

# City's Early Settlers Were

It must be difficult for modern Mansfield and Richland County residents to understand why the rugged people who settled this area wanted to leave comfortable homes in the East to come into the Indian country to establish settlements.

The early residents of the Richland area deserve more recognition than they have received. They needed great courage and stamina to carry out their mission.

Some of these settlers of course were adventurers who saw a chance to get rich in the new country to the west. Others wanted the excitement that the frontier offered.

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But most of the substantial people who came here to make their homes and build a new community had to undergo terrible hardships to stay alive and raise their families.

It's not easy to pick a few men from among these first settlers and say they contributed more than the others. It was a task for everybody.

The ones who stayed and were active in community affairs, however, deserve special praise.

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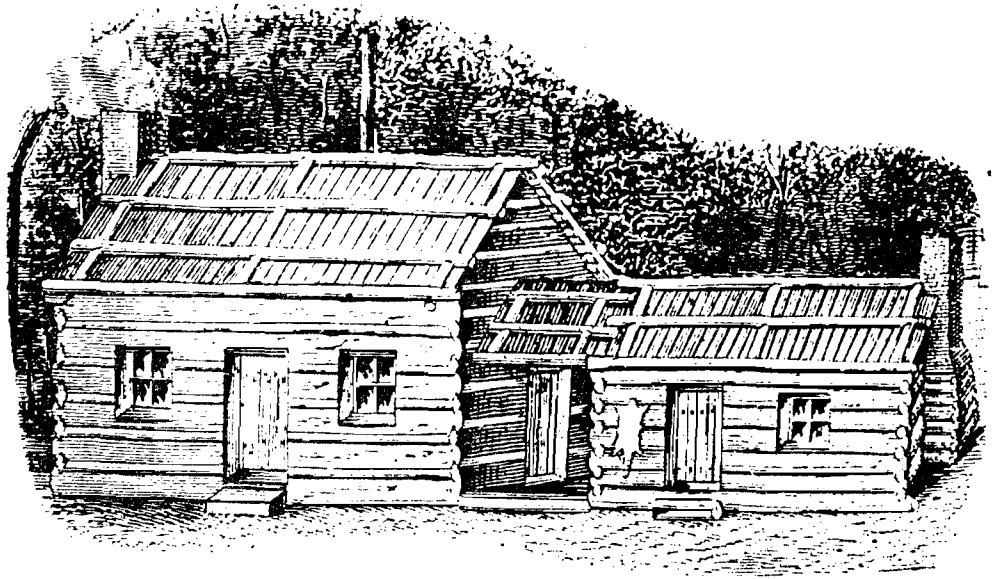
Among these men were five who gave a great deal of their time and energy to building the city and county we have today. These leaders were James Hedges, Jacob Newman, Capt. James Cunningham, George Coffinberry, and James McCluer.

Hedges and Newman, along with Joseph Larwill, platted the village of Mansfield 165 years ago. Hedges is usually credited with carrying the most weight when it came to selecting the site for the town.

Hedges, for whom a street and school in Mansfield were named, was a surveyor of considerable ability. Before he came into the Ohio country he was an officer in the U. S. Army.

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He and Newman first picked a site on the Rocky Fork southeast of Mansfield for their county seat town. Newman had a cabin there and a settlement was in the making. Then the men changed their minds and



Living quarters were crude and crowded in the early days of Richland County. This is the enlarged cabin of the Jacob Newman family, the first settler's cabin built in the county. It was off the modern Route 39 near the former Richland Hospital. The small structure to the right was the original cabin.

moved a short distance to the northwest where there was a big spring and good drainage for a town. The spot they chose is our modern Mansfield.

That spring on East Fourth may have had a great deal to do with their choice. It was known for many years as the Big Spring and it later was the site of a major brewery in the city. The spring no longer sends its water to the surface.

Hedges was an imposing man in stature and character. He was in business here for some years and had an active role in the development of the new village. It is said that he helped the poor and was greatly admired by his neighbors. He lived until the 1850s.

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Newman was the county's first permanent settler. He came into Ohio from Pennsylvania, settling first in the Canton area. He was related to Hedges and heard about the Richland County area from him.

Newman arrived here in 1807. With him were his niece, Catherine Brubaker, and her three brothers. She was the cook and housekeeper in the first settler's cabin in the county. It was along the Rocky Fork near the present Hattery and Chatlain Nursery.

Those log cabins with the

fireplace at one end for both heating and cooking were poor excuses for housing, according to our modern standards. Rain and snow often came through the rough shingle roofs.

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By 1811 Newman had acquired a new wife in Pennsylvania and sold his cabin and mill on the Rocky Fork and moved to Mansfield. His new home was on the east side of South Main St., about 600 feet beyond Ritter's Run. That put it outside the corporation limits which extended only to the bottom of the South Main hill.

