

# Hollow Tree Served as First Post Office

## The Mansfield That Was

By VIRGIL A. STANFIELD

If you had lived in Mansfield when the town was incorporated 161 years ago you would have picked up your mail at a hollow tree in Central Park.

The tree served as the first "post office" here. The postman rode a horse and he called once a week, collecting the letters in the tree and bringing news of the outside world. His route followed an Indian trail northward from Coshocton.

This primitive mail service was in effect for three years, until the town's first official post office was opened July 1, 1811, at the southwest corner of Third and Main Sts., about where the Fashion Lane is now.

★

Postal records show the first postmaster was a "Mr. Winship." He held the job for nine years, serving during parts of the administrations of James Madison and James Monroe.

When Hugh McFall, the third postmaster here, took office in 1830 Mansfield had a population of 830. By 1860, the town had 4,581 people. The postmaster then was Samuel Snyder.

There have been 25 postmasters in the city since 1811 and several of them were men of considerable prominence in the community. William S. Cappeller, who held the office from 1902 to 1910, was editor of

the old Mansfield Daily News. He was chairman of the Republican state committee in 1880, 1886, 1887, and 1888. For a time in the 1880s he was state commissioner of railroads and telegraphs.

★

Others who held the office in this century included F. M. Bushnell from 1915 to 1923, Harry E. Hawley from 1925 to 1934, and Herman E. Homberger from 1934 to 1943.

Ralph M. Hardy, the present postmaster, has been in the job longer than any other man. He was named acting postmaster in 1953 and four years later he was named postmaster.

Mansfield, which hopes soon to have a fine new federal building and post office in the area of Fifth and Diamond Sts., has had eight post offices. The present building at Fourth and Mulberry has been occupied since June 16, 1914, longer than any of the other buildings used for mail handling.

After that first post office at Third and Main, postal activities moved across Third St. to the northwest corner of the intersection, or the M. O'Neil corner.

Then the office was moved a little to the north,

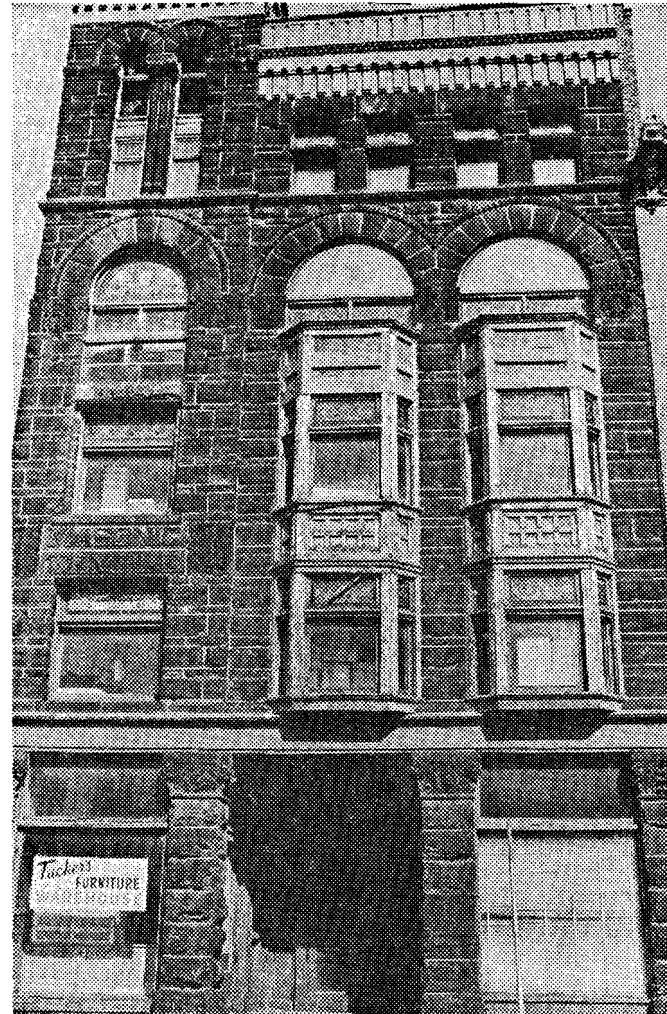
or next door to the Wiler House on North Main. It remained there until 1865 when it was moved to North Park St. In 1873 it was moved again to the corner of North Park and Diamond Sts.

In 1884 the former Masonic Temple on North Main St. became the city's post office. That site was occupied until 1913 and then temporary quarters on South Park St. were used until the new building at Fourth and Mulberry was ready the following year. The first floor of the North Main St. building, which now is used as a furniture warehouse, was leased by the Masons to the federal government for the 29-year period.

Mail handling in the early days of the city's history was a difficult task. Deliveries to and from the city until 1830 were largely on horseback. Then stagecoaches brought both mail and travelers to Mansfield until the first railroad trains arrived in 1846.

For well over a century the railroads hauled most of the mail. In recent years airlines have been taking over the mail contracts and now virtually all mail is either trucked or transported by air.

Rural carriers out of the



This was Mansfield's post office from 1884 to 1913. Modern Mansfielders will recognize it as the former Masonic Temple on North Main St.

Mansfield office used buggies or wagons to make their deliveries until the era of the automobile began.

The day of the foot carrier in the city is nearing an end. Trucks and small motor vehicles now are used to deliver mail to the

suburbs and residential communities.

Most adult Mansfielders can remember when there was only one post office. As the city grew and the mail volume increased it was necessary to open branches and substations to ease the downtown office congestion. A large annex on East Fourth St. took a great deal of the load off the main office.

There now are four branches in addition to the Annex. They are the Southwest branch on Cook Rd., the Sherman Station on Park Avenue West, the Lincoln Branch on Ashland Rd., and the Lexington Branch in Lexington. In addition to these there are four contract postal stations in outlying areas of the city.

★

Mansfield now serves as a mail distribution point for 68 cities and villages in northcentral Ohio. Mail to and from these communities is handled by the office here.

From a one or two-man crew back there in the infant days of the city, the Mansfield postal staff has grown to 335 persons.

Mansfield looks hopefully to the new quarters which will afford the most modern mail handling facilities available in the nation for a city of our size.