EDWARD DORSEY HOBBS, 1810–1888, A KENTUCKY GENTLEMAN

By Marion Castner Browder

In the late 1850's Squire Poulter, of Middletown, operated a hack between that town and Hobbs' Station to meet the trains of the Louisville & Frankfort Railroad. The mare that helped pull the hack had foaled a colt, and the little fellow was "running its legs off" keeping up with the hack on its trips. One day a gentleman looked at the tired little colt at Hobbs' Station, then turned to the Squire:

"Squire, that colt is about to run itself to death. What will you take for him?"

"Ten dollars," promptly replied the Squire.

"All right, I'll take him."

Edward D. Hobbs was the buyer of the colt, which was promptly named Ten Dollars, taken to Evergreen, Mr. Hobbs' home in what is now Anchorage, and turned over to a colored boy to be raised from a bottle. Ten Dollars developed into a horse of strong character and decided preferences. He would permit no one but Mr. Hobbs and the boy who had raised him to ride him. Others who mounted him were thrown off or brushed off by trees or gate posts.

When the War Between the States came, Mr. Hobbs was a sufferer from what was then called rheumatism, and now would be known as arthritis. In the morning the boy would bring Ten Dollars up and tie him to the stile block. When the horse saw his master coming from the door of the house on crutches, he would ease himself around at such an angle that Mr. Hobbs could mount him with the least exertion, and off they would go to inspect the thousand acres of the Hobbs place.

One morning Ten Dollars was tied to the stile when a band of guerillas rode up the drive. Mrs. Hobbs went out to meet them. The leader explained that he would have to take the horse. Mrs.

Hobbs told them it was the only horse they had left, that her husband was crippled and had no other way of getting around, and asked them not to take it.

"Sorry, ma'am, I've got to have a fresh horse," was the answer.

The saddle was removed from Ten Dollars and the guerilla buckled his own saddle on, mounted, and started to ride away. A few feet away Ten Dollars bucked and threw him. Again he mounted and dashed off, only to be brushed off by a low hanging limb of a tree. He took his own saddle, remounted his own jaded nag, and left Ten Dollars triumphantly grazing on the lawn.

Edward Dorsey Hobbs was born in Jefferson County, Kentucky, November 16, 1810, the son of Basil N. and Polly (Dorsey) Hobbs who had come out from Maryland to make a home at the settlement of the Falls of the Ohio. The father later was a partner in a firm which operated a large store at Middletown, whither ladies of Louisville would drive to shop. The goods sold in this store were bought in Baltimore and Philadelphia, hauled to the Ohio River near Pittsburgh, carried in boats down the Ohio to the mouth of Harrod's Creek, thence hauled to Middletown. The route of these caravans is still known and marked as Harrod's Creek Road, where it crosses the Louisville & Nashville Railroad near Lakeland.

Young Edward Hobbs grew up in the rough frontier settlement at the Falls of the Ohio, known as Louisville. No written record is left of his youth, but doubtless he lived the usual life of boys of that time and place—and any boy of the present time will tell you that it was a better life than that of today—plenty of good hunting and fishing, with now and then the possibility that a Red Face might be peering from behind a tree to lend excitement to the scene. Life was not as complicated as it now is, and the climate probably was better before deforestation had made its mark on the rivers and on the rainfall. A new country was being developed, and it was surely a lot of fun for a boy to take part in such work.

The primitive educational opportunities of that day developed in the boy a talent for mathematics and finance, which flowered into engineering and real estate development. When he was nineteen years old, he set up for himself in business as a real estate agent.

On March 16, 1831—then only twenty-one years old—he was elected City Surveyor of Louisville, and continued in that work for about five years, surveying the streets, alleys, and river front of Louisville, as it was then.

In 1831 he published a very accurate map—forty-one by twenty-six inches—"A Plan of the City of Louisville and Its Environs," and the following year issued a somewhat smaller one based on the preceding and entitled "The City of Louisville and Its Environs." The latter appears in *The Louisville Directory for the year 1832*—the city's first directory—and is reproduced, greatly reduced, in the April, 1930, issue of THE FILSON CLUB HISTORY QUARTERLY. Among his unpublished maps is one drawn in 1829, showing that section of Louisville which extends from Jefferson to Walnut between Brook and Seventh streets. Another was drawn in 1833 for Jacob Geiger, showing "Plan of Geiger's Addition to Louisville," an addition which extended along Fulton Street and the River Front from Adams Street up to what is now the Cut-off Road. Ever since the Hobbs maps appeared, surveyors who wish to run a line in the Louisville territory embraced within the old bounds invariably refer to a Hobbs as their guide.

