

## Alfred Kelley and the Dawn of Ohio Railroads

By James M. Cavanaugh

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Central Ohio railroad history has something for everyone. Those of us now in our senior years recall the railroaders and trains of our youth, and the transition from steam to diesel. Quite a few enthusiasts look to the railroading legends and images of World War II and the Great Depression. Others love the booming growth of the Ohio's early railroads in the coal era, or the Civil War. The photographs and documents of those periods, and stories behind them, bring it all to life for us in rich detail. But before those rail epochs, and largely before photography itself and the proliferation of document publication and other resources, there were three more decades of primeval rail genesis. This was the period in American History known as the Agrarian Republic, in the 1830s through 1850s, when the first railroads inched into Ohio and on across the Midwest.

The dominating figure of those now obscure years in Central Ohio history was Alfred Kelley. His DNA ran deeply through virtually every economic, political and social aspect of Ohio when it first was born, and what it would become.

### **Stones in the Snow**

My first contact with this history, now long ago but not many years before my first job on the New York Central, was as a high school freshman in 1963 at St. Charles Borromeo on East Broad Street by Alum Creek. Following after-school sports practice, a group of us who lived east of Bexley would walk through Wolfe Park to the eastbound city bus stop at Broad Street and Park Drive. Just south of the Broad Street pavement opposite the St. Charles front gate rested what looked like a pile of building materials in a weedy patch surrounded by a wrapping of snow fence wired onto steel posts.



*Kelley Mansion Ionic column capstone*

One December day, with crystalline snow just starting to fall, in that moment early in the storm when you can hear each icy snowflake strike dry leaves on the ground, I walked over a few steps to look at it. Oddly, the pile was not the accumulation of new cinder block and I-beams which I had expected. There were stacks of gray cut sandstone, not new at all, some with cracked edges. Also present were a number of enormous cylindrical columns, resting on their sides atop wooden dunnage. What really caught my eye was a row of carved stones, each with elaborate chiseled scrollwork. At first I thought this was something from a cemetery. But then I recognized them as Ionic column capstones from a recent Greek architecture portion of our high school ancient history class. So this was not a new building going up – it was a very old one that had come down. Why were the stones here?

My parents answered, informing that this was the remains of a historic mansion which had stood downtown, being preserved for relocation. With a few more questions, I linked this information with one of my earliest and most mysterious childhood memories. The mansion had stood on the

north side of Broad, just east of our Catholic Diocese cathedral at Fifth Street. By then dwarfed by encroaching larger buildings, including the old Memorial Hall (later to become the Center for Science and Industry), abandoned and almost black with soot and scale in parts, the house loomed dark and haunted. Going by the place frequently in the car, my younger brothers and I made up tales of it being a tomb, full of coffins, something out of Edgar Allen Poe, linked to old dead people from a former age.

But by my encounter with the stones in 1963, I forgot prior fears of ghosts and caskets. I just wondered whose house it was, someone too forgotten in death to keep the monstrous house upright, but powerful enough in life to have raised it up, and still so significant that the stones had to be saved for an uncertain future. My parents said it was Alfred Kelley. Not having grown up in Ohio, they did not know much about him, other than he had something to do with canals and railroads.

Nearly 60 years later, having become a devotee of Columbus Railroads (my wife would say oddly obsessed), I reconnected with the subject. A quick look revealed a very remarkable story.

### **Kelley Comes to Ohio**

Alfred Kelley was born in Middletown, Connecticut, November 7, 1789. His family moved to Lowville, in upstate New York, in 1798. He attended the Fairfield Academy in Herkimer County, New York, in its day a noted Episcopal liberal arts school. This education, a rare thing in early America, would likely have included Greek and Roman history, literature and architecture, mathematics, geometry and engineering, all of which would stand Alfred well in the decades that followed. Alfred's father Daniel, a successful merchant and politician, became moderately wealthy and was appointed as a judge in 1805. Young Alfred studied law under Judge Jonas Pratt of the New York Supreme Court, and was admitted to the bar in 1807.

Alfred grew to be a tall (just under six feet) and spare but strongly-built man. Contemporaries described him as having a very warm but direct personal manner, intolerant of irrelevance or hypocrisy, much focused upon end results and moving matters to conclusion. Alfred read voraciously, but as he noted, avoiding excessive reading, as he felt many educated people "read too much and think too little". Throughout his life he was at the top of his game intellectually, being able, for example, to give lectures at the Columbus Mechanics Institute in the 1840s on subjects such as light, heat, electricity and magnetism. Once when traveling by stagecoach in England, he was able to inform his fellow travelers of the names of obscure streams and other topographical information about their own land that none of them knew.

