and we quickly found our first house and happily settled in with our infant daughter. *(cont. on next page)*

## CANTON MEMORIES (CONT. FROM P. 2)

We moved into our new home, and it was time to learn my way around Canton. In my mind all I had to remember was that Michigan Avenue and Ford Road are east-west, all others seemed to be north-south. Mapping out the fastest way to get to Ann Arbor was easy too. Palmer to Canton Center to Geddes which will inevitably end in Ann Arbor. But as I passed a house on the west side of Canton Center Road, I had a déjà vu moment. It drew my attention each time I passed it by. There was nothing special about the country house. I passed it often, ranch style, breezeway, garage. Then I saw something new.

In front of the house was a recently erected plywood sign advertising AKC pups for sale. The memories came rushing back. That was the place! This was where my sister and I embraced our first puppy. I had been to Canton before! Today, the kennel where we picked up our beloved dog is still there providing pet boarding services. When I told my parents that I saw the birthplace of our dog Clancy, they nodded.

They knew all along that the place that seemed so far from home in 1974 was only a sixteen-mile journey. I thank you for letting me share my first Canton memory with all our CHS members. **It's good to acknowledge that Canton's newest residents also have a place in our shared history.** Perhaps it's a first house, an annual trip to Liberty Fest, a place of worship, going to school, or even a first pet. It will become part of Canton's history and I welcome you to join the CHS and share your Canton history with everyone.

## HISTORIC HOUSE (CONT. FROM PAGE 1)

was needed to protect slaves and property owners, the latter of which could be executed in order to dissuade others from assisting the slaves on their road to freedom. Curtis has doubted there would ever be definitive proof of harboring slaves in the property, in part because of secrecy surrounding property owners and activities and because of a lack of definitive clues. So what is the story of this house?

In 1852 the property was sold to John Kinyon for \$3,000. This increase in price over previous sale of the property indicates there had been major improvements to the property—possibly a house & barn. Shortly after, Issachar Hughes purchased the property. He was from Steuben County, New York which was home to some Quakers. Quakers were active in seeing enslaved persons set free.

From 1988-2018, Jamie & Laura Flora owned the property. They found documentation that the earlier owners, the Godwins, had found Civil War era newspapers stuffed into the walls of a back room to use as insulation. Documentation seemed to indicate the possibility that slaves were quartered in the barn.

Another revelation was a crawl space in back of the original building. It is speculated that slaves could climb a nearby wall and enter the house via the crawl space opening. Additionally, an Eastern Michigan University student who studied the site found a semi-circle of stones near the house. A cloverleaf pattern in one of the stones is believed to be a signal to slaves that this was a safe house.

There has been much speculation over the years about the authenticity of these claims, but no positive conclusion about whether or not the house was truly part of the Underground Railroad. Regardless, we are sad to see the loss of this historic home and hope to preserve all of the photos and stories of this important piece of Canton history.



The historic Canton home before (left) and during (right) demolition.

## FROM THE NEW CHS PRESIDENT

I am honored to lead the Canton Historical Society this year. We are a strong and energetic organization focused on preserving and sharing the history of our community. Our dedicated members, volunteers, community leaders, donors, and sponsors make all this possible.



I am proud of CHS's successes over the last year, including reviving programs that members previously enjoyed, and our commitment to expand programming by offering new and exciting activities. In the year ahead, we will continue these initiatives through tours of historic sites and events held in collaboration with other organizations in Canton and beyond. In everything we do, we build opportunities for you to get to know your neighbors and come together to celebrate our diverse history, enjoy each

other's company, and learn about our shared history.

Kimberly Mabie, CHS Board President



# JOHN STRONG HAGGERTY (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

In 1907 John Haggerty and Frank Newton founded the Ypsilanti Hay Press Company. John Haggerty was designated as its president. The claim was made that the facility was the largest factory in the world devoted exclusively to the manufacture of Hay Presses. Two years later Haggerty formed a partnership with Joseph VanBlerck to produce marine engines and boats with VanBlerck engines. During World War II the factory produced engines for small naval craft, and in 1910 Haggerty built a boat which was the fastest boat on the Detroit River, and soon had the first hydroplane in Detroit built for the Memorial Day races.

A 1911 automotive journal lists John Haggerty as one of the men responsible for the organizing of the first Indianapolis 500 race. His close friend Henry Ford was also an early backer of the Indianapolis 500 (one has to wonder if Haggerty Bricks were used at the brickyard).

Never one to slow down, Haggerty was appointed to chair the Wayne County Republican convention in 1912. He and Alex Groesbeck were nominated, among others, to serve as delegates to the national GOP convention in Chicago. He then founded the Springwell State Bank with John Mercier which was taken over in by People's State Bank in 1916.

Haggerty's business ventures continued when in 1915 he went into partnership with Howard Corbin Wade to found the United States Trust Company which specialized in investments in stocks and bonds and in loans to businesses. This became a very successful business venture. From 1915 to 1926 he served on the board of directors, including as President of the Michigan Agricultural Society whose main purpose was organizing the state fair. During this time he and his brother Floyd incorporated as the Haggerty Land Company and subdivided land they had inherited from their mother off of Livernois north of Warren Road. He also purchased the 150-acre Carleton homestead in Canton Township. Construction on the house began in 1923 on Canton Center Road.

In 1927 John and his brother Floyd contributed greatly in raising funds (and contributing bricks) to build the Dearborn Masonic Temple. Haggerty was also elected to the position of Michigan Secretary of State. Once in the job he found it was several million dollars in the red. By 1928 the debt was erased. He earned a reputation as an honest and thorough administrator who ran the department like a private business. One of the most important things he did was pass the Darin Act, which set up a superhighway commission to develop a plan for superhighways in the Wayne-Oakland-Macomb region. As a member of this board, Haggerty helped develop the master plan which became an integral part of the expressway system. There was a strong push for Haggerty to run for Governor of Michigan, but he turned down the offer.



