

Steele has steady source of water

By KIM CRAFT
News-Aegis Reporter

STEELE—With the idea that everyone wants clean water, the town of Steele secured a dependable water supply in 1991.

Numerous cave-ins and silt-contaminated water lead to the conclusion that the town needed to search elsewhere for an adequate water supply, Mayor Fred Hyatt said.

In the past, the town's water supply came from two wells. However, the increasing frequency of problems in one of the wells forced the realization that one well was not enough to keep up with citizens' normal water consumption.

After closing one of the wells, the town tapped into the West Etowah County Water Authority in October 1991 to continue service to its 425 water customers.

"When we had a cave-in, we'd have to shut the well down until the water cleared up," the mayor explained. "We had to go on a short supply of water and we couldn't guarantee how long it could sustain the system."

Hyatt said it was especially hard during summer months when citizen water consumption is high. Now residents can wash vehicles and water lawns and gardens as often as they want, he added.

The town received a community development block grant which

allowed hook-up to the other system. "It had come to the point where if we hadn't gotten this grant, we'd have had to dig another well," Hyatt emphasized.

According to Hyatt, a new well would have cost the town a minimum of \$250,000. "If we hadn't struck water the first time, they'd charge for every time one was dug until it ran into an astronomical figure," he noted. "With the grant, the project cost the city \$30,000 in matching funds — which is a far cry from \$250,000."

With the water tap-on in the rear view mirror, Hyatt said he would prefer that that streets receive attention. "I would like to see all the streets paved," he said, adding that most streets have some type of surface on them and only need additional resurfacing. "That's one of my priorities, but I don't know if it will materialize."

Though ideally Hyatt would like to see all the roads resurfaced, he admitted it is not financially feasible at this time. What money is available, he said, will be used for patch work.

"It's like an old farmer's overalls, after awhile, you've got patches on patches and it becomes quilted," he compared.

Hyatt said the biggest project in his five-year tenure as mayor was the water connection. "We were on the verge of not having any water," he stressed. "If you don't have water, you don't have a town."

Wednesday, April 9

Will ever have abuse it. It is the only one you heart, to take care of it. Don't

April 2 1958
St. Clair Co. Reporter

History Of Steele Is Heard As Garden Club Meets

The Steele Garden Club met with Mrs. J. L. Free on Friday night, March 28th. Her home was lovely with spring flowers and greenery. An outstanding arrangement being on her dining table, of white and yellow displayed in a low white basket.

Mrs. Cecil Qualls, president called the meeting to order and Mrs. Willard Wood, secretary read the minutes and called the roll to which members answered with the name of their most treasured garden plant. Mrs. A. C. Bodholdt gave the treasury report. The different committees made reports. The community service committee presented a miniature laundry basket, which will serve as an Easter Basket when presented to W. J. Buffington filled with gifts from the gardeners. Mr. Buffington was honored by the club this month.

Mrs. Pierce Russell gave an interesting bird comment in the absence of bird chairman, Mrs. John Russell. Mrs. Bert Brock gave the garden hint for March.

Mrs. Cecil Qualls was in charge of the program on historical research. She read the history she had written on the Steele community that dates back to 1814. Mrs. Qualls did much study and research in preparing the paper which is a part of a history of St. Clair County now on file in the History and Archives Dept. in Montgomery. She showed pictures of old land marks, such as the old 2 story school building. Among her collection also, were news paper clippings dating back before 1900. It was interesting to see the pictures of St. Clair Countys very 1st school bus. This bus was bought for the Steele community with a tax collected in their beat.

Following the program the group was lead in a contest inspired by the theme of the program. Each member had brought pictures of themselves and members of their families as babies or youngsters. Mrs. Gladys Pope and Mrs. Lois Russell won prizes for recognizing the most pictures.

A lovely salad plate was served to the following; Mrs. Mabel Wilcox, Mrs. Hugh Miller, Mrs. Ben Burtram, Mrs. Willard Wood, Mrs. Cecil Qualls, Mrs. Tom Wood, Mrs. Eulis Mason, Mrs. Howard Owen, Mrs. Lois Russell, Mrs. Paul Pope, Mrs. Burt Brock, Mrs. Axel Bodholdt, Mrs. Cliff Tinsley, Mrs. Lala Ford and the hostess.

