

Stephen Decatur Greer

By William N. Greer

On June 26, 1830, Stephen Decatur Greer was born in Troup Co, Georgia the fifth child of NHG and NAT. Shortly thereafter — perhaps the next year — NHG led his family across the Chattahoochee into the eastern edge of the Creek Territory and established his trading post.

Cate, as he came to be known, grew up in Texas, mostly in Washington Co. He was a young man of 24 when the family set out for Utah, and two days short of his 25th birthday when he lost his father to cholera. Soon after most of the Greers returned to Texas, Cate met and wooed the daughter of two pioneer heroes: Colonel Philip Howard and Sarah Creth.

Colonel Howard, born in Kentucky, had clerked at the Fort Dearborn trading post that would later become the city of Chicago. He fought in the Black Hawk War under General William Henry Harrison (later President of the United States) before emigrating to Texas in 1833 at the age of 21 to become a Texas Ranger. After helping to win Texas independence from Mexico, he protected settlers from Indian attacks. During the Mexican War, he was Army Commissary.

Sarah Creth, born in Illinois, married John Sherry and emigrated to Texas where he was killed by Indians in 1829. She then wed John Hibbins who, along with her half-brother, was slain in her presence by Indians who then took her and her two children prisoner. A short time later her infant was beaten to death before her eyes, and yet she maintained her reason, escaped, and sought help from a band of Rangers who soon rescued her remaining son. After this nightmarish experience, she wed a man named Stinnett who, while travelling to New Orleans to buy supplies, was murdered by outlaws. By this man she had one daughter who drowned at the age of two. In 1839 she wed Col. Howard by whom she had three daughters, including Cate's future bride. That Sarah survived her ordeals (for which she became famous) retained her sanity and went on to live a productive life as wife and mother is a testament to her amazing courage and a triumph of human endurance rarely matched in history.

Cate wed Martha Arminta "Mintie" Howard on April 7, 1858. That August he purchased from her father 200 acres where Steele Creek flows into the Brazos River. On this homestead all six of their children were born.

Cate was too young to fight in the Mexican War, but the Civil War was another matter. In the winter of 1863, he enlisted as a cavalry private in Co. E, Mounted Frontier Regiment, Texas State Troops, commanded by Col. J. E. McCord. Later he was in Capt. Henry Fossett's Co. A of Lt. Col. Buck Barry's "Battalion," Texas Frontier Regiment, C.S.A. This service allowed Cate to honor Union sympathies he shared with his father-in-law by protecting the frontier against Indian raids rather than fight his northern brother. On January 8, 1865, his unit was in the Battle of Dove Creek, the most famous frontier engagement of the day. This battle has been recounted in many works on Texas and the War.

During the Civil War Cate was stationed at Camp Colorado where he and Mintie lost their infant daughter, Ellen May, who was buried at the nearby town of Coleman. The rest of their children lived long, full lives.

In 1871 Cate bought 5.5 acres in Meridian, providing the children greater access to schooling. The next year he added 30 acres to their Meridian land. On April 23, 1881, he sold his 160-acre portion of the 1280 acres of the NHG survey.

After farming during his later years, Cate died January 25, 1905 in Meridian — tragically by his own hand, and for reasons unknown — by drinking strychnine. Mintie then lived many years with her widowed daughter, Susan, until passing away in De Leon, Texas, on October 22, 1923.