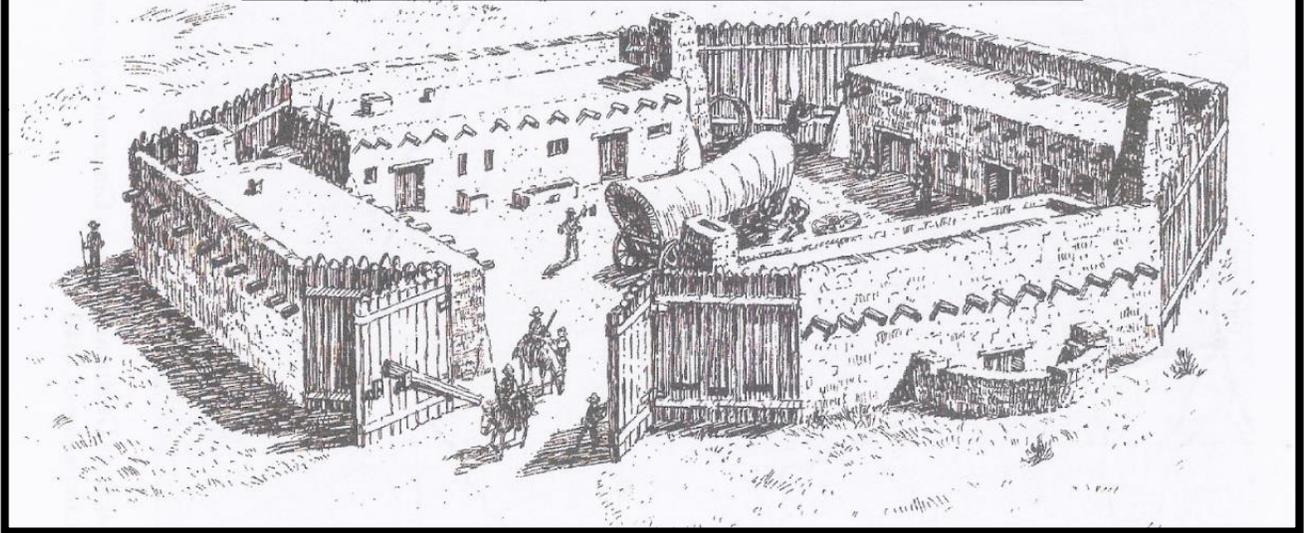


Fort Mann on the Santa Fe Trail

By Roy Grinnell



Elizabeth Caroline Newcomb

(1825 - ????)

Elizabeth Caroline Newcomb was one of the earliest-known Anglo-American women to travel on the Santa Fe Trail and to serve as an enlisted soldier in the frontier military. In September 1847, First Lieutenant Amandus V. Schnabel, from St. Louis, induced an “abandoned female” named Elizabeth Newcomb to disguise herself as a man and join his company--Company D of the Missouri Battalion of Volunteers (known as the Indian Battalion). Elizabeth enlisted as a soldier named William (Bill) Newcomb. Her age on enlistment record is 22, but her place of birth and family background are unknown.

Newcomb traveled to Fort Leavenworth where she was mustered into the battalion on September 18, 1847. The volunteers were issued equipment but given no basic training for military service before marching along the Santa Fe Trail to the site of Fort Mann, near present day Dodge City, arriving in early November 1847.

Soon after they arrived at Fort Mann. Private Newcomb was ready to quit playing soldier and bed partner with Schnabel. She may have been pregnant, but there is no documentation to support that. Private Newcomb joined a wagon train returning to Fort Leavenworth on December 1, 1847. Newcomb’s absence from Fort Mann was discovered, she was intercepted and returned to Fort Mann, her gender exposed. She still continued to serve as a soldier at Fort Mann for several months before she was sent to Fort Leavenworth with a wagon train.

When Elizabeth arrived at Fort Leavenworth on May 28, 1848, having spent two weeks traveling along the Santa Fe Trail, she was discharged from service in mid-June. Little is known about Elizabeth during the next few years. She married John Smith, date unknown, and in 1853 successfully petitioned for her military pay and bounty land warrant for her service.

What became of Elizabeth Caroline Newcomb Smith remains unknown. No image of Elizabeth has been located.