While beginning to prosper in Lowville, the Kelleys heard stories of the vast lands available on what was then known as the Connecticut Western Reserve. The Reserve was an enormous swath of land granted by the English Crown to the Connecticut Colony before the American Revolution. The Reserve included all territory west of Pennsylvania between the 42nd parallel (today's New York-Pennsylvania border) and the 41st parallel (just south of Akron), all the way across Ohio on to the Mississippi River. In 1786, Connecticut ceded the portion west of Sandusky to the U.S. federal government to settle its Revolutionary War debts, retaining the 120-mile wide section east of Sandusky to the Pennsylvania border. Today this would include all or part of 15 Northeastern counties of Ohio. In 1795, Connecticut sold the remainder of the Reserve to the Connecticut Land Company for \$1,200,000. An investor in the Company, Alfred's uncle Joshua Stow, had surveyed

land there in the first decade of the 1800s. Joshua interested the Kelley family in pursuing the growing opportunities in Ohio.

In 1810 Alfred took the challenge, riding on horseback with Joshua to the embryonic Lake Erie village of Cleaveland, as it was originally spelled. The town then consisted of two houses and a handful of log cabins on a newly laid-out town square at the mouth of the Cuyahoga River. Alfred set up his law practice, and began to explore business enterprises. He was soon joined by his brothers Irad and Datus. Alfred acquired the land on the East side of the river along the shore of Lake Erie to 9<sup>th</sup> Street, which is where the Cleveland football stadium, Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, and other iconic Cleveland attractions now stand. He also picked up other key properties, and began operating a farm on the west side of the river. He jumped into politics, being elected the first Mayor of Cleveland in 1815. Only 25, he gathered all of 12 votes, a high percentage of whom were his relatives. As the first lawyer in Cleveland, Alfred also immediately became the prosecuting attorney for Cuyahoga County. Alfred's brothers also did well, later acquiring most of what is now known as Kelley's Island in western Lake Erie, for about \$1.50 per acre.

Alfred married Mary Seymour Welles, ten years his junior, in Martinsburgh, New York in 1816. Mary proved to be a strong woman ready for adventure. The story of their travel back to Cleveland is worthy of retelling. Alfred bought a one-horse chaise, a two-wheeled carriage that rode well on the rough roads of the frontier. They drove to Buffalo, a trip of about 150 miles, but found their ship to Cleveland was not ready to sail. So they drove up to see Niagara Falls during the delay. They returned to Buffalo only to find the schooner had left without them. They then drove on for another 195 miles all the way to Cleveland. Their chaise was the first one ever seen there. Alfred and Mary had 11 children, but only six survived to adulthood, the last of whom died in 1918.



*Mary and Alfred Kelley, c. 1830*

In 1817 the Kelleys were joined by Ann Fowler, a five-year old African-American indentured servant girl. Mary's father, Major Melancthon Welles, owned Ann's mother as a slave, which was legally permitted in New York until 1827. Under the odd transitional laws of the era, children of slaves were "free" but remained indentured servants until reaching adulthood. The Major "gave" Ann to the Kelleys as a wedding present. Ann Fowler remained with the Kelleys as a nurse and companion for many decades after her full freedom, and into her own marriage. As noted below, Ann lived to reach 90 years of age, and became the matriarch of two very prominent Ohio families.

As Alfred's land investments and law practice prospered, he soon demonstrated a keen vision of what it would take to move this new frontier homeland forward, and harvest its portentous bounty. Alfred quickly found ways to facilitate and finance the expansion of the village. He established the Commercial Bank of Lake Erie to complement his law office, helping the rising new population to underwrite their growth and diversification. He set up partnerships in various businesses, including a dock and marine terminal on the Cuyahoga River. He also established the first Library Association in Ohio, and organized an Episcopal Congregation.

Alfred was elected to the Ohio General Assembly, entering as the youngest member of the Legislature at 28. He would eventually become that body's oldest member, retiring from the State Senate at the age of 68. Originally a Democratic-Republican, as that party was known in the 1820s, he became a follower of Henry Clay and eventually switched over to the Whig party.

