

Did You Know...

... the cannon in front of Village Hall has been in Chagrin Falls for 130 years?

Ever wonder where the cannon in front of the Village hall came from? Is it from the Civil War? Was it used by Chagrin soldiers during some battle?



The history of the cannon in Chagrin dates back to May of 1886. D. L. Fenkell circulated a subscription paper for the purpose of raising funds to purchase a cannon. It was decided that the GAR (Grand Army of the Republic) would have control of the gun once purchased. The GAR was a fraternal group made up of veterans from the Civil War that lasted till the last veterans died off in 1956. Representative Stranahan from Chagrin Falls worked with the authorities in Columbus and they agreed to furnish Chagrin with a 12lb Napoleon brass cannon, with carriage limber for the sum of \$120. This cannon saw service in the Civil War but it is very doubtful any Chagrinites actually fired it.

A Napoleon cannon was a popular smoothbore cannon used in the Civil War. It was named for a nephew of Napoleon I, Prince Charles Louise Napoleon Bonaparte, who became Emperor Napoleon III of France. The Napoleon was the favorite field gun of both armies. It was reasonably accurate at all ranges and was devastating when firing canister at close range. The Napoleon was robustly designed (in modern parlance it was “overengineered”) and was capable of firing large number of rounds (more than 1200 rounds for a six gun battery in a single engagement was not uncommon) without any noticeable distortion or wear on the tube. With a

propellant charge of 2.50 lbs. of black powder, the Napoleon fired a 12.30 lb. solid shot to a range of 1,619 yards at 5 degrees elevation.

Chagrin Falls took ownership of the cannon in July of 1886. According to the Exponent, the GAR gun squad liked to have gun practice and the cannon echoed throughout the valley.

In 1891, the cannon was placed in Triangle Park. No sooner had it been placed there, that the GAR had to ask the mayor's help in keeping boys from playing with it.



Cannon on north end of Triangle Park – 1891

The cannon was moved to the top of Grove Hill in 1898 temporarily and fired to celebrate Santiago's surrender in Cuba.



Cannon in 1911



Cannon facing south on Triangle Park - 1926



Cannon 1936

In 1960, a battle for the cannon was fought. The Village had agreed to let the Seventh Regiment Ohio Volunteers Infantry Inc. (a non-military re-enactment group) use the cannon at the Maple Festival in Chardon, with the condition that it be returned by April 25th of that year. After using the cannon at the festival, the group decided to keep the cannon. When asked to return it, their lawyer threatened to return just the brass barrel unless their group was allowed to use the cannon during the summer months for mock battles and reenactments.

The main contention was that the group had restored the cannon to working order. Village officials were not aware that the group was going to restore the cannon, they just thought the group was going to borrow it. The group had replaced the wood parts of the cannon and refurbished the cannon so that it could be fired again.

The two groups went back and forth for over 2 1/2 years. During that time, the whereabouts of the cannon was unknown to Village officials, finally ending up in a garage in Warrensville Heights. The final result was a settlement out of court where the Village agreed to pay the Seventh Regiment group \$400 for the parts used in restoring the cannon and the group gave up its claim of ownership. When it was returned, Chagrin's mayor James Solether said "As long as I am Mayor, no one else will get the use of that cannon, not even the White House".

The cannon was stored in the Police garage for many years and was finally put on display in front of the Village hall.



Cannon in front of Village Hall 1980



Cannon being moved 1963 (Gary Morton, Jim Owens)

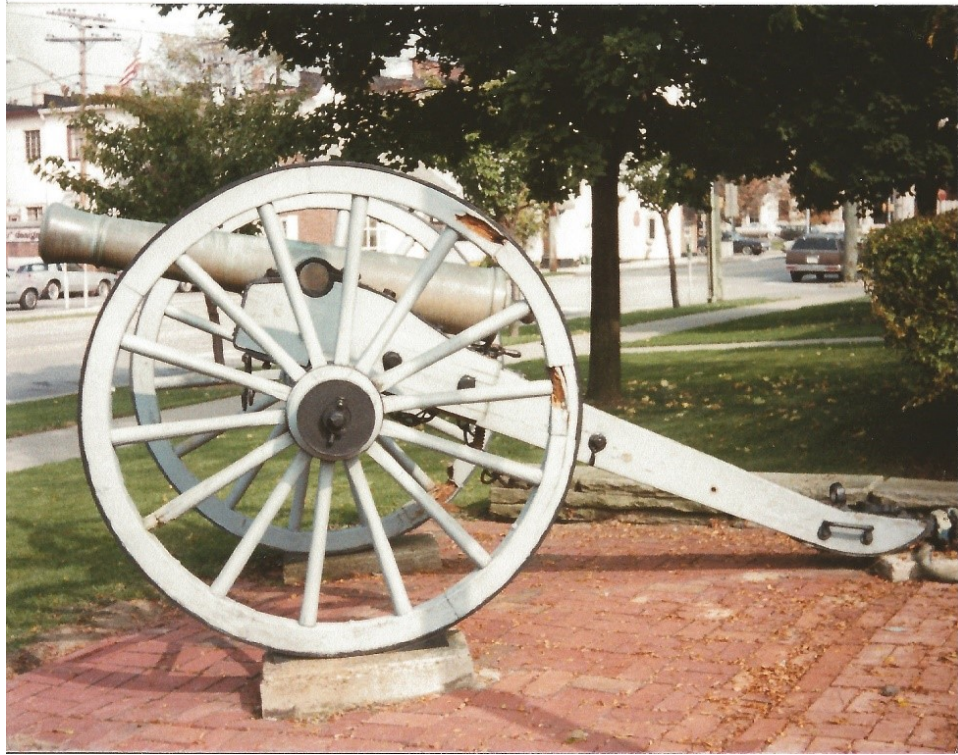
The cannon made the news again in 1975 when some students decided to 'borrow' the cannon as a prank. The prank did not go over well, but it was all in good fun and no harm was done.

Gaither Perry, a well-known cannon expert in the area, refurbished the cannon into working order again in 2000. The cannon was temporarily moved to Evergreen Hill cemetery and fired. You could hear the blast for miles around.



Gaither Perry with the cannon in 2000

The cannon is back in its resting place in front of the Village Hall, hopefully for another 130 years or more



Cannon in front of Village Hall 2016