A HUSBAND-AND-WIFE team who contributed much to the progress of Missouri and the settlement of the vast expanse of the West in the last century was George and Mary Sibley.

George Champlin Sibley was born April 1, 1782, at Great Barrington, Mass. His family soon moved to Fayetteville, N. C. He attended several schools, got itchy feet and came to Missouri. He obtained an appointment in a trading post and the next year was named agent, or factor, for the newly-constructed Fort Osage.

Fort Osage, high on a bluff over the Missouri river, was recommended by Lewis and Clark on the way west. And, when they returned from their journey, the government decided to build a fort there, one of 28 trading posts operated by the government from 1795 to 1822 to protect and promote national expansion and keep an eye on the Indians, British and other political enemies.

The fort was built by soldiers of the 1st Missouri infantry regiment under the command of Gen. William Clark and Maj. Eli B. Crennson. Two groups divided at St. Louis and marched by water and land. On the river there were four keelboats carrying merchandise valued at $20,000 which Sibley had to his beginning stock.

During the early construction it was called “Fort Clark,” and at the formal christening November 13, 1808, it became Fort Osage.” General Clark, Nathan Boone, son of Daniel Boone, Sibley and others who had successfully negotiated treaties with the Osage tribes decided to use the Indian name.

Sibley did not arrive at Fort Osage without experience. He had been an assistant factor at Ft. Bellefountaine near St. Louis. One night he was the guest at the home of a Mr. and Mrs. Rufus Easton who had seven daughters. Easton was the first postmaster of St. Louis, one of the first federal judges of the Missouri Territory.

George Sibley’s eyes were for Mary, the oldest. She was 14 and he was 32, but nobody expressed serious opposition to the match and the next year Mary Easton was wed to George Sibley.

The workers and soldiers at Fort Osage made friendly bets how long the beautiful Mary would stay. George Sibley spoke of her as the “fair one with the beauty, the amiable disposition and the elegant accomplishments.”

But it didn’t take Mary long to “conquer” Fort Osage. She brought her piano with flutes and drum attachments, her library, her New Orleans gowns and her riding saddles. She charmed the Indians with her combination of musical arrangements and then donned her riding clothes and gave the braves a work-out on hard and fast riding.

She planted vegetable and flower gardens, directed the building of an ice house and insisted that the pigs be kept in a pen. She often rode miles from the fort with her husband. She could ride all day and dance half the night.

The Osages loved Mary, and the chiefs gave her permission to start a school for their children. This was the germ of the Lithium Academy.

Fort Osage became a popular place under the hospitable direction of Mary Sibley. She stationed a servant at the Missouri river docks on a 24-hour watch and everyone was invited to the Sibley home.

Some of the visitors were Audubon, Prince Maximilian, Daniel Boone, Sacajawea, Chief Shahaka of the Mandans, Manuel Lisa, the Chouteaus and Bradbury, the English botanist.

The War of 1812 closed the fort. Sibley was commissioned a major in the army. In 1815 the fort was re-garrisoned. Populations began to shift and the War department decided to move the technical headquarters in 1819 to Council Bluffs. In 1822 the fort was completely shut down.

In 1827 the Sibley’s moved to St. Charles. Mary Sibley remembered the need for education of girls. George and Mary selected a site in a forest of lilac trees overlooking their beloved Missouri river and erected a school building. This was the first private Protestant girls’ school west of the Mississippi river.

George Sibley dabbled in politics, was elected to the Whig national convention in Baltimore in 1844, ran for the state Senate the same year and lost by 49 votes.

The Sibleys worked hard at Lindemwood and the school prospered.

George Sibley died January 31, 1863. Mary Sibley continued her work and organized several charitable associations. She died in 1878.