From the start, Alfred distinguished himself as a thoughtful and hardworking Ohio legislator. During his long career in both houses, he developed and published a set of carefully-crafted principles for considering, drafting and voting upon bills, which seems still timely 200 years later. Various sources note that in his long legislative career, no court or administrative agency ever found any material ambiguity in any measure he had authored that was enacted into law. He was also known for his unfailing reliability as an implementer; once a concept was agreed, Alfred would always be the best person to entrust to take action bringing it into reality.

Alfred was also a popular public speaker throughout his career. His speeches show that unlike the formal oratory of the era, his style was warm and personable, avoiding ostentatiousness, using a simple vocabulary and phrasing that made great respectful contact with the common people, at their own level. He was entertaining, but always very clear, to the point and brief. He often invoked God, but advocated for secular solutions and values.

Traveling back and forth from Cleveland to New York, and to legislative sessions in Columbus, and building relationships with politicians from all parts of what was then the newest state, Alfred soon realized several critical facts. While Ohio was blessed with far more productive farmland than he knew from his New England roots, Buckeye farmers were poor and struggled to establish sufficient on-farm prices for their crops. Ohio commodities markets lacked the liquidity to incentivize optimal production. Many farmers just grew produce for their families and livestock. The way to improve the prospects for Ohio goods would be to open up access to better capitalized markets, which lay to the east, mainly in New York and Pennsylvania.

The Great Lakes provided ample opportunity for water transportation. By 1810 the Erie Canal was under construction between Buffalo and Albany, and onto the navigable Hudson River to New York City and other Atlantic seaports. This route would open the way to move an almost unlimited volume of Ohio's output to eastern buyers ready to pay higher prices. The challenge was to provide the interior of Ohio access to these promising destinations on an economical basis.

### **Ohio Becomes the “Canal State”**

With Alfred's unsurpassed relationships with Ohio's politicians, and skills as a lawyer and banker, he quickly became the most prominent champion for building canals. The goal was to link expansive interior regions of Ohio to the navigable waters of Lake Erie and the Ohio River. While the canal boats of the 1820s look small, quaint and slow to us today, they represented a great technical advance over the ox-drawn wagons and rough, muddy roads of the era. With several teams of mules, and a live-aboard small family of navigators, a canal boat could move up to 80 tons of goods at three to four miles per hour at a small fraction of the cost of wagon haulage.

While serving in the General Assembly, Alfred investigated and wrote a report responding to an invitation by New York State in 1816 for Ohio to assist in completing the Erie Canal. The Ohio legislature did not follow up on the request. But by 1822, Alfred, now elected to the Ohio Senate,

served on an investigating commission reviewing possible routes for north-south canals in Ohio. Alfred studied canal design, engineering and construction efficiency methods. He acquired a premier collection of technical books on canal construction for the Ohio State Library to support further research and planning.

In 1825, Alfred was appointed as a State of Ohio Canal Commissioner, tasked with leading a group of start-up canal companies with lay-out and acquisition of routes (water level of course), raising huge sums from eastern investors for construction, outfitting and working capital. Between 1820 and 1845, these entrepreneurs dug, flooded and operated some 625 miles of canals and feeder waterways in Ohio. The principal enterprises were the 274-mile Miami and Erie Canal, built in 1825-45, connecting Toledo and Cincinnati via St. Marys and Dayton, and the 308-mile Ohio and Erie Canal, built in 1825-32. running from Cleveland to Portsmouth via Akron, Coshocton, Newark, Lancaster, Canal Winchester, Groveport, Big Walnut Creek and Chillicothe. The canals' main arteries served a pea vine array of side "feeder" ditches to nearby markets, including the Columbus Feeder via the Scioto River. Vast man-made reservoirs were dammed up to provide a reliable flow of canal feed water. These included Buckeye Lake, Indian Lake and Grand Lake St. Marys, three of Ohio's largest interior bodies of water.

In this dawning industrial era, the Ohio canals boosted farm prices, swelled the money supply, enabled the growth of small cities tied to the agricultural economy. Barges operating on the Hocking Canal between Lancaster and Athens also opened up the first wave of coal and mineral wealth in Perry, Athens and Muskingum Counties. This flow of critical commodities for industrialization would soon awaken the Columbus economy.

Standing astride this newfound wealth, at the hub of all economic, social and political activity, was Commissioner Alfred Kelley. His public service, foresight, leadership and energy, with support of likeminded people, made it all possible. To avoid political criticism, Alfred donated land he owned along the Ohio and Erie route, rather than selling it to the canal at a conspicuous profit. But like many notable public servants of that era in Ohio, while not engaging in any corrupt activity, he did not miss the opportunity for his various businesses to profit enormously. He rapidly became one of Ohio's wealthiest, and likely best-known man.

