

Colonel James Cooper Steele

The Steele family had come from Ohio and quickly become involved in the founding of Bloomington; in fact, Steele actually built his home on the Bloomington town site. Lieutenant-Colonel James Cooper Steele had not arrived in Kansas in time to be involved in the early territorial election of 1855 nor had he been present to take part in the numerous raids on the proslavery forts. Nevertheless, his free-state proclivities had taken root while a youth in Ohio, where he was captain of a military company and later commissioned by the governor to be lieutenant colonel.

One of the original organizers of the Free Soil Party in Ohio, he was three times their candidate for the legislature and twice for Congress. He was a member of the first anti-slavery society in the United States (the American Anti-Slavery Society), joining when it formed about 1833. In addition to his abolition activities, he was a prominent temperance worker. The very day the news came of the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska bill he declared that he would go to Kansas to help make it a free state. A colony was organized, but many of its members became discouraged and determined to locate in Iowa, and, on account of business complications with them, Steele was in effect compelled to settle in Warren County, Iowa, where he remained until 1857 when he started for Kansas.

On March 4th of 1857 he crossed the Kansas line and immediately located a claim on the southwest quarter of Section 24 in Clinton Township. The north half of Section 24 was designated on April 28, 1858 by James Cooper Steele and William Jessee as the town site of Bloomington, Kansas, with Jessee acting as president of the Town Company.

After arriving in Kansas, James and Elizabeth Steele lived on their original claim near Bloomington until 1865, when James began buying up lots on the town site of Bloomington, and with his knowledge of carpentry and construction began to build what became a well-known landmark in the community. This beautiful two-story house was built of bricks made from the red clay of the Wakarusa River, and of local lumber. Before being dismantled by the Army Corps of Engineers, the house was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on August 26, 1974.

James and Elizabeth had eight children, including two daughters who married prominent farmers in the Clinton community. Mary Veach married Robert A. Dean, and Evalina McLean married Charles F. Woodward. James and Elizabeth's second son, Marcus, had died in 1843 at the age of twelve. The remaining five sons all served their country during the Civil War. Their amazing stories are as follows:

Captain Robert A. Steele, born on February 14, 1829, during his service became Captain of Company L of the Kansas State Militia and was in the engagement with Price's army at the battles of Westport and the Big and Little Blue. After his military service he was engaged in farming and stock-raising. Robert, who was well informed about successful agricultural practices, contributed to agricultural journals and

occasionally wrote articles of a political nature. This led to his election to the state legislature and a prominent position at conventions and Republican Party caucuses. He was a man of decided convictions, theories and opinions, never afraid to say what he thought and, in fact, often courted controversy. He married Isabella Cummings on September 14, 1865 and together they raised three sons and three daughters. He died on May 12, 1898. He and Isabella are buried in the Clinton Cemetery.

Brigadier-General Lewis Scott Steele was born on September 15, 1833 at Ross County, Ohio. In 1854, he moved to Indianola, Iowa, and studied law with his uncle, R. W. Steele. He spent the winter of 1854 at Florence, Nebraska, and returned to Indianola in the spring where he practiced law until 1857. He moved to Kansas and settled in Clinton near where his father had staked a claim. There he engaged in farming and the lumber trade until in 1860 he went to Pike's Peak and tried his hand at mining. He became Judge of the Washington Gulch Judicial District and took part in the organization of the Territory of Colorado. He was appointed Justice of the Peace in Washington County but declined the position and instead enlisted in Company G of the Third Colorado Infantry on October 5, 1862. Marching on foot in March 1863 from Denver to Fort Leavenworth, his regiment then proceeded by boat to Pilot Knob, Missouri, where they remained until winter and were then consolidated with the Second Colorado Cavalry. They took an active part in the defense of Missouri during General Sterling Price's raid on that state, meeting Price at Lexington and following him to the Arkansas River, which encompassed several engagements. After moving through the ranks, Lewis Steele was mustered out with his regiment in September 1865. He returned home to the Clinton vicinity and operated a grist and saw mill until 1870. He eventually moved to Lawrence, Kansas, where he was appointed Police Judge and Justice of the Peace in 1878 and re-elected in 1879 for another two years. He was married in 1857 to Harriet Stathem of Des Moines, Iowa, who died Sep. 3, 1859 at 20 years of age, leaving one daughter. On February 8, 1866, Lewis married Louisa A. Blakely from Marietta, Ohio, who had been born on Oct. 7, 1832 and who died on July 15, 1896. Lewis himself died on June 19, 1916. He and Louisa are buried in Oak Hill Cemetery in Lawrence, Kansas. Two of their infant children are buried in Pioneer Cemetery, also in Lawrence.

