

Elizabeth Stone
Chronology of the “Founding Mother of Fort Collins”



The following text is from a brochure funded by a community grant to the Fort Collins Museum from the American Association of University Women Educational Foundation in commemoration of Elizabeth Stone. The project director was Joy L. Poole, and the writer/researcher was Teresa R. Funke.

The brochure is available at the Fort Collins Museum in the Auntie Stone Cabin, located at 200 Mathews Street, Fort Collins, Colorado.

Elizabeth, "Auntie" Stone broke out of the mold imposed on women in the nineteenth century. Her long list of "firsts" has caused her to be remembered as the "Founding Mother of Fort Collins." Possessed of boundless energy, generosity, and an acute business sense, Auntie Stone touched the lives of every citizen in the burgeoning town. Her contributions to this community are still evident today.

1801 September 21, Elizabeth Hickok born to parents David and Adah Hickok in Hartford, Connecticut.

1805 Hickok family moves to Watertown, New York.

1824 On February 22, Elizabeth, 22, marries Dr. Ezekiel W. Robbins in Watertown, New York.

1828 Elizabeth and family move to St. Louis, Missouri.

1838 The family, which now includes 8 children, moves to Chester, Randolph County, Illinois.

1852 Dr. Robbins dies in Chester, Illinois, of cholera on July 25; Elizabeth, 51, and her children return to New York and later move to the prairie section of Minnesota.

1857 Elizabeth marries Judge Lewis Stone and settles in St. Paul, Minnesota.

1858 Judge Stone helps establish the town of Langola, north of St. Cloud, Minnesota. The Stones operate a hotel and dining room.

1862 Elizabeth and Lewis Stone leave Minnesota and cross the plains in a Conestoga wagon

pulled by milk cows. They purchase 12 lots in Denver and build a house which they rent as a restaurant as they homestead in the St. Vrain valley.

1864 The Stones befriend Dr. T.M. Smith-surgeon for the military fort and only physician in the Cache la Poudre valley. Smith persuades the Stones to move to Fort Collins and open a mess hall for the soldiers. Elizabeth, the first Euro-American woman to settle in Fort Collins, remains the only Euro-American woman for nearly a year. In October, the Stone's two-story log cabin -the first private dwelling in Fort Collins - is completed, an event celebrated with an exuberant housewarming party. The Stones begin boarding army officers.

1866 In January, Judge Stone dies. Elizabeth, 64, is dubbed "Auntie" Stone by the soldiers and officers. Auntie Stone expands her mess hall into the area's first hotel. She also sells pies and bread to soldiers, as well as milk for 50 cents a quart and butter for \$1.50 a pound. Auntie Stone's widowed niece, Elizabeth Parke Keays, keeps an important journal as she and her 10-year-old son, Wilbur, journey to Fort Collins at Auntie Stone's request. Keays starts Fort Collins' first school with 14 pupils in the large, upstairs bedroom of Auntie Stone's cabin. Several students board at the cabin. In December, Keays marries Harris Stratton in the first wedding ceremony held in Fort Collins.

1867 Following the closure of the fort, Auntie Stone opens her hotel to the public. One of her first non-military visitors, a representative from the *Rocky Mountain News* on assignment to canvas the new settlement, returns to Denver and sends Auntie Stone's household the paper free for a year. Henry Clay Peterson and Auntie Stone decide to build Northern Colorado's first grist mill to convert wheat to flour. Auntie Stone moves into two rooms in the mill to board the men installing the machinery. Her niece, Mrs. Stratton, remains in the Pioneer Cabin with her family and boards men working for the railway. Auntie Stone becomes the first woman land-owner and taxpayer in Larimer County after obtaining a land patent for 160 acres.

1868 Auntie Stone becomes the first midwife when, in her cabin, she assists the birth of Agnes Mason, the first Euro-American child born in Fort Collins. While passing through Chicago on his way to Buffalo, New York, H.C. Peterson is knocked down and robbed of the \$3,000 he is carrying to purchase machinery for the mill. He returns to Fort Collins and he and Auntie Stone raise the funds again.

1869 Linden Mills, located on the Poudre River, begins production of flour powered by a mill-race which diverts water from the river.

1870 Auntie Stone and H.C. Peterson decide to build the region's first brick kiln. Peterson becomes a charter member of the Masonic lodge which meets on the third floor of the flour mill, the tallest structure in town.