Alfred also invested his personal time substantially in the canal effort. He traveled along the routes extensively, laying out the rights-of-way and directing the grading, putting to work the large reserve of canal design and engineering study he had done. Under Alfred's supervision, the cost of these canals per mile, while often over budget, was lower than that achieved on any other canal project of the era. He also unfortunately contracted malaria while out on the construction works. This afflicted him episodically for the following three decades, eventually slowing his career and leading to a somewhat early death.



Ohio Canals

## The House Rises

Tiring of traveling back and forth to Cleveland, where his Ohio Assembly constituency lay, Alfred and Mary relocated to Columbus in 1830. They purchased an 18-acre building site on East Broad Street stretching between what is now Fifth Street and Grant, then just outside Columbus city limits. A few blocks to the west, the ponderous limestone Greek Revival style Ohio State Capitol at Broad and High Streets began to rise from the turf in the late 1830s, plodding toward completion in 1861, stone after stone being hauled up from the Scioto waterfront. The Kelleys replicated this activity on a slightly smaller residential scale, no doubt drawing on Alfred's Greek architecture studies back at Fairfield Academy. They completed their Ohio sandstone Greek Revival mansion in 1838, also hauling their building stone into Columbus by barge.



*The Kelley Mansion on East Broad Street*

The Kelleys did not try to match the sheer bulk of the state house. However, like the Capitol, their rectangular three-story mansion also featured porticos on all four sides, supported by ten massive columns, with four on the Broad Street face of the edifice, and two each holding up recessed porches on each of the other three sides. What they lacked in sheer size, they made up with style. The Kelley columns' capital stones were of the Ionian design, with carved scrolls at the corners.



*Doric, Ionian and Corinthian columns*

And while the State House columns had simpler Doric capstones and were built up with small precision-carved cylindrical fluted limestone segments, each of the Kelley columns was one enormous single perfectly polished stone, each 18 feet 8 inches tall. Unlike many 19<sup>th</sup> Century structures that paid tribute to the Greeks with an ostentatious columned portico on the front of an otherwise colonial style gabled building, the Kelleys carried the Revival motif through the entire structure on all four sides.

Moving in at the ages of 49 and 39, the most prominent couple of Central Ohio occupied what was likely then one of the few most impressive personal residences then standing west of New York. Alfred would live to enjoy it another 21 years. Mary Kelley would abide there until her death in 1882 at the age of 83.

By contemporaneous accounts, the Kelly house was a busy and happy place, with visitors often in residence and guests for most dinners. The mansion reportedly had cost \$15,000 to build, an astronomical sum in its day. However, the Kelleys were notably not conspicuously big spenders, thought to be living and managing their household on only \$700 to \$800 annually, hardly a

profligate sum for a wealthy family of the day. They valued personal relationships, learning, accomplishments and service well above possessions.

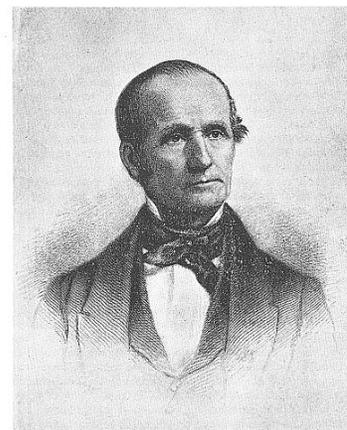
### **Trouble Back on the Canals**

In the meantime, following the Panic of 1837, an economic recession in the wake of the booming years of the Andrew Jackson presidency, the canals began to falter. Canal construction costs often ran more than double their original budgets. The recession made it difficult to raise more capital by selling bonds. Cargo volumes and freight prices dropped, threatening the sufficiency of operating revenues to cover the debts of the canal companies, as well as principal and interest payments due on bonds that had been issued by the State of Ohio to support the construction. In multiple instances in 1842-3, the state had to refinance these debts, in some instances finding there were few willing buyers for Ohio's financial obligations.

Alfred Kelley, experienced as a banker and no stranger to placement of debt from more than 20 years in the state legislature, led the efforts both inside the state government and with investors and lenders to prop up and restructure the state's burdensome debt package. Kelley personally traveled to England in 1842 to promote a new Ohio canal bond issue, and made multiple trips to New York to meet with financiers to restore confidence in the canal companies.

