

Ellsworth P. Smith

Hanging on walls in homes and businesses around North Canton are prints of its historical scenes. In fact, the artist has admitted, “I think I’ve painted everything paintable in North Canton, excepting only the sides of a few old barns.” These are the products of artist Ellsworth P. Smith who helped guide the visual and marketing presentation of the Hoover Vacuum Company.

Ells was born in 1895 on Cherry Street in Canton, Ohio, as the last born of six children. He enjoyed both athletics and arts and spent much of his youth at the YMCA and attending YMCA camp. He was a gifted athlete who played on several city basketball teams and played semi-professional baseball. He was also a gymnast and tap dancer. After graduating from Central High School, he attended art school in Washington DC and Cleveland. During World War I, he served in the Army at Base Hospital 9 and Mobile Hospital 5

near Rouen, France. Though his primary role was to document medical procedures via cameras and sketches, he also entertained the troops, helped wounded soldiers exercise, and helped carry the wounded to hospital beds.

When he returned from Europe, Ells began working at the YMCA in Canton. In 1920, he was approached by the president of the YMCA board, HW Hoover, who was Boss Hoover's son and second president of the Hoover company. Ells was offered the opportunity to begin an Art Department at the Hoover Company to design a small magazine for the company's dealers.

The Art Department had many projects. It produced artwork for the dealer monthly magazine and the 8-page sales force publication. It also produced a monthly publication for the managers and for the service department and a weekly publication for all of the home office employees. Ells did comic strips for all of the magazines and created artwork to be awarded to employees. He additionally

created a character called Whimsie who was performed by comedian Gus Howard at company conventions. Whimsie was an example of what a Hoover salesman should **not** be. Eventually, Ells's art department employed 8 artists, 3 photographers, and a secretary.

Inspired by his experiences with YMCA, Ells became interested in the health of the Hoover employees. He encouraged fellow employees to join him at the Canton YMCA for exercise and games. He also captained the Hoover Company's tennis team. In August 1921, Ells took the initiative to meet with HW Hoover to propose creating a place near the Hoover factory where employees could exercise and participate in recreational activities after work. His vision and willingness to take that first step set the idea in motion. Without his initiative and his meeting with Mr. Hoover, the YMCA in North Canton would not have come into being. On February 18, 1923, the Community Building YMCA was opened across the street from the factory.

Ells had other impacts on the community as well. He created the most notable records of historical North Canton. He was instrumental in founding the Canton Art Institute and the Little Art Gallery in North Canton. He created a series of patriotic paintings featuring a shabbily dressed character named Gaylord. Jack Nicklaus was appreciative of the series and commissioned a series of 49 paintings from him. In 1960, after retiring from his 40 year career at Hoover, Ells taught art classes in his home – 4 classes a week.

Ells was honored for his work. He worked closely to create award-winning annual reports from 1944 to 1960. His reports won 5 firsts, 3 seconds, and 2 thirds from the Financial Times. When he retired in 1960, he was honored with the first Canton Advertising Man of the Year award.

Ells and his wife, Ernestine Strock whom he called Miss America, built a home on 35th Street in Canton in 1922. There they raised their children, Lowell and Barbara. Lowell

also became a notable watercolor artist. Similarly, Barbara was a recognized vocal artist and teacher of singing. Ells lived in that home until his death in 1996 at the age of 100.