

Mansfield's 'Golden Era' of Great Men

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The decade from 1845 to 1855 has been called the "golden age" of the Mansfield bar. Add another 10 years to that, covering the period from about 1840 to 1860 and we could call it a golden era in politics as well as the bar.

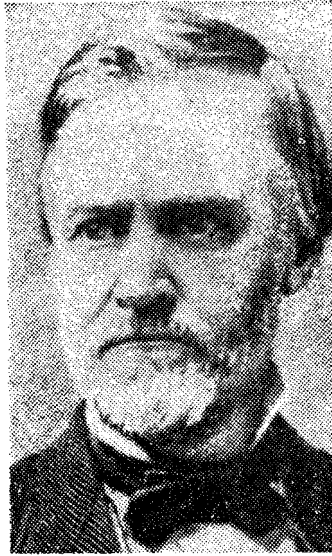
A brilliant array of men held office and practiced law here during that period. They became governors, senators, members of the U.S. cabinet and Supreme Court justices.

No one has explained satisfactorily why Mansfield, a community of less than 5,000 at the time, attracted so many able men. It may have been because two or three capable lawyers set up practice here and spread the news about Mansfield as a potentially - great city.

Best known of all Mansfielders in the 19th century of course was John Sherman, the attorney who went on to become a congressman, Senator, Secretary of State, and Secretary of the Treasury.

Sherman arrived here in 1840 from Lancaster. He was 17 at the time and four years later he was admitted to the Ohio bar. He was elected to Congress in 1854 and from then until his retirement in 1898 he was a national figure.

A father and son team made news here and in Ohio in the 1840s. The son was Thomas Bartley who was



JOHN SHERMAN

elected to the first of four terms in Congress in 1822.

In 1844 Gov. Wilson Shannon resigned and Bartley, speaker of the Ohio Senate, became governor. He was 32 and the youngest man ever to hold that office.

Bartley sought re-election but lost in his bid for the nomination by one vote. His father, Mordecai, was nominated and elected and served one term, declining nomination for re-election. He came home to Mansfield to live on his farm.

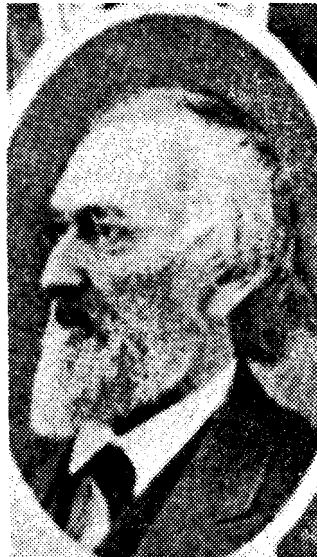
Meanwhile the son Thomas became U.S. attorney for the northern Ohio district and served on the Ohio Supreme Court from 1852 to 1859. He was Chief Justice for three years.

David Ross Locke, who

became nationally known as Petroleum V. Nasby, was part-owner of the Mansfield Herald for a brief time in the 1850s after coming here from Plymouth. His brand of humor made him a great favorite with Abraham Lincoln and readers throughout the Middle West.

Another Mansfielder of the 1840s was Thomas H. Ford who was Mansfield mayor in 1845. He then became lieutenant governor of Ohio. His ability as a speaker won wide recognition for him, especially after his address at a Know-Nothing Party convention in Philadelphia in the 1850s.

Samuel J. Kirkwood, a Mansfield lawyer in the 1840s and mayor for a year, was one of the men who left here to gain fame. He went



JACOB BRINKERHOFF

The Mansfield That Was

By VIRGIL A. STANFIELD

to Iowa in 1855 at a time when that state was being opened to settlement. He served two terms as governor of that state and then was elected to the U.S. Senate. He was Secretary of the Interior in President Garfield's cabinet.

Two other great Mansfielders of the mid-19th century were the Brinkerhoff cousins, Jacob and Roeliff.

Jacob was one of the town's able attorneys when his cousin, Roeliff, stopped here to see him in 1846.

Jacob became an influential member of Congress. Although the Wilmot Proviso bore the name of David Wilmot, another congressman, that document was largely credited to Jacob Brinkerhoff. It banned slavery from territory acquired from Mexico by the U.S.

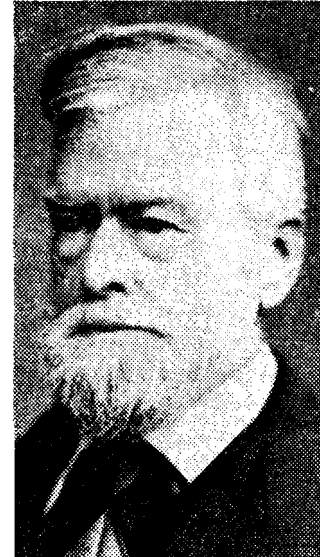
The measure created a great deal of controversy in Congress and was repeatedly rejected. The substance of it was accepted, however, in 1862.

Gen. Roeliff Brinkerhoff founded the Ohio Archaeological and Historical Society and the Richland County Historical Society. He was a newspaper publisher here for a number of years and was in Ford's Theater in Washington the night Lincoln was shot.

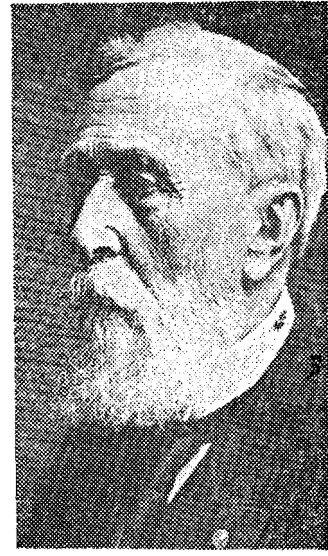
Gen. Brinkerhoff, who established Camp Buckingham in Mansfield during the Civil War, was an early leader in providing care for mental patients and worked for prison reforms.

One of Mansfield's able attorneys and judges in the 1840s was Jacob Parker, uncle of John Sherman. Parker served as common pleas judge here and was considered one of Ohio's outstanding men of law at the time.

Atty. John May and his son, Manuel, were a team of lawyers and community leaders here in the 1840s and 50s. The son was a member of the Ohio Senate



THOMAS BARTLEY



ROELIFF BRINKERHOFF

and then common pleas judge.

By modern standards, Mansfield of the 1840s would have been a quiet and unprogressive community. While it was a trading and market center for a considerable area, it had no railroad until 1846 and most of its streets were of the dirt variety. An Opera House on North Main St. was the entertainment center. Some substantial homes were beginning to show up on West Market St. (Park Avenue West) and South Main St.

Businesses were primarily on Main St. and around Central Park. There were a few on Third and Fourth Sts. and on Walnut St.

Yet this was the town that attracted these men of great potential.