During the War of 1812 Newman, familiar with this area and the ways of the Indians, helped to guide an army unit from here to Upper Sandusky. The weather was bad and he contracted pneumonia. He died in June of 1813. After his death his widow and their three sons moved to the north side of Central Park. The site of their cabin later was occupied by the Newman block.

Capt. James Cunningham was Richland County's first farmer and its first sheriff. He settled first in the fertile Clear Fork valley near Butler, later moving to Mansfield to operate a boarding house on the square.

A man of great physical strength during much of his life, Capt. Cunningham became a semi-invalid and

was almost blind during his later years. He lived to be 90 and died at his home in Worthington Township.

Cunningham was the grandfather of historian A. J. Baughman and Sade Baughman. For a time the Baughmans operated a newspaper in Mansfield. Baughman's history of Richland County appeared in 1908.

Cunningham organized the Methodist congregation at Little Washington. He is buried in that community.

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A Revolutionary War veteran, George Coffinberry came to Mansfield soon after the town was founded. His cabin was on the south side of Central Park, about where the Southern Hotel stands. He devoted much of his time to church and civic affairs.

One of the Coffinberry sons was Mansfield's first school teacher. A grandson, James, born here in 1818, became a newspaper publisher at Findlay and later was a well-known Cleveland attorney and judge.

George Coffinberry and his wife, Elizabeth, are buried in the Springmill cemetery. He lived to be 91. She was 88 when she died.

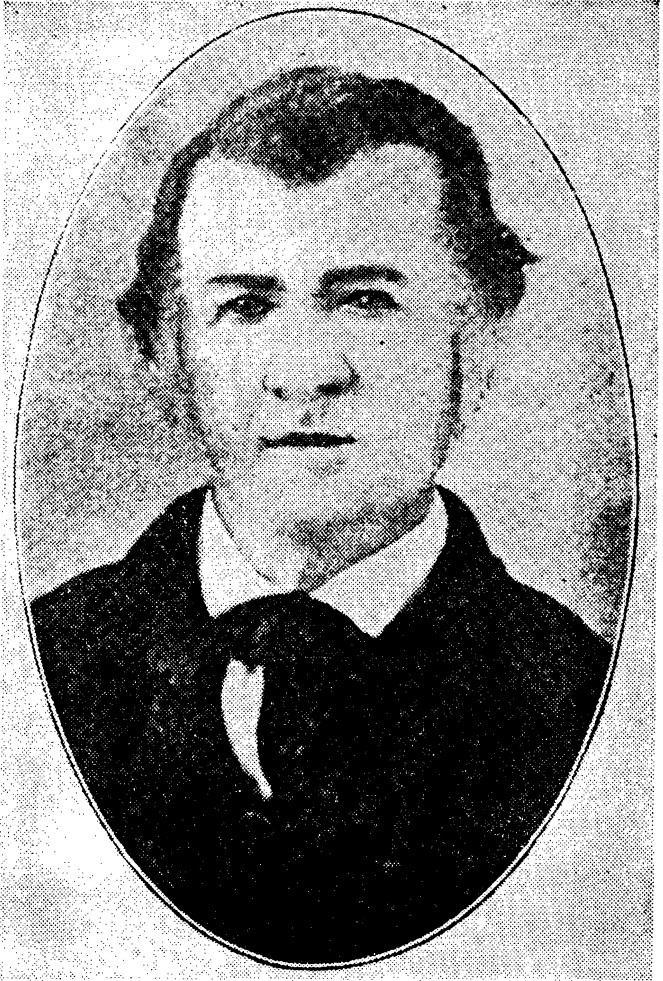
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James McCluer, a daring fellow who was looking for action, came northward from Mount Vernon in 1808

# a Hardy Lot

## *The Mansfield That Was*

By VIRGIL A. STANFIELD



**Capt. James Cunningham was a true Richland County pioneer. He arrived in 1809, a year after Mansfield was founded and four years before the county government was established.**

and built a cabin on the present site of Bellville. His family came here a year later. He was largely responsible for the construction of the first road into Richland County from Mount Vernon and Fredericktown.

Later in his life McCluer lived at the southwest corner of Fourth and Main Sts. in Mansfield. He became one of the first associate judges in the county and otherwise active in community affairs.

These men had major roles in the development of Richland County and Mansfield. They were here when life was rough and dangerous. They were fine citizens.

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The women who were wives of these men and came here with them to

start new lives haven't received much recognition from historians, but they may have shown even more courage than the men.

For a while Mansfield's nearest neighbors, other than the Indians, were in Fredericktown and Wooster. There was no doctor here until 1815, seven years after the village was founded.

Infant mortality was high. Young mothers often died at childbirth.

There were no conveniences in the home. Finding food for meals, trying to keep the cabin warm in winter, and raising large families called for strength and courage.

So the women in those early settlements deserved honors right along with the men.