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William Allen White

Hanna led nation

Red Boss of Cleveland, first and only one of his kind, made a president, sold public on business

By Robert G. McGruder

Marcus Alonzo Hanna was the boss of all bosses. The Tigers of Tammany and the rulers of political machines in various states were lords of smaller fiefdoms. Hanna was the political boss of the entire nation.

While others were buying city, county and state offices Hanna was buying the presidency.

He was not a politician. He was a businessman whose major concern was the sound of the cash register. He believed that what was good for business was good for the country and people, and programs that threatened business were bad.

To insure that conditions were right for business and profit, Hanna reasoned, businessmen should control the government. The way to do that was with money. Hanna had a lot of money. And he knew how to get it from others who had a lot.

His ability to use that money made him one of the most powerful men in the country at the end of the 19th century.

Dollar Mark, the Red Boss of Cleveland and ogre of Homer Davenport cartoons, was born on Sept. 24, 1837, in New Lisbon. His family moved to Cleveland in 1852. He attended Central High School along with William and John D. Rockefeller and spent a brief time at Western Reserve College.

Hanna was suspended from college because of a prank. Since he was 20 years old before he got to college it has been assumed he was not much of a student. He was born to business and found no fascination in books.

He joined the family business at Hanna, Garretson & Co. were grocers and pioneers in trade in the Lake Superior region. Young Mark worked on the docks, in the warehouses, on the boats that carried goods to and from the settlers in the Minnesota and Wisconsin regions and traveled across northern Ohio as a salesman.

He was a successful salesman but not nearly as serious about his work as fellow grocer John D. Rockefeller.

Hanna's father died in 1862 and he had to become more serious. He had to run the business.

In 1864 Hanna married Charlotte Augusta Rhodes, daughter of Daniel Rhodes, an iron merchant and one of the most successful men in Cleveland.

He began to expand the family business. He built one of the first large oil refineries in the area and constructed the fastest and finest lake steamer of the day. While his instincts about where the money was to be made were good, his luck was bad. The refinery burned down and the boat sank.

The pudding entrepreneur was broke at 30 and was forced to go to his father-in-law's coal and iron business. He quickly learned the

business and prospered. Eventually, the firm became M.A. Hanna & Co. and Hanna owned coal lands, iron mines, ships, foundries, a bank, a newspaper, the Cleveland Opera House and was one of the two leading street railway magnates in Cleveland.

Because of his energy and business skills, everything he touched turned to money. He began to dabble in politics.

John Hay called him "a born general in politics." William Allen White, the Kansas journalist, explained the secret of his success. "He ground up one startling fact of politics rapidly: that money makes the mare go."

His first brushes with politics had been in fighting local machines and bosses. Later, he took up their ways and improved upon them.

Hanna and Tom L. Johnson, a plunger of a businessman who later became a reform mayor of Cleveland, had bitter fights over street car line franchises. As a protector of privilege Hanna became a hero of the local utilities and manufacturing giants and the banking and real estate interests.

He moved more into politics in 1880 when he organized the Cleveland Business Men's Marching Club, a gathering of rich and potentially rich who supported Republican James A. Garfield for president.

At the 1884 and 1888 Republican conventions he supported Sen. John Sherman's efforts to win the nomination for president.

Sherman lost each time and at the 1888 convention Hanna became convinced that if he was going to make a king it would not be Sherman but could be another Ohioan, Congressman William McKinley, who had received some support for nomination at the convention.

The Red Boss, which he was called because his factories polluted the sky over Cleveland, began to dedicate his life and considerable skills to McKinley's political career and to refurbishing the Republican party. The alliance of the two men was one of the most perfect ever in politics. Hanna's motives appear to have been personal and political.

There is no denying that McKinley, the staunch protectionist, the politician's politician and the businessman's politician, was his kind of candidate. But there was more.

"Men thought that his ambition for McKinley was ambition for personal power, ambition to control a president of the United States," wrote William White.

"The power that moved Hanna was fine and strong and clean as a father's love. Hanna's worship of McKinley was the passion of his life."

"It was utterly unselfish, save as Hanna had invested his own reputation as a fighter in it, and had in the outcome of the game a consuming



desire to win — for the stake was the largest in the world."

Hanna began laying the groundwork for McKinley's march to the Republican nomination and eventually the White House long before the actual events took place.

He successfully guided McKinley's campaign for governor of Ohio in 1893. In 1894 Hanna retired from his company to devote full time to this new enterprise, the election of a man White said was "on the whole decent, on the whole dumb."

Hanna used an open pocketbook policy in dealing with convention delegates and it was so effective that the nomination was virtually locked up before the convention began. He established a \$100,000 home and headquarters in Thomasville, Ga., and from there he spent time locking up delegates.

In his book, "The President Makers," Francis Russell wrote, "All subsequent American political campaigns have, for better or worse, followed the model established by the Red Boss in 1896."

After the Democrats nominated William Jennings Bryan and seemed to be on the verge of capitalizing on an antibusiness mood in the country, Hanna embarked on one of his "frying the fat" expeditions.

"Frying the fat" referred to Hanna's policy of dunning the big corporations and wealthy businessmen, the people who had the most to win or lose in the election, for money to wage his campaign.

Previous campaigns had been run on \$1 million to \$2 million. Hanna set as his goal a war chest of more than \$10 million.