As early as 1835 he founded the Louisville Savings Institution, ancestor of innumerable such organizations which have flourished since that year.

As a real-estate agent he had charge of the holdings of the Preston family of Virginia (large tracts of land in Louisville, as Preston Street signifies). One of the Preston girls married the Reverend Robert J. Breckenridge, famed Presbyterian minister, and another was the wife of Albert Sydney Johnston, brilliant Confederate general who was killed at Shiloh. Either Breckenridge or Johnston came to Louisville once every year or two to get a statement of the business, receive the profits, and advise as to future developments. Both became intimate and lifelong friends of the young surveyor.

There is now at Evergreen an old sofa, an antique of early American design, about which this story is told: In the days of the struggle of Texas for independence from Mexico, Albert Sydney Johnston was in the Southwest, concerned in the events. One night a disagreement arose between him and a brother of the famous General Sam Houston, resulting in a challenge to a duel.

The following morning Houston and Johnston met on the field of honor, and Johnston, brave and gallant man that he was, simply fired into the air. Houston, however, appears to have been more mortally offended, and a bullet from his pistol went through Johnston's hip. The wound troubled him for a long time, and as he journeyed back home to Virginia, he stopped at the Hobbs home to rest.

"He used to lie on that sofa," Edward Hobbs related to his children, "and cuss Houston black and blue, while the pain from the imbedded bullet made him wince."

After becoming city surveyor of Louisville, Edward Hobbs spent busy years, surveying, selling, building, buying, trading—and marrying. On a spring day, in 1832, he was riding in the country north of the site of Anchorage, carrying his chain and transit. He passed a boy plowing in a field, hailed him, asking where he could get someone to carry his chain. The boy, whose name was James Henning, declaring he was doing nothing but plowing, volunteered to carry the chain. The surveying done, an invitation to dinner at the log home of the Hennings followed. There he met Susan Henning, sister of James. They were married the following December 4, but the young wife died in a year or two, leaving no children. Her body, as do those of the other members of this family, rests in the beautiful burial ground near the Memorial Chapel on the Hobbs estate at Anchorage.

In 1839 Mr. Hobbs was married to Mary A. Craig, daughter of John D. Craig, of Georgetown, and the following year he removed to Anchorage, where in a few years he built Evergreen, which was to be his home the remainder of his life, and which still stands as a monument to the culture, the love of beauty and of art, and the achievements of a man who vastly influenced future generations in a wide area of Kentucky. Six sons and daughters who grew to manhood and womanhood were born to Mr. and Mrs. Edward D. Hobbs. One son, Captain Basil Nicholas Hobbs, of the Fourth Kentucky Cavalry, Volunteers, died, after the Battle of Missionary Ridge, while in the Union service during the War Between the States. Now two survive, Tarleton C. Hobbs, who lives at Evergreen, and Edward D. Hobbs, who also lives at Anchorage.[1]

From the day when he established his home in the country until September 6, 1888, when he died, a period of almost fifty

years, Edward Hobbs lived a life of rare achievement in many fields of human activity. When he went to the country, he was thirty-one years old and already had gathered together a fortune in worldly goods. His skill in business and finance, his wisdom in affairs, and his insight into the future development of his country had placed him in a position where he could enlarge his field of work and give full play to his constructive abilities.

At first the family lived in a log-house home not far from the site where subsequently the family mansion was erected. Mr. Hobbs at once started to project his genius for improvement and embellishment. He farmed, landscaped, bought more land, planned improvements in his estate, and gave his energy to the comfort and happiness of a growing family. The country around Anchorage was naturally a fair and fertile land, but there were, as in other parts of the State, large tracts covered by cane brake, of which not a trace now remains. The young engineer rode around the country, seeing on all sides possibilities for improvement, and planning to do things, some of which had to be deferred for many years.

In those days the idea still prevailed that the best qualified men should be elected to office, and once elected they should give their best to the welfare of the State. This was the theory of a democracy, and the theory was still being tried out. Accordingly in 1843 Mr. Hobbs was elected to the Legislature of the State from Jefferson County. He was twice re-elected, and in 1847 was sent to the State Senate.

Of his activities in the State capital, little has been recorded. It is probable that he found politics uncongenial, if not actually distasteful, as it would be to most men of sincere and straightforward character. One can hardly imagine a man like Mr. Hobbs listening for hours to men talking about subjects of which they knew nothing, or trading in committees for votes for one plan as against another, or putting out statements for home consumption shrewdly designed to confuse the voters, or indulging in any of the practices which seem inseparable from a democratic form of government.

