

# Once-Thriving Newville Only a Memory

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## The Mansfield That Was

By VIRGIL A. STANFIELD

Newville, which once had ideas of outstripping Mansfield as a Richland County metropolis, disappeared more than 30 years ago.

The little village, located in one of the most beautiful valleys in Ohio, was founded in 1823 and reached its peak of prosperity more than a century ago.

John Frederick Herring, a Pennsylvanian who had made some money in the milling business in southern Richland County, plotted the village on the Clear Fork and named it for his native town in Pennsylvania.

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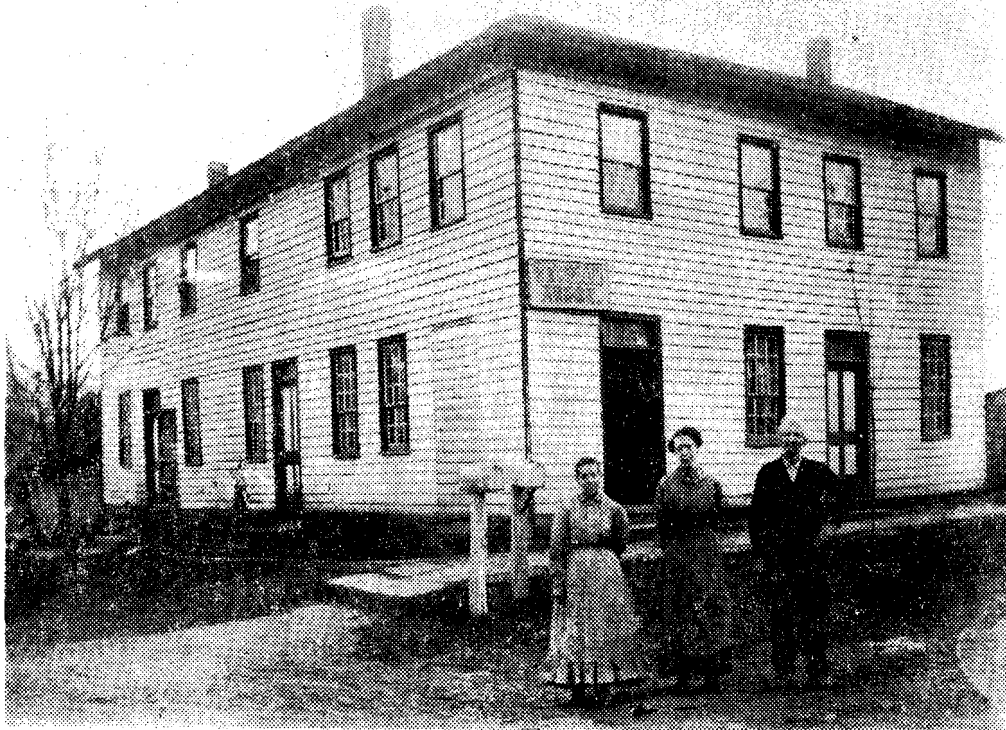
Mansfield was only 15 years old at the time and had only a few hundred inhabitants. The railroads hadn't arrived and the roads in and out of the county seat town were only trails through the forest.

Herring had operated a grist mill west of Bellville and then another some 15 miles downstream along the Clear Fork. Abraham Nye, a friend of Herring's, had recently arrived in the county and he liked the country along the Clear Fork. He saw the wild spot between the picturesque bluffs as an ideal site for a town.

Herring was sold on the plan and became the founder of Newville. Along with Herring and Nye the early settlers included Luther Richard, Daniel Stoner, Michael Hogan, Daniel Carpenter and Daniel Armentrout.

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Nye opened the first hotel and Hogan became the first



A hotel in Newville around the turn of the century was the German House. It was operated by Mr. and Mrs. Henry Reiter, shown here with their daughter, Miss Sylvia Reiter. Mr. and Mrs. Reiter were grandparents of Mrs. Russell McCue, 637 Kirkwood Dr., who provided this photo.

merchant. Stoner opened the first blacksmith shop. At that time a blacksmith was an important businessman in the town.

Newville started to grow as more adventurers came up the Clear Fork from the Mohican and Muskingum Rivers.

They were hardy people ready for the rough life of the frontier. Herring showed how determined the Newville people were when he drove a team of horses to Baltimore, Md., and back to get equipment for a mill. It was a 1,000-mile

roundtrip and took two months.

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Others among the first citizens of the county made the Baltimore trip to market the products they found in the forests. Among these items which brought good prices in the east were maple sugar, beeswax and ginseng.

During the period around 1830 Newville was the religious center of the county with several churches and ministers who were outstanding as orators.

Two of these men of the

gospel were Thomas and Sidney Rigdon, brothers. Sidney, spokesman for the Disciples religious order, was considered one of the finest orators in the state.

He soon outgrew Newville and along with several followers moved westward to Nauvoo, Ill., Mormon headquarters at that time.

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As other nearby communities began to grow Newville lost its fame as a church town and by the early 1900s only one church remained.

The community was the

home of several prominent men in the mid and late 1800s.

Samuel J. Kirkwood, one of the early teachers in Newville, later became mayor of Mansfield and from here moved on to Iowa where he served as governor and then as a U.S. Senator. While he was in Mansfield he practiced law with Judge Thomas Bartley, later to be a governor of Ohio.

So two Mansfielders in the same law firm in the 1840 era moved up to governorships in Ohio and Iowa.

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Joseph Musgrave, one-time Newville merchant, left to enter politics in Ashland County. He was elected to the state senate in the 1850s.

While John Peter Altgeld, fiery and controversial governor of Illinois, late in the 19th century is sometimes called a Newville boy, he didn't spend much time there. He lived nearby, however, after his parents came here from the east while he was still a youth.

Newville had the usual shops and taverns of the small frontier town, but it never became much of an industrial center. The prime reason was the absence of railroads. The B and O and Pennsylvania both missed the village and probably ruined any hopes it had of overtaking Mansfield.

The village did have a pennyroyal distillery, however, which perfumed the valley on both sides of the town. Pennyroyal is an aromatic plant with a pungent taste. The oil from it is distilled to make a medicine.

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After the railroads crossed the county in the 1840s and 50s, leaving Newville all alone in its rustic setting, the town started downhill. At one time it had a population of several hundred persons. By 1880 the population was down to about 300.

Mrs. R. R. McCue, 637 Kirkwood Dr., said her grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Reiter, operated the German House, a small Newville hotel, for several years.

Until its final years the village had at least one hotel to serve the horse and buggy travelers and the drummers who came to town.

When the Muskingum Conservancy District and its system of lakes was created in the 1930s, Newville had dwindled to a tiny community of a church and a few houses.

Because of its site along the Clear Fork, it stood in the way of the proposed Pleasant Hill lake. So Newville had to go. Its church and houses were moved to higher ground and the waters of the lake now cover the spot where the band of rugged settlers had hoped to build a thriving city.