

Hannah Cole . . . 'the founding mother'

(Editor's note: The following story about Hannah Cole is reprinted from an article by Lew Larkin of the Kansas City Star.)

Historians, for one reason or another, have yet to deal justly with the many tremendous contributions and sacrifices pioneer women made in shaping Missouri's early history.

One woman is particularly outstanding in this regard. She was Hannah Allison Cole. Hers is one of Missouri's most dramatic pioneer stories.

She was born in 1764 in Wythe County, Virginia, where she grew to young womanhood. She and her husband, William Temple Cole, had nine children. Hannah's sister, Phoebe Allison, married Stephen Cole, a brother to William, and of this union were born five children.

In 1807 the two families moved to Loutre island in the Mississippi where her husband was killed in an Indian raid in 1810. That same year Hannah and her nine children, and Stephen and Phoebe Cole and their five children established their home on the south bank of the Missouri river near Boonville.

A fort was built on Stephen Cole's place as a means of protecting the Coles and other families from Indians. Settlers called it "Cole's fort." During the War of 1812 years Cole's fort was attacked by Indians but those who'd found sanctuary within its walls escaped safely. Hannah Cole is credited with much of the strategy involved in saving the group from the Indians.

The Indians continued to attack settlers in the Boonville area in 1813. In 1814 area settlers decided to build a fortification on land occupied by Hannah Cole. It was built on a bluff with cannon protecting it from almost every angle. It was called "Hannah Cole's fort". Christmas day, 1815, was observed in this first and probably the only early day military outpost to be named for a woman.

But there were troubles ahead for the settlers. The fort not only became a military bastion, but also served as a hospital for the wounded. Hannah Cole served as a "Florence Nightingale" in her home area. She bandaged the wounded, administered to them, performed all menial tasks required to keep things going at the fort and in her "idle moments" cast leaden bullets for the rifles the settlers used to

hold back the attacking Indians.

Howard County was organized January 23, 1816. It was named after Gen. Benjamin Howard of Lexington, Ky., governor of Kentucky and of Upper Louisiana which became Missouri territory in 1812. Fayette became the county seat of Howard in 1823.

When Cooper County was organized December 17, 1818, Hannah Cole's fort became its first county seat. Cooper was a part of Howard County then. Stephen Cole was one of the commissioners who was instrumental in selecting the county seat.

As early as 1811 Peter Woods, a Baptist minister, held church services in Hannah Cole's

cabin. In 1817 her cabin was used as a schoolhouse. History fails to record the name of the teacher who taught there but, the tuition was one dollar a month. Her cabin was one of four voting "booths" used in the first general election in 1819. Later it became a postoffice for several years.

Hannah Cole was also one of Missouri's first business women. Before Missouri became a state, she pre-empted, bought and sold many acres of land near Boonville. In 1816 she established the first ferry service crossing the Missouri river at Boonville. The business was operated by her sons.

Her life was filled with tragedy. The last came in 1822 when one of her sons, Stephen, and his uncle, Stephen Cole, were killed by Indians on the Santa Fe trail about 60 miles from Santa Fe.

Three years later she built a cabin on land she owned 15 miles south of Boonville near the home of her son, Samuel

Cole. With a faithful slave, Lucy, she lived there until her death in 1843 at the age of 79.

Hannah Cole had much to do with settling and pioneering of what is known as Cooper County, Missouri. For her many accomplishments she might justifiably be tagged "the first lady of Missouri."

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