

Small Historic Towns across America

As presented by Mr. Stadt's on-line Freedom Project Education U.S. History classes in the Fall and Winter of 2014. You can learn more about our classes by visiting us at: www.fpeusa.org



Canton – The City of Lights

Brief History of Canton, Mississippi

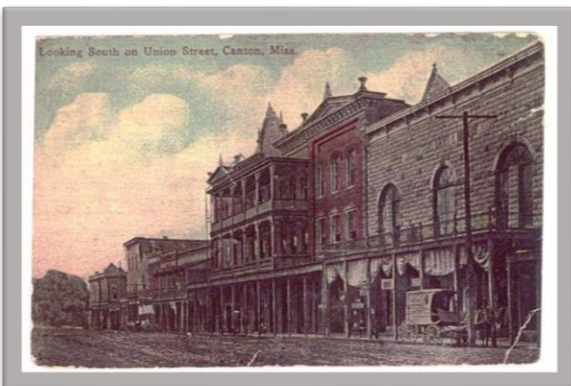
Canton was designated as the Madison County seat of government in 1833, becoming an incorporated city in 1836, with a population of 400. Madison County had belonged to the Choctaw Indians, which was given to the U.S. government in the 1820 Treaty of Doak's Stand and the 1830 Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek. Canton is the geographical center of Madison County, which is why it was finally chosen as the official county seat, and became a strategic location of development, trade, and commerce. By 1838 Canton had two banks, two hotels, and a drugstore. Its post office opened in 1840. The railroad industries



of New Orleans Jackson and Great Northern Railroad connected Canton to New Orleans, and later, the Mississippi Grand Central Railroad connected Canton to Memphis which boomed the cotton business. For central Mississippi farmers, the journey of getting cotton to Vicksburg destined for the Mississippi River started in Canton. Canton progressed by establishing private

schools in 1836 and public schools in 1874.

Religious beliefs of early settlers ranged from Protestant, Catholic, Mormon, to Jewish. The first church, Union Church, was established in 1836 as non-denominational. Canton boasted its fine liquors and saloons, one of which was Trolio's on the square, in advertising which the local churches disliked. The years of prohibition finally made Canton a dry city, but commerce continued with the cotton industry. The Opera



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House was a fine gathering for artistic expression, plays, membership groups, and social gatherings. Canton's famous pre-Civil War Greek Revival style courthouse was completed in 1855 and remains the center of activity. It has been noted that early on there were more lawyers in Canton than physicians. An early police force and fire company, complete with a fire bell which still stands, could not compete with losses caused by fires, so it became law that the buildings on the main square would be constructed of brick. Mud was a constant problem for merchants, so the present-day vintage brick sidewalks around the square were finalized in 1898, but the paving of the old dusty streets, the town's main complaint, waited until 1913. While the sidewalks were being paved, telephones came to town, which was widely celebrated. The town has a long-running history which makes its original structures and many stories so rich and timeless.

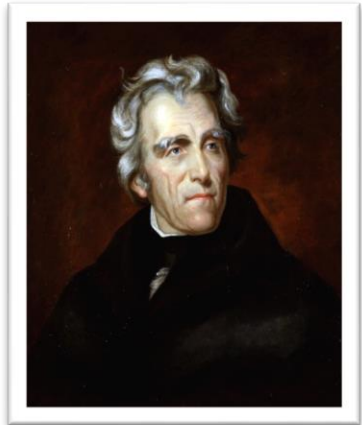


Directions from the International Airport to Canton, Mississippi

From the Jackson International Airport, go south about 1.3 miles to Old Brandon Road, then go west on Old Brandon Road ¼ miles to Airport Road. Travel North on Airport Road to Lakeland Drive (Hwy 25) about 3.3 miles. Then go east on Lakeland Drive 4.3 miles to I-55, Turn North on I-55 and continue 19 miles on I-55 to Exit 119. From that exit go east on Peace Street 2.1 miles and there you will be in the Heart of Canton "The City of Lights."