He had hardly entered upon his term as State Senator when a project was conceived, in 1847, which made an overwhelming appeal to his practical, constructive mind. That was to build a

steam railroad from Louisville to Frankfort. He resigned his seat in the Senate to take up this work.

Construction of the Louisville & Frankfort Railroad, with Mr. Hobbs as president of the company, was started in 1848 and completed the following year. A year later it was merged with the Lexington & Ohio, running from Lexington to Frankfort, and the line was then known as the Louisville & Lexington. In spite of the many financial, physical, and moral obstacles which were opposed in those days to the building and operation of railroads, the road prospered. It was one of the parents of the huge system now known as the Louisville & Nashville Railroad. Under good management the funded debt was paid, and dividends were paid to stockholders, a practice which now appears to be on the verge of discontinuance by the railroads of the country.

Mr. Hobbs' skill for management, his practical mind and resource in action operated brilliantly in the management of the railroad. He had to be a pioneer in railroad management and operation, as there were few lines in the country, all yet in the experimental state. He was one of that group of men who laid the foundation and paved the way for the time to come when the railroads of America were to be the best managed and most efficient in the world. It is a truism, of course, to say that the railroads played an important part in the development of America. No doubt, if one could know his own opinion, it was in his part in that movement of change, growth, improvement, and development that he found his greatest satisfaction in life.

The Louisville & Frankfort Railroad was busy transporting freight and passengers, improving its roadbed and equipment, and contemplating expansion, when the War Between the States began, with all its bitterness and excitement, and sad division of families and friends in Kentucky. Mr. Hobbs, of course, was a Unionist. He clearly saw the impending calamity which a division of the Union would bring. He did what he could to preserve the Union. His physical condition made it impossible for him to serve in the army. He lost a son in the service. He gave money and time and work to the Government. A year after the war started he was appointed, by President Lincoln, a special agent of the Treasury Department for Northern Kentucky, his duties being to see to the outfitting of volunteer troops with

arms, equipment, and supplies. Money for this was sent to him by the Treasury at Washington.

His appointment to this important post was made at a suggestion of Joshua Speed, intimate friend and crony of Lincoln's. When Mr. Speed went to Washington, he did not, like other visitors and politicians, call at the White House. Instead he went to a hotel, and sent word to Mr. Lincoln that he was in town. After darkness fell, the President would slip away from the White House, and quietly go to Mr. Speed's hotel. He would then take off his high hat, remove his boots, and stretch out on the bed.

"Josh, what's the latest?" he would ask. And the two would begin to tell stories. At one of these meetings, Mr. Lincoln asked:

"Josh, what sort of a fellow is this man Hobbs who is spending money for the Government in Kentucky? Do you know he is the only man the Treasury has who ever sends any money back? The rest of 'em spend it all."

The war ended, and Mr. Hobbs, like many other men, went to work to recover from its effects. The Louisville & Lexington Railroad, still under his guidance, entered a stage of renewed prosperity. In 1867 it was proposed to build a line from LaGrange Kentucky, to Cincinnati, Ohio. The president of the company found himself at odds with the directors as to the route of the new line. Mr. Hobbs advocated a route close to the Ohio River all the way. As a result of these opposing views, and also perhaps because of the desire to retire to a less strenuous life and a wish to devote his remaining years to plans which he had held in abeyance for a long time, Mr. Hobbs resigned the presidency of the railroad.

The "Short Line Railroad," as it came to be known in later years, was constructed from LaGrange to Cincinnati. Its cost of construction and operation proved so high that the company went into bankruptcy. It struggled along under receiverships for many years, and finally was acquired in 1881 by the Louisville & Nashville Railroad. A contemporary of Mr. Hobbs says that he never referred to this error in judgment by the directors as being the cause of the road's subsequent troubles, and never indicated that he believed his own judgment was better. He was a modest man, and did not point with pride to his own achievements, nor did he ever belittle the efforts of others. His simplicity

of character, and utter lack of pose have had one regrettable result—he has not received his just place in the annals of Kentucky.

When he resigned the presidency of the railroad, Mr. Hobbs was fifty-seven years old. His children were grown and growing up—a large family with grandchildren in the offing. He was to have twenty-one years more of life, perhaps the best, the most fruitful of his career, in far-reaching and gentle influence on the community in which he lived and on those who were to follow him.

Always he had loved flowers, shrubs, trees. Long before the War Between the States, he had developed one of the largest nurseries in the country, operated by Hobbs, Walker & Company. Their trees, shrubs, and flowers were sold all over the United States. They had traveling salesmen who carried catalogs printed in type, but illustrated in water colors, because there was very little commercial color printing at that time. Most of the drawings in the catalogs were made by Mr. Hobbs himself, the coloring being done under his direction. One of these old catalogs has been preserved and is in good condition except that some of the illustrations are smeared, which, it was explained, was caused by some of the children licking the water-color pictures of fruits and flowers.

