

Almost Died In Epidemic in West, James Steele Returned To Paisley To Spend Fifty-five Years In Business

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"My father came to Paisley over 100 years ago, I've lived all but seven years of my life here, and was in business in the village for over 55 years"—and you knew by his attitude that James H. Steele still thinks this village is an ideal spot to live and that it's people are the salt of the earth.

Last Thursday "Jim" Steele celebrated his 90th birthday, when his cousin, Mrs. Russell Brown, entertained relatives and old cronies of "Mr. Paisley" at an informal afternoon party. "It was all a surprise to me," Mr. Steele told The Advocate. But he had keenly enjoyed the reminiscing and the reunion with nieces, Mrs. Dougald McDonald of Vancouver and Mrs. George Cornwall of Toronto, who were among the guests.

James Steele's grandfather and father were born in Ireland. On the eve of the former's emigration to Canada, the young son, Samuel, about two years of age, came down with a serious illness. Sadly, but rather than postpone the sailing, the family left behind the young son, who grew up on the old sod and was 17 years of age before he finally followed his family to Canada. Disembarking at New York, he made his way to Rochester, thence to Bradford, where he made a chance meeting with his father, whose home was at Steele's Corners. Samuel Steele's father took up land on the 14th concession of Greenock when that district was opened up by the government. Samuel Steele came to Paisley. Here he married Ann

Hanna, whose family built the first dam here and owned the first sawmill and grist mill.

To them was born one son, James H. When the young babe was seven days old, his father, an officer in the militia of this district, went to defend the new home and country against the Fenians. James H. Steele proudly showed to The Advocate the Fenian Raid Medal which was presented to his father. When the young Steele was 22 months old his mother died, and he made his home with relatives in Elderslie for a few years. He attended public school in Paisley. At the age of 15 years, he apprenticed with a man by the name of McGill to learn the harness making trade. After five years, he went to Deloraine, Man., where he spent two years. Contracting typhoid fever during an epidemic which lasted two years and saw 120 cases, he was cared for in an improvised hospital on the outskirts of the town. There he spent two weeks in which he remembered not one incident, and at which time his life was despaired by doctors and nurses. But a strong constitution pulled him through. Recovering, he returned to Paisley, then worked for a couple of years at Chesley, Uxbridge, Glamis and other Ontario points.



James H. Steele

Expressing a desire to return to Manitoba, he was dissuaded by his father, who offered to back a loan of \$500 at the bank, provide board and pay his business rental for the first year if the son would remain in Paisley.

Thus was born the business he operated until his retirement in 1947.

He commenced his operation as opposition to the man with whom he had apprenticed. Eventually he repaid to his father the rental advanced in the first year and the cost of clothing which he had received free from his father's place of business. After eight years he

bought out McGill. That was in 1891. A few years later he purchased the Steele Block, centrally located in the first block north of the Teeswater bridge on Queen street. There he remained. At one time he employed two others, but with the advent of the motor car, the harness business fell off and for some years he operated alone.

About 1908 Mr. Steele went to Vancouver, at the height of the great boom, and temporarily, as he puts it, "dabbled in real estate." He made several other trips to the coast, the last as recently as 1948, but always returned to Paisley.



THEY WERE ON HAND FOR THE OPENING CEREMONIES

It was a capacity crowd of 2,400 persons which witnessed the impressive opening ceremonies at the Paisley War Memorial Community Centre on Feb.

19th. In the above photo H. L. Matthews, ticket-taker, is directing John F. Scott of Hamilton, his aunt, Mrs. Alex Wood, and Miss Isobel Aitchison.

Community Centre will be Officially Opened Feb 19

On the evening of Feb. 19th, which is the first anniversary of the date upon which Paisley's first memorial community centre was totally destroyed by fire, the official ceremonies in connection with the formal opening of the fine new Community Centre will be performed. As yet, arrangements are still in a state of flux, but it is quite definite that Owen Sound Mercurys, O.H.A. senior hockey club, will be one of the teams participating in the big affair. Efforts had been made by the Owen Sound management and the local committee to have either Hamilton Tigers or Stratford Indians come up as the second team, but because of playoffs impending, it was impossible to effect these arrangements. It is now hoped to assemble a very strong all-star sextette to tackle the Mercurys, as the tid-bit of the evening. Plans are proceeding for other phases of the big official opening night, and full details should be ready for next week's issue of The Advocate. Better keep the date open. Remember, its Saturday evening, Feb. 19th. 1949.

Mr. Steele recalled that at one time, years ago, there were in the village men by the name of Bone, Foot, Shanks, Body and Head. The wits of the day took pleasure in introducing the men to one another. "Mr. Head, meet Mr. Foot," was always good for a laugh.

Bone was a tanner in the village; Foot operated a livery and Shanks was a grocer. Body was employed in a foundry, and Head was a photographer.

Mr. Steele, who is a member of Aldworth Masonic Lodge and of Knox United Church, was always interested in municipal affairs. He was a member of village council for the first time under Reeve Jacob Robb, then was elected to the reeve's chair in 1904-05, returning for a second period in 1917-18-19. Altogether, he served on council 14 years and five as reeve.

Although slightly hard of hearing, Mr. Steele is still mentally alert and can discuss present-day conditions or reminisce on events of 75 years ago with equal clarity. He takes his daily walk and retains remarkably good health for one of his years.