The Republican National Com-

mittee that year reported raising about \$3.5 million. Most historians double the figure and estimate that it is still short of what the party actually raised.

No chances were taken with the candidate. While Bryan criss-crossed the country making variations of his famous Cross of Gold speech, McKinley stayed at home in Canton.

Groups of people were brought to his front porch and McKinley gave well-rehearsed answers to prearranged questions. Meanwhile, Hanna flooded the nation with a quarter of a billion pieces of campaign literature. Pamphlets were translated into various languages.

Manufacturers and railroad operators let the workers know that if Bryan were to win they need not report for work the day after the election.

And just to make sure, Hanna is said to have brought trainloads of blacks up from the South to vote in key states. In Ohio, one out of every four living persons were counted as having voted and that included women and children. Women did not yet have the vote. One western district with 30,000 registered voters counted 48,000 votes.

McKinley won and a jubilant Hanna sent the new president a telegram saying, "God's in His Heaven, all's right with the world."

While Hanna may have been content with just the joy of victory and the knowledge he had helped a good friend, there was added reward: McKinley appointed him to the U.S. Senate.

Sen. John Sherman was appointed secretary of state, creating a vacancy that Hanna was happy to fill. He

replaced Sherman as the prince of plutocrats in the Millionaire's Club.

Naturally, he became one of the most powerful members of the Senate. He had a book on everyone there and a book on who put them there. McKinley took great pains to convince people that Hanna was not running the White House, but the power of the kingmaker was indisputable.

In those days the senators were elected by the Ohio Legislature and Hanna had to run for re-election. He made sure there were plenty of people in the legislature who supported that re-election.

When the legislators gathered in Columbus to elect a senator, one of Hanna's supporters was kidnapped, recaptured and locked away. Another man claimed he was offered a handsome bribe to vote for Hanna. But Hanna controlled the legislators and won.

Few people doubted that a bribe had been offered but all the demands for investigation and removal of Hanna got nowhere.

McKinley was nominated again in 1900, but Hanna suffered a rare political defeat at the convention. Matthew Quay, the boss in Pennsylvania, engineered the nomination of New York Gov. Theodore Roosevelt for vice president.

Hanna despised Roosevelt, but he could not overcome Quay and the New York bosses who wanted to make Roosevelt vice president to get him out of their hair locally.

The convention over, Hanna told McKinley, "We have done the best we could. Now it is up to you to live."

McKinley again defeated Bryan and the Republicans increased their majorities in both houses of Congress.

On Sept. 6, 1901, the thing Hanna had feared most happened. He had said at the convention "there is just one life between this crazy man (Roosevelt) and the presidency." An assassin shot McKinley and Roosevelt became president.

People in political circles expected trouble between the two men. It was said there would be two executive mansions — the White House and Hanna's suite at the Arlington Hotel.

Roosevelt and Hanna held opposite views about the relation of government to business. William White said,

"Roosevelt was the first Republican leader of a new cult — the liberalism of the young century."

Hanna was the best of the old," White wrote in "Masks in a President."

"Hanna believed that government existed to protect, encourage, and fortify business. Roosevelt believed that government existed as an agency of human welfare to promote justice between the citizens, and that commerce was but one of many necessary functions of civilization, not so important as education, not so important as liberty."

Hanna continued to be one of the most powerful men in the Senate and the leader of all the moneyed interest that hated Roosevelt. However, the presidency was in different hands and from the White House Roosevelt proceeded to dismantle Hanna's machine.

Roosevelt, who once said, "I think there is only one thing I do not understand, and that is Ohio politics," gained enough understanding to take advantage of local rivalries to erode Hanna's political strength in his own state.

Wall Street was hoping that Hanna might challenge Roosevelt for the Republican nomination in 1904.

Hanna may have entertained the thought himself, but he realized that Roosevelt had become too popular and too powerful and opted to run for re-election to the Senate.

Hanna won, but it was his last campaign. He became ill and died Feb. 15, 1904.

His place in politics was summed up by Fred J. Cook in the book "American Political Bosses and Machines."

"He had been, for all practical purposes, a national boss, the first and only one of his kind — the man who made a president. He had also changed the political balance of the country in a fundamental way. Big business did not just buy political influence as it always had; millionaires now seated themselves in political chairs. . . . And the nation as a whole, approved, so completely had Mark Hanna imbedded in the public mind the idea that the Republican party was the party of prosperity and the full dinner pail for every workingman."

"It was a belief, a faith, that was to last far beyond his own time until the worst depression in the nation's history, erupting in 1929, in the midst of the Hoover regime that so faithfully reflected Republican philosophy, finally exposed the fallacy of the idea of businessmen's omnipotence in the affairs of government."



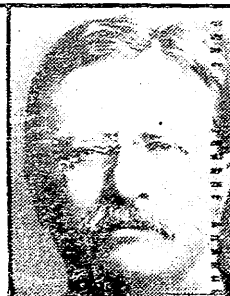
Marcus Alonzo Hanna



Hanna as interpreted by Homer Davenport. The cartoon caption: "So what else is new?"



McKinley: The politician's politician and the businessman's politician, he was Hanna's kind of candidate.



Roosevelt: Hanna despised him and said, "There is just one life between this crazy man and the presidency."