
PART ONE: THE 1839 SETTLEMENT OF THE ESTATE OF MRS. HANNAH WILSON FROST OF MONTEVALLO, ALABAMA

Submitted by Marshel Roy Cunningham (GoneToAlabama@aol.com) for the Montevallo Historical Society.

Hannah Wilson Frost (1779-1839) was a widowed sister of Benjamin Wilson (1776-1852), her brother Jesse Wilson (1776-1820), first settler of Montevallo (Wilson's Hill), and sisters Elizabeth W. Lawler, Nancy W. Baker, Lucretia W. Hancock, and Mary Wilson, spinster.

She was twice a widow. First, she married Thomas Frost of Anderson County, Tennessee, who died about 1806 in Rutherford County, with whom she had two sons and two daughters. She then married another Frost relative, whose name is unknown, who died leaving her a widow with a third son named John Aaron Frost and at least two daughters. All that is really known about this elusive second husband is that he was deceased by 1820.

The settlement of her estate can be found in Will Book "1818-1846" in the vault of the Shelby County Archives in the 1854 courthouse in Columbiana. This courthouse was to be torn down, but the county historical society led the fight in the 1970's to save it, and won.

Hannah's estate papers begin on page 400 and end on page 409. She left no Last Will, as her son Jesse Frost is appointed "administrator" rather than "executor."

As Hannah was a widow, she actually held possession of her own property. Women at the time did not own anything; their husbands had full control as their legal guardians, as if the wife were a child.

The first item recorded is a bond for son Jesse Frost for ten thousand dollars, dated 4 December 1839. Jesse was bound to "honestly and fairly" divide his mother's estate among her heirs, or he and his securities, namely his uncle Benjamin Wilson and his first cousin's husband Joseph Cunningham, would be liable for the stated amount of the bond. The agreement remained legally binding until the estate was settled to the satisfaction of the court, that being the Orphans Court of Shelby County and Judge James Woodruff. Do not think that all estates were easily settled. There are many instances in Alabama in which heirs or other interested parties filed petitions when the estate was being "squandered" by those in charge. Law suits over estates were not uncommon and could go on for years.

Page 401 begins the next step in the normal process to settle an estate: the appraisal. Judge Woodruff appointed Joseph Cunningham, Samuel Bowden, and Barnabas McHenry to go to the farm and make a list of what Hannah owned at the time of her death. Those appointed were usually neighbors who were already familiar with the estate. This practice lessened the possibility that someone dishonest could take livestock, valuable farm equipment, or such, and cheat the heirs who might live in counties or states far away from their home place. Joseph Cunningham had married Hannah's niece Lucretia Wilson in 1836, and lived a short distance from her farm. Samuel Bowden (b. 1785) had married Sarah Welch, sister of Mr. Cunningham's first wife Elizabeth. Samuel's son Elbert Bowden would grow up to marry Hannah's granddaughter Margaret Frost in 1854, the oldest girl of Jesse Frost's eighteen children. Barnabas McHenry, the third appraiser, was the 33 year old son-in-law of



Jesse Frost and his wife Catherine Harless

Mr. Cunningham, and the son of Thomas D. McHenry (born 1772) who had served both in the Virginia and Alabama state legislatures.

The inventory begins in the house. Hannah owns two very nice bedroom suites. She keeps her dishes in a cupboard, probably the open front type known as a pewter cupboard.

She owns crockeryware and a set of knives and forks. Forks were not so common on the frontier; many folks ate with knives only, using syrup or honey to help the peas and beans stick. Her kitchen also contains tin plates, bottles, sugar boxes, and "woodvessels" or dough bowls.

Listed separately are her coin silver spoons.

She owns smoothing irons to keep the clothes pressed, and a metal clock, known as a wag-on-the-wall. She owns a number of books, which indicates education and the ability to read. Hannah owns a trunk in which she stores her clothing. She also owns an "old bible." This would be her grandfather Methusalem Griffith's Welsh bible, entrusted to her as the youngest daughter, as it had been entrusted to her mother. The bible would have the water stains from the time her grandparents had survived the Great Flood in 1749 in Augusta County, Virginia. The bible records their marriage in Christ Church, Philadelphia, in 1730.

Other standard inventory entries include a loom for weaving, andirons for the fireplace, a grinding stone for corn meal, and crosscut saws to fell the trees for barn building and firewood. Her animals include a yoke of oxen, some cows, some hogs, some sheep, and some goats. The appraisers listed corn and fodder, a side saddle, but no horses. There is a wagon and a harness for travel, apparently by oxen.

The appraisers signed under oath that their report on the estate and their assessment of its value was true and correct, and they were "without partiality or sinister views." Also included in the papers was a list of loans made by Hannah to other people. One was to Abner J. Wells, the local militia leader, for \$600. Abner J. Wells was a native of Spartanburg, South Carolina, and a son-in-law of Joseph Cunningham. Mr. Wells ran a tavern on Main Street Montevallo. The tavern housed a large bell which was used to call locals to meetings or signify emergencies. This very bell has survived, and is now housed on Selma Street at one of Montevallo's oldest churches.

In the February issue of the Chamber Chatter, we will continue with the actual estate sale, the final settlement, and a short synopsis of what became of her children.



540 Shelby Street
Montevallo, AL 35115

WWW.HISTORICMONTEVALLO.ORG