

COLE, ANOTHER ECHO FROM THE PAST

Life in northeastern Oklahoma was not filled with drama on a daily basis, most of the time folks went about the business of simply making a living under difficult conditions. Some settlements evolved then just faded away. The Cole community located in Mayes County, six miles east and two north of Pryor is one example. First settled around 1881 by a young pioneer Daniel Boone Cole, the community still retains the Cole name today. The origin of Cole's given name, Daniel Boone, is open to speculation. He was born and grew to his middle teens only about fifty miles east of Boonesborough, Kentucky founded by that pioneer icon. Perhaps there were family ties or maybe like many, he was simply named for the state's illustrious son. Daniel Boone, the intrepid Kentucky pathfinder, was famous for noting that "I've never been lost, just confused a few times." As his story unfolds, it appears his namesake, Daniel Boone Cole, was neither lost nor confused, his life path demonstrated that.

Migrating to Indian Territory from West Liberty, Kentucky in 1871 at the age of fifteen, Daniel settled in Cooweescoowee, one of the districts in the Cherokee Nation, along with his parents, eight brothers and a sister. But tragedy soon struck with the death of his mother, apparently disrupting the family plans for the future and soon after, his father and most of the family relocated to Missouri. But Daniel, still in his teens saw his future in Indian Territory and remained behind living with families around Chouteau, working as a farm hand. In 1879 he married Nancy "Nannie" Vann who had been raised in the Cherokee Orphans Home in Salina. Soon, the first two of eight children were born to the couple and it was at that point Daniel decided to stake out and homestead his own land, which as it turned out, became the lynchpin for the future community of Cole.

Like others in the region, Cole has its stories about early settlers and one involves Daniel and two oxen he purchased that he called Tom and Baugh. Oxen were powerful but known as difficult animals to control, primarily because of their strength and independence. Only pain in the form of a sharp pointed goad could gain their attention. However, thirst overcame pain when on a hot summer day while pulling a load of lumber, Tom and Baugh caught scent of water in a nearby slew and pulled the wagon, lumber and all into it. Daniel had no recourse but to wade in and unload the lumber one board at a time then wait until they were refreshed and drive the happy oxen to dry ground.

He built the Cole home near the Military Road which played such an important role in the history of northeastern Oklahoma. Originally an Indian Trace or path, over time thousands of pioneer families bound for Texas had worn it into wagon ruts that passed for a road. During the Civil War it was a supply lifeline for Union troops stationed at Fort Gibson and was constantly contested by opposing troops. And even after the Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railroad was built in 1871 just a few miles west, it continued to be used for many years. The Cole home was also close to a spring near the road which had been used by travelers and later by troops, evidenced by numerous military artifacts found there.

As a result, both the road and spring were frequently a source of contact with the outside world. The spring, an attractive overnight campground for travelers, became the

site of misfortune for the Niggerts, a young family bound for Texas. During the night the pregnant wife gave birth to stillborn twins. In the spirit of friendship typical of the frontier, Daniel and Nannie provided the first space for burial of the Niggert children in what was to become the Cole family cemetery. The Military Road was also a convenient byway for outlaws. During one hot Sunday afternoon as the family lounged in their front yard, members of the Dalton gang, Bill, Grat, Bob, Emmett and the others rode by. With matched horses and carrying two pistols and a rifle in the saddle scabbard, each tipped their hat as they passed.

The specter of death touched the Coles just as it did most pioneer families. In 1892 they mourned the loss of their five year old son Joseph, and a year later Nannie, just 35 joined her young son in the family cemetery. Nannie's death left Daniel with six children, their ages ranging from three to thirteen. So responding to a situation all too common in that era, Daniel remarried this time to Cora Rogers, a union that would last until his death in 1935.

Cole grew and prospered around Daniel's farm. Many families settled in the community often following either the Military Road or the trail passing through Grove Springs further east. Tall blue stem prairie grass was plowed under in favor of wheat, corn and cotton. In 1889, a church and subscription school was started in a house, later both were replaced with buildings of their own. And in 1906, a post office was opened located in the Tip general store nearby and finally closing in 1951. The Cole Community typifies many in northeastern Oklahoma. It never became a crossroads of commerce, a railroad destination nor a center to supply local farmers. But unlike some that simply disappeared, it retains an identity through its namesake, Daniel Boone Cole, which in turn creates memories of pioneer days gone by, echoes from the past.