Steele news

By Madolyn Burttram

A post holiday celebration was the results of what started out to be merely a family get together of members of the late Mr. and Mrs. Box Burtons children. Mrs. L.F. Frazier of Clarksville, Tenn. Mr. and Mrs. David Shepherd, Memphis, Tenn. Mr. and Mrs. Conrad Frazier and daughters Terry and Tammy and Donald Stewart of Birmingham and Mrs. Dot Brothers of Gallant, Mr. and Mrs. Larry Hudgins, Todd and Kelly of Gadsden and Mrs. Othella Burton gathered for lunch with Mrs. Lila Hudgins. Later in the evening the party went to the Cornor Supper Club in Attalla for what turned out to be a birthday celebration for Mrs. L.F. (Clarice) Frazier.

Mrs. Jackie Curry and son Don of Glenco and Mrs. Lila Hudgins visited with Mr. and Mrs. Roger Dale Robertson and son Wade .. —. —.

Mr. and Mrs. Robert Black and sons Jim and Jeff of Birmingham were recent guests of the P.M. Russells.

Mr. and Mrs. Bill Curry and children Angelia, Dwight and Don of Glenco. Mrs. Larry



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- ELED DEVEINED COCKTAIL
HRIMP LB. **\$1.39**
- ... \$1.29 ... TASTEE SLICED
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- FRESH PORK
NECKBONES LB. **49c**
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BOLOGNA 12-OZ. PKG. **79c**

PERCH
TS

LB. **79c**
24-OZ. **\$1.39**
BAG

LB. 99c TASTEE PORK
SAUSAGE
FRESH SLICED
PORK STEAK

FRG.
12-OZ. **79c**
PKG.
LB. **99c**

STAFF FROZEN

WAFFLES

6 5-OZ. **\$1.00**
BOXES

SOLID BLOCK

FARINE

Hudgins, Todd and Kelly Hudgins and Delors and Mark Hudgins of Gadsden were dinner guests recently of Mrs. Jack Hudgins.

Mr. and Mrs. Pierce Russell had as recent guests Hollis Beason and Mrs. Mabel Harp of Birmingham, Mr. and Mrs. Jim Wilder and Beth Wilder of Centerpoint.

Mrs. Bsn Burtrtram and Mr. and Mrs. Cecil Qualls spent last weekend in Jacksonville Florida. They visited Mr. and Mrs. Rex Buffington and family.

Vivian Qualls and Madolyn Burtrtram, representing the Gadsden Chapter DAR, met with Mrs. Try Tucker of the Anniston Chapter and the dietitian of the Down Town Motor Lodge in Anniston on Tuesday to plan menus for the District D.A.R. meeting to be held on March 11th and

Mrs. Verna Martin passed away January 6, 1975 in a Trussville Nursing Home. Services were at 11 a.m. Wednesday from Lawley Chapel, Oneonta with interment in Antioch Cemetery. Survivors include sons, Edward H., J.D. and Phillip E. Martin of Birmingham and a daughter Mrs. Inez Beason of Steele.

Mr. and Mrs. William Walker, (Lynn O'Barr) of Boaz announce the arrival of a daughter Lana Marie on January 7th. Grandparents are Mr. and Mrs. Thomas O'Barr of Steele.

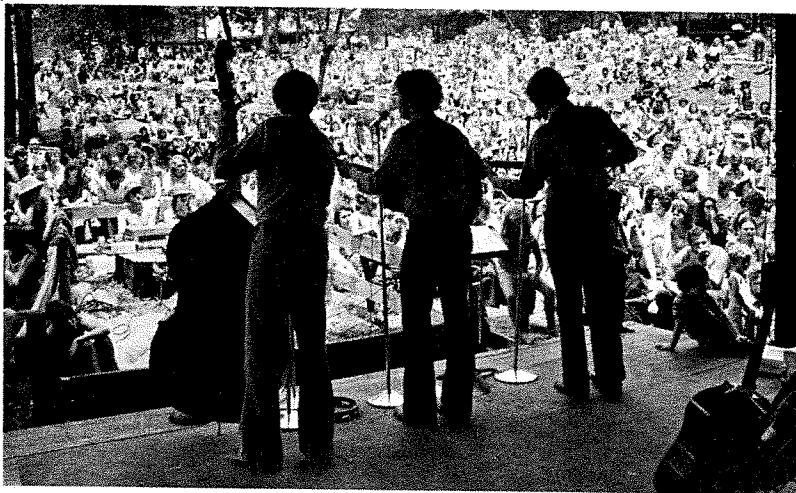
Jerry Wayne O'Barr left last week for training in the U.S. Army. He will be stationed at Fort Jackson, South Carolina for eight weeks. He will then be transferred to Huntsville for 12 weeks.

*"Curly" Ray Cline and
Ralph Stanley delight the crowd with
"Foggy Mountain Breakdown."
Photographs: Joe Benton*



*Amateur and professional pickers often get
together for informal sessions.*

*Three on a String combine
folk and bluegrass at Horse Pens 40
Bluegrass Festival.*



Painting the Grass Blue

Every fall the hills in North Alabama come alive with music—that rousing, foot-stomping, pickin' and grinnin' kind called bluegrass.