During the darkest hours, in 1842-3, when it appeared all would be lost and that the state would have to default on its bonds, Alfred time and again came through with complex legislative and banking solutions. At one point he even personally guaranteed a large portion of debt, pledging to creditors his own fortune, including the mansion on East Broad Street. These maneuvers enabled the canals to avoid insolvency, although just barely, and saved the state from a ruinous financial setback that would have likely crippled its growth for years to follow.

Reports of Alfred's dealings throughout these financial crises show that he sometimes worked close to the edge or even outside the rules. He used imaginative and irregular financing arrangements as a last resort to cope with a worsening situation more than once. While he sometimes concealed certain facts from people for a time, in order to avert a disaster, he did not mislead them altogether. Above all else, his actions in this turbulent era were always for the greater good of the state and the people as a whole, not for personal gain. He was often bitterly attacked by political opponents during his financial maneuvering. But when he left the Canal Commission in 1843, the Democratic-Republicans and Whigs both recognized the ultimate integrity and success Alfred had achieved, passing a joint resolution retroactively ratifying all his financial dealings on behalf of the state.



Alfred Kelley. (SOCIETY COLLECTION)

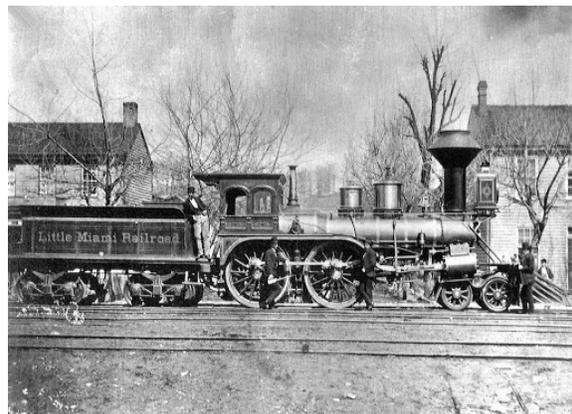
*Alfred Kelley, about 1850*

## Railroads

As the canals neared completion, before even reaching their full potential for moving large volumes of Ohio goods to market, Alfred and a few foresighted colleagues in the Ohio legislature took note of the new railroads being built in England and east of the mountains in New York, Pennsylvania and other coastal states. Originally, they saw the railroads as a supplement to canal capacity, as feeders connecting outlying areas not reachable by canal due to the geography. However, Alfred quickly realized that railroads, while expensive to equip and operate, could advance technically to move increasing volumes of passenger and cargo traffic more effectively than the canals ever would. He studied all available information, corresponding with friends and investors in the East to learn more and more.

**Muskingum & Columbus Railroad – 1836.** Alfred’s first foray into railroad development was with the Muskingum & Columbus Railroad, chartered by the Ohio General Assembly in 1836. This line was intended to connect Zanesville and Columbus over a 55-mile route via the Licking River Valley. Alfred was a founder of this company, bringing his superior know-how of construction methods and finance acquired during his time nurturing the evolution of the canals. However, like many early aspirational railroads, the M&C was never financed or built. A direct rail connection between these cities was not opened until the completion of the Columbus, Shawnee & Hocking Railroad in the 1870s.

**Columbus & Xenia Railroad – 1847 -1853.** The Columbus & Xenia Railroad, which eventually became the Miami side of the Pennsylvania Railroad west of Columbus, was chartered by the State of Ohio in 1844. The original concept was to develop an end-to-end connection from Columbus with the Little Miami Railroad, chartered in 1836 to connect Cincinnati and Springfield. The C&X was moribund by 1847, having failed to raise sufficient funds to commence construction or to survey a route. The founders turned to Alfred, recognizing his superior know-how, connections with elected officials and bankers, and energy regarding financing and building right-of-way. Signing on as president in 1847, Alfred personally joined the C&X chief engineer in surveying and mapping out the line. He also quickly persuaded municipal and county officials along the route to invest, and made a trip to New York to secure bigger East Coast financiers for the line. His sale of bonds for the C&X in New York represented one of the first, if not the initial placement of financing there for a western railroad. Next Alfred traveled to England and Wales to purchase the rails, which were not yet available in sufficient quality or quantity from fledgling U.S. iron foundries. The C&X was the first line in Ohio to use modern “T” rails instead of the less reliable strap rails used on earlier projects.



