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Thomas Sanford was born in Westmoreland County, Virginia in 1762, and came to Kentucky about 1790. Soon after his arrival, Thomas acquired numerous acres of land in the Northern Kentucky area and began farming. As did many other men in the area, Thomas served in the Kentucky Militia in which he attained the rank of general.

Eventually he became involved in Kentucky politics and was the only member from Campbell County (Kenton County had not yet been established as a separate county) to attend the Second Constitutional Convention in 1799. He also served in the state legislature as a senator and then as a representative in the early 1800's. Later, in 1803, he became the first Northern Kentuckian elected to Congress and served in that capacity until 1807. A year later, on December 10, 1808, General Thomas Sanford accidentally drowned in the Ohio River at the age of forty-six.

The Sanford home, located at 1026 Russell Street, was built by Major Alfred Sanford, the general's son. Built in the early 1800's, it was originally constructed in Federal style, but was redesigned in French Empire style after a fire several years later.

The house remained in the Sanford family until 1835 when it was purchased by the Western Baptist Education Society. However, in 1853, as a result of a dispute over the slavery issue between the Northern and Southern trustees, the society closed. The matter was arbitrarily solved by United States Supreme Court Justice John McLean who decreed that the property be divided equally among the two parties.

Later, in the 1840's, the house was used as Miss Bristow's Boarding and Day School for Young Ladies and Misses which was an exclusive finishing school of the period. Today, however, the house is privately owned and maintained.