Musicians and fans alike gather atop a picturesque high-country acreage called Horse Pens 40 for back to back festivals celebrating the folklore and the music of the mountains.

During the Folk Festival, October 2-3, music and craft demonstrations share the spotlight. However, the Bluegrass Festival, October 15-17, is devoted entirely to the guitar, mandolin, banjo, and fiddle.

Located just outside of Steele, Alabama, Horse Pens 40 is a sandstone rock pile. Oldtimers point out that the rock formations formed a natural corral, a perfect hiding place, for settlers' horses during Civil War raids on livestock. Today this rocky site is used as a living museum of Appalachian history, preserving both the handmade crafts and

the handpicked music of the mountains.

Old-fashioned games are a major part of the Folk Festival. Two of the most popular are a hollering contest and slingshot shooting contest. And at both events, you can find hickory-sizzled chicken and sorghum syrup poured over hot biscuits.

One musician, Jerry Ryan, says, "We enjoy playing among the rocks and trees up here. It's a relaxing atmosphere for the performers and the listeners. Every time we come we hate to leave. It's just that kind of place."

Ryan, Bobby Horton, and Andy Meginniss form a folk and bluegrass trio known as Three on a String. The group originated at the first bluegrass festival at Horse Pens, and, because of their overwhelming popularity, they have been back every year since.

This year, Three on a String will be the featured group both days of the Folk Festival.

Among those highlighting the Bluegrass Festival will be Jim and Jesse; the McLain Family Band; the Conrad Hinson Family; Golden River Band; Glenn and Scooter of Fast Grass; Whetstone Run; and the Dixie Mountain Boys.

Folk Festival (October 2-3) hours are 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. **Admission** is \$2. Primitive campsites are \$4.

Bluegrass (October 15-17) hours are 2 to 11 p.m. on Friday, 11 a.m. until 11 p.m. Saturday, and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday. **Admission** is \$6 Friday and Sunday and \$7 Saturday. A three-day ticket is \$12, with primitive campsite included.

Horse Pens is 40 miles north of Birmingham, off I-59 at the Steele, Alabama, exit. Signs direct you from the exit.

For more information, contact Warren Musgrove, Route 1, Box 379, Steele, Alabama 35987.

At the end of the Creek War the Creek Indians gave up by the treaty of Fort Jackson, August 9, 1814, their lands south and west of a line drawn from Cherokee Crossing, near Greensport in St. Clair County, down the east side of the Coosa to Wetumpka, thence to the mouth of Summochio Creek, which empties into the Chattahoochee below Eufaula. (A.B. Moore's History of Alabama)

Thus, the Whites claimed South St. Clair Co. The Cherokees claimed North St. Clair but gave up the claim in 1816.

The following families settled in N. St. Clair on county land now served by Rt. 1. Steele: Browns, Halls, Logans, Stephens, Jourdans, Tramel, Smiths, Basons and D^{er}mans.

The following settled in flatwoods below Steel in Camp Sibert area Countrymans, Siberts and Battles.

Indians used to kidnap Calvin Jourdan frequently (he was a baby) Parents would rescue him.

B^ason family settled in 1814 near Ashville on the Double Bridge Road. (Rev. Soldiers of Alabama Dept of Archives. Bulletin 5 p. 10)

For further information Consult Mrs. Cecil Qualls. Steele, Ala.
(She is doing research with intention of publishing a history of Steele)

HISTORY OF STEELE

The recent incorporation of Steele in north St. Clair County marks a milestone in the history of the little community, whose life story dates back for over a hundred years.

If the American way of life can be described in one word, that word is "change," and that word, "change," also describes the way of life in Steele community. The story of Steele is a story of progress - Progress - often slow, with many unexpected set backs but ever making slow advancement toward a better way of life.

Look back with me into the past and see the wilderness where the Indians roamed, the sturdy pioneers as they came - as they cleared land and built homes, the little community as it grew into a thriving little town with churches and schools and parents striving to give their children the best. Men and women working that they and their neighbors might have a more abundant life - look back with me to yesterday and see how it helped to bring about a more glorious today.

In the mountain-valley section of north east Alabama the forest grew. There was affluence of rainfall and sunshine. The winds whispered through the stately pines on the mountain sides - The broadleaf trees shaded the little valleys from the summer sun. Many springs bubbled up and offered sweet water to the thirsty Redskins who dwelt in the land. Game was plentiful in the woodland. Many streams offered fresh water fish to the hungry warriors, who were largely Creek, with some intermingled Cherokees.