The Political Climate at the Time of Canton's Formation

Andrew Jackson, was the president at the time of Canton's formation, serving from 1829 until 1837. At this time the Whig Party was quite popular, but the Democratic Party prevailed in Canton, which was Madison County's official seat of government. In 1836 at the time of Canton's founding, the nation had 25 states.



Canton experienced the Union soldiers marching through the square, with some discomfort. Colonel William Sherman camped under an Oak tree directly behind the square. Some Cantonians were asked to provide food for soldiers, and the buildings, thankfully, remained undamaged as was ordered. Canton has scars of racial tension through the years, and many families still share their stories. Political visitors to the town included Martin Luther King, Jr. and President Ronald Reagan.



The Oldest Businesses in Town

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Mosby's Drugstore, first established by Samuel Luke Mosby III and Dr. William Priestly, is one of the longest surviving single-family owned pharmacies in the United States. It is now relocated from the square to behind the square, but it is still in operation today. The First National Bank, now called Renasant Bank, is the oldest business still in operation in its original building since 1903.

City Government

The Governing body of the city consists of the Mayor and a seven- member Board of Alderman six members are elected from separate wards, while the seventh member is elected at large. In 1994 Mayor Alice Scott made history by becoming the first African American and the first female to serve as mayor of Canton.

Historic Attractions of the Area, Festivals and Events

Victorian Christmas Festival- includes magical animation museum, children's carousel, vintage car rides, horse and buggy rides, and merchant's open house- December 1st through 23rd.



Canton Flea Market- this is a day-long, bi-annual event occurring on the second Thursday of every May and October.



Shoppers arrive early to find local handcrafted items such as pottery, jewelry, and unique arts and crafts complete with delicious food- Penn's catfish and chicken-on-a-stick and funnel cakes are popular. Each year a total of 100,000 tourists visit from all across the U.S.

Championship Hot Air Balloon- An Independence Day heritage extravaganza, highlighted by over 25 hot air balloons, fireworks, food, evening balloon glow, and competition for cash prizes for balloon pilots.

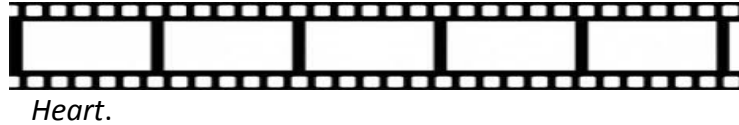


Historic Square with shops and restaurants- Merchants on the square sell antiques, art, and home décor. There are several restaurants to choose from, some franchises as well as locally owned.

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Notable Events- Several movies have been filmed in Canton: *A Time to Kill*, *My Dog Skip*, *O Brother, Where Art Thou* and *A Ponder Heart*.



Lodging Suggestions

Chateau Myrtlelydale - a luxury bed and breakfast a few miles from the Square's antiques and merchants. 197 Robinson Road Canton, MS 39046, 601-859-6038

Brentwood Inn & Suites - (Complementary hot breakfast, and Wi-Fi)

145 Soldier Colony Road, Canton, MS 39046, 601-859-7575

Reasons to visit Canton, Mississippi

I have visited the square for festivals and events since I was born. My dad's family is from Canton, and we still live in Canton about 10 minutes from the square. I enjoy hearing the stories from my grandparents of their early lives in Canton. My



grandmother was even an extra in the movie *A Time to Kill*. My father attended school in Canton and has many memories especially from his school days serving in Flea Market fund-raisers. If you come to Canton, you can attend the above mentioned festivals, tour the antebellum historical homes and buildings, possibly see a movie being filmed, shop for antiques and crafts on the square, and even find the Madison County center marker stone on the grounds of the Canton Courthouse. When eating on the square, if you ask for iced tea, we serve it sweet with Southern

hospitality, Canton-style.

Links to Visit about Canton, Mississippi:

www.Cantontourism.com

www.cantonmsfleamarket.com

www.cantonms.net