

## **Cornelius Aultman**

By the time Cornelius Aultman was in his early 30s, he was Stark County's first millionaire – and one of the first 300 in the nation. His legacy extends throughout Stark County -- most notably in the hospital his widow and daughter started in his memory.

Cornelius was born March 10, 1827, in a log cabin just west of Osnaburg to Jacob and Elizabeth Tawney Aultman. In 1828, the family moved to Uniontown and within the year Jacob died. Elizabeth remarried the widower John Miller on Dec. 15, 1830, and blended their two families. Cornelius became close to and later became business partners with his step-brother Lewis Miller, a 2017 Hall of Distinction inductee.

Cornelius began his career as a wheelwright in Greentown, but he soon began to work at the Wise and Ball Machine shop making farming equipment. It was there he

met his first wife, Eliza Wise. After a brief business venture in Illinois with his brother-in-law, Eliza and Cornelius returned to Greentown where he established the Ball Aultman and Co which produced six styles of reapers.

In 1852, Cornelius moved his company from Greentown to Canton to lessen his shipping charges. A new railroad that ran from Pittsburgh to Chicago – the Ohio and Penn Railroad – was coming through Canton. So he built his factory on what is now the Hercules Engine property on Market Street South.

By 1871, C. Aultman and Co. had become the largest reaper and mower company in the country and employed 550 workers in Canton. Stark County became known as the “Reaper Capital of the World.”

Cornelius ventured out into other businesses as well. He co-founded Akron Iron Co. with John R. Buchtel, and he founded Canton Electric Light and Power and the Canton Street Railway. In 1863, he helped to organize the First

National Bank of Canton. Shortly after his daughter Elizabeth married one of his plant managers in 1869, he gave responsibility of the bank to his son-in-law George D. Harter.

Not all of Cornelius's efforts were business ventures. He was friend to four sitting presidents – Grant, Hayes, Garfield, and Arthur – and worked on William McKinley's congressional campaigns. Later, when McKinley ran for president, he did so from the front porch of a house Cornelius lived in while his mansion was being built. Despite his connection to politics, he declined the encouragement of the Republican Party to run for governor of Ohio. Cornelius founded the Canton Public Library, served as president of the Canton School Board, and worked to rebuild the First Methodist Church – now the Crossroads United Methodist Church – at 120 Cleveland Ave. SW after it burned in its second fire. He chaired the committee that built the Stark County Courthouse and was a trustee and substantial donor to what is now the University of Mount Union.

In 1869 after Eliza's death, Cornelius was introduced to a Philadelphia widow named Katherine Barron Reybold. Together they built their mansion designed by the designer of the County Courthouse. The mansion – later known as the Harter Estate – was located where the current Canton Institute of Art is. It included a 6-sided library, a three-story service wing, two levels of maid quarters, and totaled over 15,000 square feet in the main house. At the time it was one of the most expensive homes in this part of the country. The mansion was demolished in 1965.

Cornelius was described by his biographer as “a very gregarious fellow. He had two chefs, and he ate very well. But he was also kind-hearted.” Additionally, he was one of the finest ice skaters in Canton and was often seen skating in the Union Dam area of the west branch of the Nimishillen Creek.

Cornelius went to bed on Christmas night of 1884 with a headache and a pain in his side. He died at one o'clock in

the morning. The Canton Repository reported that “the active pursuits of business had suspended and sadness inexpressible had rested upon all.” Within 10 years of his death, his widow, Katherine, and daughter, Elizabeth Harter, founded Aultman Hospital in his memory.

At his funeral, William McKinley described Cornelius as “a self-made man, famous by actual and useful achievements, whose word was coin, and whose name was a tower of strength in all the industrial and commercial activities of our city, county, state and country.” It is with much esteem that the North Canton Alumni Association receives Cornelius Aultman into its Hall of Distinction.