*Little Miami Railroad Locomotive, 1850s*

Construction got underway by the end of 1847. Alfred’s financing and logistics skills enabled the company to procure its first locomotive in the east and get it delivered to Columbus, no small feat in the 1840s, but canal boats met the challenge. The line opened in February 1850. After using a

temporary terminal west of the Scioto River while its bridge just north of Broad Street was being completed, the C&X established its permanent Columbus terminal on North High Street at Naghten, being the first railroad to reach the site which would later become Union Station. Alfred also negotiated a strong interchange agreement with the Little Miami Railroad to secure through traffic between Columbus and Cincinnati, quickly achieving robust profits. The two railroads merged in 1853, and Alfred then left his post as president.

**Cleveland, Columbus & Cincinnati Railroad – 1847-51.** The concept of a rail line from Cleveland through Columbus to Cincinnati arose in the mid-1830s, while the canals were still under construction. The state issued a charter for the Cleveland, Columbus and Cincinnati Railroad in 1836, but the organizers failed to raise enough money to start construction, and the charter lapsed. In 1845, a group of Cleveland business leaders persuaded the state to reinstate the charter, but they also were not able to raise enough money to proceed. Wealthy Massachusetts industrialist and financier Edmund Dwight (1780-1849), whose family had invested in the Commercial Bank of Lake Erie with the Kelleys years before, took an interest. Dwight quickly concluded that more dynamic leadership in the person of Alfred Kelley was what the line needed to become a going concern. Alfred became the president of the CCC in August, 1847.



*Joint Cleveland, Columbus & Cincinnati Railroad and Columbus & Xenia Railroad Union Station on North High Street, Columbus, built 1851*

Alfred began to raise money in earnest that year from his long-time banking and finance associates in New York, and followed up in 1848 with new investors within Ohio. It was reported that Alfred made very persuasive speeches, motivating more stock sales in Cleveland. He organized a new construction and supply company with other former business partners to build the line. Alfred

made trips to England in 1848 and 1850 to purchase the necessary rails to build the road. As he did with the C&X, he purchased superior “T” rails. By this time, iron foundries and machine shops had advanced in Ohio and the CCC was able to have its first locomotives built in Cleveland.

It appears Alfred made as many as five trips to England between 1842 and 1853, along with several other trips to New York City. This represents an enormous amount of travel in the early days of modern transport. Just getting to the East Coast in the time prior to through railway connections would have been an ordeal taking up to a week. Crossing the Atlantic on sailing vessels and early steamships was a time-consuming and perilous undertaking. As Samuel Johnson famously noted, a sea voyage was “like being in jail, with worse company and the added risk of drowning.”

Building southward from Cleveland, the CCC line was completed to Columbus in early 1851, creating the first direct link between the two cities. The CCC offered several excursion trips for elected officials, civic leaders and other prominent citizens to demonstrate the efficiency of the line, which enabled passengers to depart Cleveland after breakfast, make a stopover for lunch at Shelby and arrive in Columbus in time for dinner. The C&X and CCC shared a passenger terminal on North High Street, later the site of Columbus Union Station.

**Cleveland, Painesville & Ashtabula Railroad – 1848-1851.** Alfred joined a group of northeast Ohio businessmen in early 1848 to build a railroad east from Cleveland to the Pennsylvania border, to connect the Cleveland terminus of the Ohio and Erie Canal, the CCC Railroad and other railroads being developed in the area reaching in from the Eastern states. Alfred served briefly as president of the line, and oversaw the selection of the route and raising the financing. The CP&A began operations in late 1851. It later became the Lake Shore and Michigan Southern Railroad.

Alfred led the CP&A successfully through a political dispute known as the “Erie Gauge War” with the adjoining railroads in Pennsylvania over the choice of gauge. Kelley wanted to move toward standardization of rail gauges, to facilitate through transit of trains and goods. Pennsylvania interests favored a break in gauge, which they thought would produce more jobs and economic activity in their state by forcing transshipment at the border. Alfred surmounted the local opposition, in some instances personally purchasing farms for alternative right-of-way, eventually enabling the CP&A to reach interconnections with new York railroads, creating the first through rail service between New York and Cincinnati. The outcome of these conflicts was eventually a broad agreement on adoption of the U.S. standard gauge of 4 feet 8½ inches.

Alfred resigned from active management of the CP&A in 1853, but continued to serve as a director of the CCC and CP&A until his death.