Captain James McLean Steele was born January 13, 1839 in Ross County, Ohio. He moved with his parents to Warren County, Iowa on October 1, 1855, and subsequently to Kansas in 1857. He was appointed deputy clerk of the District Court of Douglas County in April of 1861. James entered the service and was appointed Captain of Company E, 12th Kansas Infantry, later serving as Lieutenant-Colonel of the 113th United States Colored Troops (consisting of 5 companies) at Little Rock, Arkansas in April 1865. After finishing his war service he returned to Kansas in March 1867. A year later he was appointed Adjutant of the 19th Kansas Volunteer Cavalry and served with Generals Sheridan and Custer in the Indian campaign, until mustering out in April 1869. After his time in service he moved to Emporia, Kansas, working in the real estate business with ex-governor S. J. Crawford. He then entered the banking business and became assistant cashier of the Emporia National Bank in 1875. In October of that

year he married Miss Hattie McBean. James died on January 27, 1916 in Emporia and was given a military funeral by Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States.

Amzi Johnson Steele entered the army as a Private at the age of 23. He had been born June 7, 1841 and had come with his parents to Kansas in 1857. He was promoted to Captain of "New" Company A, 9th Kansas Militia, which had been organized March 28, 1862. He was married to Miss Ellen A. Pierson; they had one child. Amzi died on February 11, 1874, in Ross County, Ohio.

Ira Theophilus Steele, the youngest of the Steele children, was born on September 14, 1844 at South Salem, Ohio. Ira married Mary Dana White on March 9, 1881. He was a prominent farmer and stock dealer in Douglas County; he served in the military and participated in the Battle of Westport and at Little and Big Blue. Ira died on Dec. 30, 1921, and is buried along with Mary in the Clinton cemetery.

James C. Steele contributed articles to newspapers and was particularly familiar with *The Kansas Farmer*, an agricultural journal established by his friend, Lawrence D. Bailey of Belvoir. In 1865 James wrote the following letter to the editor of that publication:

I am highly pleased with *The Kansas Farmer*, regarding it as an excellent medium through which the farmers, stock raisers and fruit growers of the state can exchange opinions and give for their mutual benefit their individual experience and varied successes in agricultural pursuits.

Having had an experience of over eight years in Douglas County, I think I have learned to my satisfaction that fruit cannot be successfully raised on wet land or on a clay sub-soil without under draining or sub-soiling. I have found also, that the rapid growth of summer, the early frost of autumn, the warm days with sudden changes to severe cold in winter, render it useless to attempt to cultivate the tender varieties of apples and other fruits. We must propagate the hardy varieties only.

Wheat, oats, barley, hemp, cotton, tobacco, sorghum and potatoes may be successfully raised in Kansas, but our strong hold is in grass and corn, if we can secure by pasturing the grass that grows so luxuriantly on our prairies, and convert our bottom land into corn fields and meadows, we can then raise sufficient corn to fatten our hogs, and stall-feed our cattle. But in order to do this, we must have good fences, whether we fence stock in or out, and the sooner we quit dreaming about Shanghai fences or none at all, the better.

The subject of fencing is of the highest importance to the farmers of Kansas. A stone fence is better and cheaper in the long run than any other that can be made, but it requires greenbacks and muscular power, which we cannot all command. In making a wooden fence, good ten-foot rails are cheaper at sixty dollars, than common fencing timber at thirty dollars per thousand. I see some otherwise sensible men, in making board fence . . . and I hope you will let us know who you are and where you live. It is a satisfaction when we hear from you, to know whether you live in Maine, Florida or Kansas, and whether your experience is applicable to our climate or not.

Very respectfully,
J. C. STEELE
Bloomington, Kan. August 8, '65