At the start of the Great Depression in 1929 the United States Trust Company was one of the first of the Detroit banks to go into receivership after the stock market crash. The exact amount of money that John Haggerty lost is not known but probably was at least a million dollars.

In 1932 Haggerty moved into the completed home at 2146 Canton Center Road. From 1924 until 1932 this had been his weekend home and a place for him and his cronies to party.

Five years later the Haggerty Power Plant was dedicated at Greenfield Village. It had been constructed out of vintage Haggerty brick which had been salvaged from an old smokestack that had recently been demolished at his brickyard.

## --ATTENTION--

Please renew your CHS membership, as our membership term runs from January 1 through December 31 each year. Membership forms will be mailed for previous members, and new members may fill out the form below. Donations are always welcome as well to help the society. Thank you!

Tablets above the two doors of the building were adorned with a facsimile of John Haggerty's signature (see photo above). In 1939 Haggerty was appointed to the Civil Service Commission.

While living at his Canton home, Haggerty lived the life of a "gentleman farmer", raising corn and dairy cattle, and sold milk to the Wilson Dairy Company. He stocked his woodlots along the river with a small herd of tame deer and waterfowl. Haggerty died in his sleep at his Canton home on September 4, 1950, leaving a legacy that will last for the entire life of Canton Township.

Source: Thesis of John R. Stewart titled *Dearborn Politician* found in Canton Historical Society archives.

## BECOME A CHS DONOR!

Your donations can help the work of the Canton Historical Society to grow. We rely on both artifact and monetary donations to continue our work documenting and sharing the rich history of our community!

### Donor Levels

The Cherry Hill: \$1000-\$500

The Sheldon: \$499-\$250

The Denton: \$249-\$100

For monetary donations, please email [info@cantonhistoricalsocietymi.org](mailto:info@cantonhistoricalsocietymi.org) or send to P.O. Box 87362, Canton MI 48187.

For history (object) donations, please contact [martinrwks@gmail.com](mailto:martinrwks@gmail.com).

*Thank you!*



## DID YOU GROW UP IN CANTON?

If you were/are a longtime resident of Canton, we want to hear from you! What are your memories from the township? What was life like for you and your family?

Even if you no longer live locally, we still value your stories and memories! Email the society at [info@cantonhistoricalsocietymi.org](mailto:info@cantonhistoricalsocietymi.org) or call the museum at 734-391-9352 and leave a message. Someone will reach out to you to discuss your memories and you may even see your story appear in a future newsletter!

## WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Is there a particular topic, person, or place that you'd like to hear more about in our newsletter? Let us know! Our volunteer researchers are ready to put their skills to work to share more about what YOU want to read. You can reach us at 734-391-9352 or [info@cantonhistoricalsocietymi.org](mailto:info@cantonhistoricalsocietymi.org) to share your ideas and feedback.



## Ready to join the Canton Historical Society?

**We'd love to have you!**

Please indicate the level of membership desired and send in this form with payment.

☐ Individual - \$15

☐ Family - \$18

☐ Student - \$5

☐ Patron - \$50

☐ Business - \$75

☐ Sponsor - \$200

☐ Donation - \$\_\_\_\_\_

☐ Renewal - \$\_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Yes, I am interested in volunteering with the Canton Historical Society.  
Please contact me about upcoming/ongoing opportunities.

Please mail completed form to: Canton Historical Society, PO Box 87362, Canton MI 48187



PO Box 87362  
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[cantonhistoricalsocietymi.org](http://cantonhistoricalsocietymi.org)

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Egg Decorating at the Farm

Children are invited to Preservation Park for a springtime egg painting party!

Join us on **Saturday, March 23** from 12:30-2:30pm for an afternoon of egg painting and fun. For \$5 guests can pick two eggs from the coop and enjoy refreshments while decorating eggs for Easter. Eggs, paint, brushes, and snacks will be provided. Please bring your own smock.



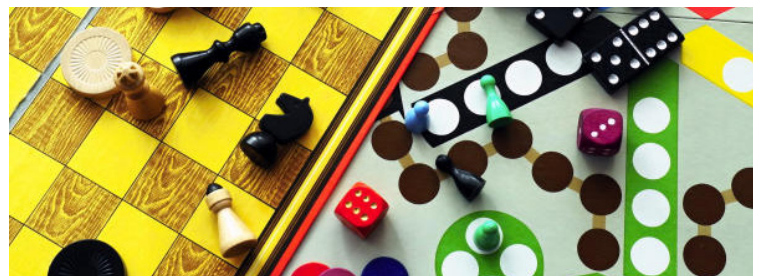
This event will be held rain or shine (we will move into the pole barn in the event of inclement weather). Cash payments are kindly requested at the door.



### GAME NIGHT



Join CHS on **Wednesday, May 15** from 6-9 p.m. at Cherry Hill School (50440 Cherry Hill, Canton) for a movie, game night, and fun! The cost is \$5 per person (children 10 and under are free) and snacks will be available for sale as well. Play your favorite games while a movie plays and we enjoy the simple fun of quality time around a game board. Tickets available at the door.



Be sure to check out our Facebook page: **Canton Historical Society (Michigan)** for event updates. For questions please email [info@cantonhistoricalsocietymi.org](mailto:info@cantonhistoricalsocietymi.org). We hope you will join us!