### **Later Years and Other Alfred Kelly Accomplishments**

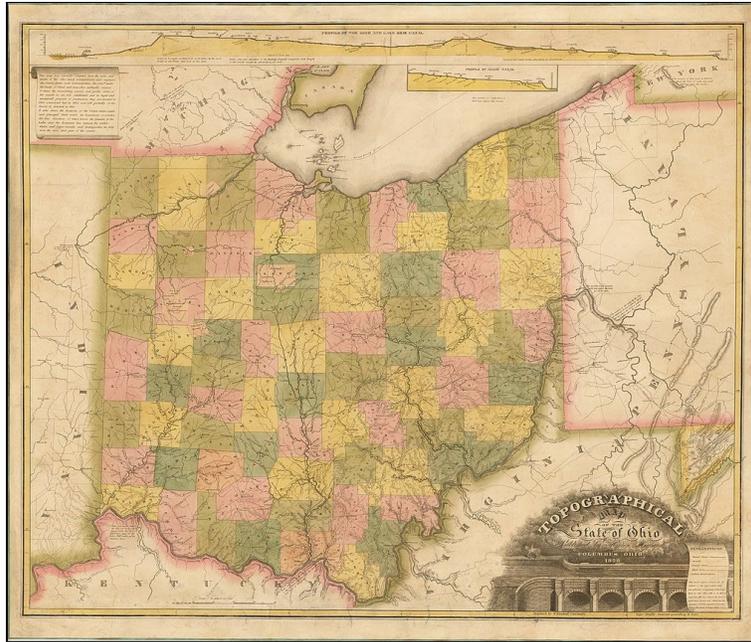
The CCC closed out Alfred Kelley’s business career. Weak from periodic recurrences of his malaria from the earlier canal construction days, he left the presidency of the CCC in 1853, and took a nearly one-year rest and holiday in Europe. Returning in 1854, he was deeply concerned by the worsening U.S. national political upheaval over the slavery issue as the nation lurched toward civil war after the U.S. Supreme Court’s *Dred Scott* decision. He won a seat in the Ohio Senate in 1856, became Chairman of the Finance Committee, and sat as the legislature’s oldest member for his last years. He actively worked to secure legal and procedural rights in Ohio for

slaves to resist being forcibly returned to slave-state owners, which was the most confrontational political issue of the day.

Alfred delivered a well-received dedication speech welcoming Columbus residents for the formal opening of the still-uncompleted Ohio Capitol for occupancy by the legislature in January, 1857. However, his health soon worsened, and he was largely unable to involve himself in legislative affairs by later that year. Alfred withdrew from public life, and passed away at his grand home on East Broad Street on November 7, 1859.

Notable Alfred Kelley accomplishments in addition to his canal and railroad efforts include:

- Led a 17-year effort for legislative changes to eliminate imprisonment of debtors, which finally passed in 1831.
- Made a proposal in 1817 that real property tax be based on value of land rather than type of use, which was finally adopted in 1846; also sponsored other tax code reforms, leading to the modern U.S. real estate tax system.
- As Cuyahoga County Attorney, he prosecuted escaped slave hunters for kidnapping in the 1820s. He sponsored a legislative bill early in his career to permit free black residents to testify against white citizens in court, but this was not passed in his lifetime.
- Led the effort to legislate state government oversight of local public schools and appointment of a Schools Commissioner, leading to formation of the Ohio public school system in 1836.
- Organized a number of the first banks, trust companies and insurance companies in Cleveland, Columbus and Cincinnati; also sponsored a great deal of modern banking reform legislation, including the first requirement that state-chartered banks provide deposit insurance (1844-5).
- Led investigations of two Ohio State Treasurers, exposing corruption and incompetence, and sponsored a successful bill to create tighter oversight of the State Treasury.
- Authored the first topographical map of Ohio, in 1826.



*Kelley's 1826 Topographical Map*

Truly a Renaissance Man, Alfred Kelley used his personal energy, vision, intellect, education, and political skills to touch almost every aspect of Ohio life, law and economics for the better during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

Mary Kelley outlived her husband by 23 years, passing away in 1882. The Kelleys are buried in Greenlawn Cemetery. Their gravesite is marked by a stately obelisk, a noble but understated monument to one who set so many innovative things in motion for Ohio's future generations.