1871 With bricks from the kiln, H.C. Peterson builds and occupies the first brick house in Fort Collins near Lincoln Ave. and Linden St. The house is later torn down to make way for tracks for the Union Pacific Railroad.

1873 Auntie Stone, now 72, advertises her National Hotel in a promotional publication for settlers titled, *The Handbook of Colorado*.

In May, she sues Thomas Kidd for two hundred dollars for overdue rent. Auntie Stone sells her cabin to Marcus Coon and buys The Blake House hotel, which she leases to the Blakes.

December 10, H.C. Peterson sells his shares of the mill to Joseph Mason.

December 31, Auntie Stone sells her shares of the mill to T.M. Roberts, who later sells the shares to Mason. In 1875 the mill and millrace are valued at \$14,000.

1878 Auntie Stone embarks on a three-week vacation to Estes Park. In September, she changes the name of the Blake House to the Metropolitan Hotel.

1879 B. S. Tedmon takes over the Metropolitan Hotel in July.

On June 18, Auntie Stone holds a "good" dinner for young men who upheld a bargain not to enter a saloon for two months.

1880 At 79, Auntie Stone, goes on a camping and fishing trip for twelve days in July and continues to host parties and dinners in her home as she has done since arriving in Fort Collins.

1881 In late July, Auntie Stone's return from an eastern visit is heralded in an Aug. 4, article in the *Fort Collins Courier*, which adds that it hopes her future absences from Fort Collins will be "less frequent and of shorter duration".

In August, Auntie Stone, who helped organize the Fort Collins chapter of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, is elected treasurer of that organization.

A December 8, article in the *Fort Collins Courier* reports on the latest of Auntie Stone's many philanthropic deeds - helping to raise funds to send an abandoned Mrs. McQueen and her two children to join McQueen's family in Nebraska.. Auntie Stone, known for her hospitality, entertains all ministers who come to Fort Collins. She also generously contributes to erecting every church in the young town and to establishing the Agricultural College of Colorado (now Colorado State University).

At age 80, Auntie Stone retires from the hotel business when her daughter, Theodosia Van Brunt, and family arrive from Illinois to take over management of Auntie Stone's Cottage House hotel.

1882 January 5, the *Fort Collins Courier* reports on a party held the previous Friday to celebrate Elizabeth and Harris Stratton's 15th anniversary. Auntie Stone attends and pitches in with three other women to present the couple a "beautiful hanging lamp" in honor of the crystal anniversary.

On her 81st birthday, four generations of Auntie Stone's family and the townspeople hold a dance in her honor at the Masonic Hall. Many of the younger men fail in a conspiracy to "dance her down." Auntie Stone further astonishes her guests by leaving the dance at 5:00 AM to go home and cook breakfast for everyone. She enjoys dancing until age 86.

1884 August 21, Auntie Stone is bruised and scratched while being thrown from Charlie Van Brunt's carriage which overturns on Bald Mountain, northwest of Rocky Mountain National Park.

1885 At age 84, Auntie Stone takes a train ride to Salt Lake City and enjoys reminiscing with passengers about her pioneer days.

1886 The flour mill, now owned by the Colorado Milling and Elevator Company, burns down and is rebuilt.

1890 Auntie Stone, 89, now relies on a chair modified with wheels but maintains her cheerful outlook, often asking to be wheeled outside to gaze on her beloved Rocky Mountains.

1893 Long an advocate of women's suffrage, Auntie Stone lives to see the vote granted to Colorado women.

1894 Auntie Stone, 93, votes for the first time in a municipal election. As her son wheels her to the polls she says, "I have waited a lifetime for this privilege."

1895 Auntie Stone casts her last ballot, voting as usual for the Prohibition ticket. On December 4, Auntie Stone dies in her sleep at the home of her daughter, Mrs. Van Brunt.

On December 6, her funeral is held at 1:00 PM at the Presbyterian Church. A large wreath of dried wheat interlaced with flowers lies on the casket. As she is laid to rest in Mountain Cemetery - later renamed Grandview Cemetery - in the Van Brunt plot, the firehouse bell tolls 94 times for each year of her life. Business is suspended from 1:00 - 3:00 PM in her honor.

She was thought to be the oldest woman in Colorado. Her headstone reads simply, "Auntie Stone - Died December 4, 1895 - Aged 94."

1991 September 11, Auntie Stone Street, in southwest Fort Collins, is dedicated to the city's "founding mother."