Cole, Willard Glover [1]

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by Jerry Lanier, 1979; Revised May 2022 by NC Government & Heritage Library

24 Aug. 1906–28 May 1965

Willard Glover Cole, newspaper editor, was born in Wilkes County [2], the son of Phoebe Mariah Bumgarner and Thomas H. Cole. He graduated from high school in North Wilkesboro and began his journalistic career at the age of twenty, when he joined the staff of the *Journal-Patriot* in North Wilkesboro. Soon he was editor of the *Ashe County Journal*. He returned home briefly to serve as editor of the *Journal*. before becoming a reporter for the *Winston-Salem Journal*. He then spent five years in Panama working for a road construction company; in the 1930s he returned to North Carolina to become secretary of the Tabor City Merchants Association. In 1948 he became editor of the Whiteville *News-Reporter*, a Columbus County [3] weekly.

In 1950, Cole and editor Horace Carter of the *Tabor City Tribune* began a crusade against the Ku Klux Klan [4], which had recently become active in Columbus County. In response to many acts of terrorism and intimidation, the two newspapers published incessant attacks on the nightriders. Regularly threatened by the Klan, Cole carried a gun when he answered his door at night. His anti-Klan editorials assailed the organization for its secrecy and its vigilante violence. One Klansman said of him: "I guessed we despised the editor of the Whiteville *News-Reporter* most. . . . His criticism never ceased for one moment against the KKK." In the aftermath of Klan violence, over eighty Klansmen were arrested on kidnapping and assault charges; nearly all were convicted with sentences ranging up to six years. The two editors, Cole and Carter, shared the Pulitzer Prize for Meritorious Public Service in 1953 [5] and also received various other service awards. In their successful efforts against the KKK, editors Cole and Carter ably demonstrated the potential of small-town journalism as a positive, amelioristic force in the community. Cole, the older of the two and controller of the larger newspaper, led the fight.

Cole left Whiteville shortly after the Klan crusade and became editor of the *Lumberton Post* in Robeson County [6]. In 1963 he founded and became editor of the *Robeson County Enterprise*, a semiweekly with offices in Lumberton. He was working in this capacity when he became fatally ill in 1965.

Cole was survived by his widow, Mary Frances Donnelly, whom he had divorced but remarried several years later; by a son, William John Cole; and by a daughter, Mrs. Mary Jo Cole Burnette. He was buried in the Donnelly family cemetery in Ashe County.

Additional information from NCpedia editors at the State Library of North Carolina:

***Spelling correction**: We have corrected the *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*'s misspelling of William Glover Cole's mother's name. The incorrect spelling replaced in the article originally read "Maria Dumgarner." We have revised this to be the correct name, Phoebe Mariah Bumgarner.

***Spelling correction**: We have corrected the *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography's* misspelling of William Glover Cole's son's name. The incorrect spelling replaced in the article originally read "Willard Glover Cole." We have revised this to be the correct name, William Glover Cole.

***Spelling correction**: We have corrected the *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography's* misspelling of William Glover Cole's daughter's name. The incorrect spelling replaced in the article originally read "Jean Cole." We have revised this to be the correct name, Mary Jo Cole Burnette.

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