### **The House Falls**

The family did not keep the property for long after Mary's death. The house functioned as the Ohio Governor's Mansion under James Campbell between 1890 and 1892. But as Columbus city limits pushed eastward, property values and taxes soared, no doubt requiring disposition of portions of the original 18-acre parcel. By 1907, the Catholic Diocese of Columbus had acquired the site, adjacent to the Diocesan cathedral on the northwest corner of Broad and Fifth Street, built in 1866-78. The Diocese refitted the house to serve as the Saint Joseph's Cathedral School.



By the late 1950s, the mansion was worn with age, vandalized and crumbling at the edges. By 1958 it was no longer used as the Cathedral School campus. The Diocese determined to repurpose the property for the then-ultramodern Christopher Inn, with a ten-story cylindrical tower, the antithesis of the classic Greek architectural style of the mansion that had occupied the site since 1838.

An effort by the Kelley family, politicians and a historical society to relocate the mansion failed to raise adequate funds. However there was sufficient interest and resources to salvage the porticos, columns and capitals and some additional portions of the exterior stone, and to preserve them in hopes that one day they could be reassembled or incorporated into a newer building as a memorial to the Kelleys' legacy.



*Salvaging the south portico of the Kelley Mansion for relocation, 1961.*

The stones, including the massive 20-foot capped columns, each neatly marked with a code to permit the jigsaw puzzle to be reassembled, were piled in neat rows along Broad Street in Wolfe Park, protected only by a flimsy ring of red snow fencing. In 1966 the stones were removed to the Ohio Expo Center near the State Fairgrounds. Proposals emerged for using the stones on a new Ohio History Center building, but this never materialized. Eventually in the 1970s the stones were moved to the Hale Farm and Village in Cuyahoga Valley National Park. Fittingly, a few fragments of Alfred and Mary Kelley's barony have been used as benches and other structures along the former towpath of Alfred's beloved handiwork, the Ohio and Erie Canal.

However, the bulk of the stones, by then becoming weathered and broken, were strewn across an area at the farm, which has now grown up into a dense woods. Most likely they will spend the rest of eternity there, reunited spiritually with the Kelleys in the rich Ohio soil.



*Alfred Kelley's Legacy - Stones in the Forest*

## Ann Fowler

The Kelley family was interconnected, through the institutions of slavery and indentured servitude, and fortunately later following emancipation, with two prominent African American families of 19<sup>th</sup> century Central Ohio.

Mary Kelley's father, Major Melancthon Welles, was a slave owner in Lowville, New York. A law passed in New York in 1799 freed children of slaves born after July 4 of that year, but indentured them until they were young adults. Under indentured servitude status, the person was "free" but legally owed his or her labor to the master for a term of years. New York totally abolished slavery in 1827.



*Ann Fowler McAfee  
(1812-1902)*

Ohio entered the Union in 1803 as a free state, meaning that slaves could not be bought or sold there. Until 1841 persons from other states could bring slaves or indentured servant children of slaves into Ohio and legally retain ownership rights over them.

In 1817, Major Welles "separated" then five-year-old Ann Fowler from her family, who were then the Major's property, and assigned her to accompany Mary to Ohio to help with the Kelleys' family as a servant to help raise the children the family expected to bear. Ann must have been freed of her servitude status under New York law either when she reached adulthood or just earlier upon the New York slavery and servitude abolition act in 1827. Once free, Ann remained with the Kelley household for many years thereafter, including some years after her own marriage.

While with the Kelley household in the late 1830s, Ann Fowler married William L. McAfee. The McAfees' daughter Maria married James Seneca Tyler in 1859. The Tylers lived at 1107 Highland Avenue. James (1837-1916), who was born free, was Quartermaster at Camp Chase and the first African-American elected Clerk of the Ohio House of Representatives. He became a personal friend of Ohio Governor Joseph B. Foraker and assistant to President William McKinley. The Tyler and McAfee families' many highly-accomplished descendants include noted medical professionals, classical musicians, engineers, entrepreneurs and journalists. Julius Boston Tyler was reportedly the first African-American Ohio State football player to score a touchdown, in 1896.

## References

There has been no shortage of good research and reference works written about the Kelleys. Among the best reads, and ideal source for pulling together an enormous amount of data and resources, is the Wikipedia article: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred\\_Kelley](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred_Kelley) That compilation includes 356 footnotes and a bibliography with over 50 titles.

Also a very good read is Bates, James L. (1888). *Alfred Kelley: His Life and Work*. Columbus, Ohio: Press of R. Clarke & Co. This biography can be read in full on the Internet Archive, and contains many of Alfred Kelley's letters and speeches, and comments about his personality from contemporaries.

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