There are hundreds of fine old evergreen and deciduous trees scattered over Anchorage which came from the Hobbs Nursery. The purple-leaved beeches—planted more than seventy-five years ago by Mr. Hobbs and now giant trees—were the first of their kind brought to Kentucky. There are lilac bushes and other shrubs which owe their origin to him. One white lilac bush more than sixty years old and almost thirty feet tall in an Anchorage garden originally came from his nursery.

He was deeply interested in the development of the country around his own home. He would devote a tract of a few acres to a home site, build a house on it, and obtain a suitable owner for it, often landscaping and planting it before selling it. There are a half dozen houses in Anchorage which came into being in this manner.

The beautiful estate that now is the home of Dr. Henry J. Farbach of Louisville, was created by Mr. Hobbs in the usual way. A family named White lived on it. Captain James Winder Goslee, who retired from his work on the Ohio River, married Miss Catherine, one of the White girls, built the present mansion

in Queen Anne style, moving the log house to what now is a negro settlement called Griffithtown, and named his home "Anchorage," a place where he could spend his remaining years. Just at that time Mr. Hobbs made a map of Hobbs Station, showing the roads and lanes—there are no streets, avenues, or boulevards in Anchorage—and down each side of the map he drew sketches of a half dozen homes. When he came to labeling the map, he did not like the name Hobbs Station. So he changed it to Anchorage. And Captain Goslee, to show he had no hard feelings, aided by another retired riverman, Captain J. Lewis Shallcross, erected an anchor at the railroad station, surrounded by a huge iron ring. A sledge hammer was kept in the station, and when a fire broke out, lusty blows of the hammer on the iron ring gave the alarm. It was said that the noise could be heard as far as Peewee Valley. The anchor still hangs in the grounds of the railroad station. This map was dated 1871. Some years ago it was placed in the museum of the Anchorage Public School.

Among the projects that engaged Mr. Hobbs' love of beauty and constructive talent, about this time, was the building of the Memorial Chapel at Anchorage. The Methodist Church, to which he belonged, had no place of worship nearer than Middletown. Mr. Hobbs gave the land and most of the money for the construction of the chapel. It is a beautiful example of Gothic architecture, pronounced, by men who know, one of the noblest small church buildings in America. The pews and furnishings are made of black walnut. The frescoing, done by an unnamed artist of that day, was paid for by a donation by Captain Zachary M. Shirley. The chapel, which was designed by Mr. Hobbs and erected under his supervision, was dedicated to those sleeping nearby in the Hobbs Burial Ground.

This burying ground, which Mr. Hobbs laid out and embellished with a stone wall and gravel walks, and set with pine trees, which now tower almost a hundred feet, was deeded in 1859 to the Governor of Kentucky and his successors in office, as trustees. Burial plots in it were assigned to neighbors and other residents of the community.

It has been the habit of Kentuckians in general to celebrate the daring deeds of the pioneers, the hunters and fighters, the generals and statesmen. They have been accorded their credit for carving out and building the State. Little attention has been

paid to the men of peace, the creators of commerce and industry, and, least of all, to those few whose influence has been for the making of beauty in homes and gardens, and in fields and farms, and who originated and handed down an ideal of culture which better enables a people to live in greater happiness.

Of these latter men, Edward D. Hobbs was a leader in this State. He spent sixty years building, planning, dreaming, and achieving. The results of his life can be seen now in many places. Not only at Anchorage, which is really his creation, but at innumerable other places, does his work and influence survive.

Instead of exalting the memory of the "b'ar" hunters and the Indian fighters, the soldiers and the politicians, why do not the people of Kentucky honor more the memory of this man who helped lay out and develop the metropolis of the State, who built one of the first railroads of America, who embellished the country with beautiful works of architecture, who cultivated to a high degree the useful science of horticulture with its trees, shrubs, and flowers, and who not only left behind him physical and material monuments of his genius but who also transmitted to his posterity and to the host of his friends, the memory of a sincere, straightforward, kindly, and high-minded man?

[1] The names of the six children of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Dorsey Hobbs who grew to manhood or womanhood are: 1, Sidney Johnston Hobbs (married Mary Bayless); 2, Captain Basil Nicholas Hobbs (married Maria Henning); 3, Susan Henning Hobbs (married John C. Sherley); 4, Tarleton Craig Hobbs (married Lucy Gilmer Hardy); 5, Mary Craig Hobbs (married Theodore Irwin); 6, Edward Dorsey Hobbs (married Mary Ellen Shallcross).