Here our story begins:

At the end of the Creek War the Creek Indians gave up by the treaty of Fort Jackson, August 9, 1814, their lands south and west of a line drawn from Cherokee Crossing, near Greensport in St. Clair County, down the east side of the Coosa to Wetumpka, thence to the mouth of Summochico Creek, which empties into the Chattahoochee below Eufaula.¹

1. A. B. Moore, "History of Alabama"

This gave the whites access to South St. Clair County. The Cherokees claimed North of this line and gave up their claim to such in 1816. Thus the whole of St. Clair County became open to white settlers.

Many of the Tennessee and Georgia volunteers who had come to Alabama with General Jackson to fight the Indians like the country. When the war was over they returned home, got their families and came back to the newly opened territory to make new homes. Among these early settlers were the Browns, Halls, Logans, Stephens, Jourdans, Trancels, Smiths, Beasons, and Deermans. These families settled in North St. Clair County on land that is now served by Steele Route One.

The Countryman, Sibert and Battles families settled in the flatwoods below Steele in what was known as the Camp Sibert area during World War II.

The Jourdan family, settled at what is now the Sam Swindall home place on Steele Route One, between 1830 and 1840. The Indians were still here. It is said the Indians would sneak around the house and if the whites had their backs turned, they would take a dish of cooked food or a corn pone and make a hasty retreat with it. Calvin Jourdan, baby in the Jourdan family, was much loved by the Indians. Every chance they had they would kidnap the baby and have much fun dancing with and entertaining him. The parents on learning of his absence would go in search of him and upon finding him would rescue the baby only to have the same thing happen again in a few days. When Calvin grew to manhood, he became a Methodist preacher in Florida.

The Beason family was among the first settlers in this part of St. Clair County. Captain Edward Beason, born in North Carolina in 1757 was a captain of Foot Soldiers in Militia in the Revolutionary War.¹ He came from North Carolina and arrived in St. Clair County in 1814. He brought his wife and slaves. He built a cabin in the woods near the site of Ashville, Alabama. This cabin was on the Double Bridge Road between Steele and Ashville.

1. Revolutionary Soldiers of Ala. Dept. of Archives, Bulletin 5, pp. 10.

They lived among the Indians until they were removed. His son Curtis Grubb Beason was twelve years old at the time. Curtis experienced the hardships and deprivations of pioneer life but became a wealthy influential man in this part of the state. He attended school thirteen days in his life. He owned thousands of acres of land. During the Civil War Federal Soldiers burned the deeds to this so since the deeds were not recorded the land was lost to him after the war and he was comparatively a poor man.¹ He married Martha Clark. His wife and the wife of David Sibert were half-sisters. His home place was where the dairyman McClain now lives, Steele Route One.

Curtis G. Beason, Sr. was Tax Collector of St. Clair and Blount Counties 1844-1845. He was a State Senator and a delegate of Alabama Constitutional Convention 1865. He is buried at Union Methodist Church Cemetery, Steele.

The Hall family settled at the home place of Miss Tera Tramel, Steele Route One about 1850.

The Logan family place was near the Old Fidelity Church on Steele Route One. They came from North Carolina and settled there while the Indians were still here. (Most of the Indians had been removed by 1834.)² Tisdell Logan was a well-known Baptist preacher among the early settlers. Tisdell S. Logan was elected Probate Judge of St. Clair County but due to the fact that he had not resigned his job as Tax Collector soon enough he was not allowed to serve. J. W. Inzer was appointed in his place. This was during the years just following the War Between the States.

The family of J. Hugh Stephens, a local Methodist preacher, lived in the Gulf of Chandler Mountain. They were among the first white settlers. His son, Tom Stephens, had been postmaster at Gadsden for a number of years at the time of his death, in the 1940's.

1. Beason Genealogy pp. 55-56

2. History of Alabama, A. B. Moore

The Deerman family settled on land located on highway 11 south of Steele in the 1830's. It is from this family that the Deerman's Chapel Methodist Church was named.

Julia Ann Deerman married William S. Beason (son of Curtis G. Sr., previously mentioned.) They were the grandparents of Dr. W. D. Partlow, past Superintendent of Brice Hospital at Tuscaloosa, and the great-grandparents of the writer of this brief history.

The Smith Family was grandparents of Herbert Smith and Milton Johns. They settled first on Chandler Mountain in 1858. Later they moved to Steele.

It is thought that a Whisenant family (unrelated to the Whisenants who now live in Steele) built the first cabin in Steele city limits on the site where Mrs. Cluvia Morrow's house now stands. They were the first settlers in the community, but they stayed here only a short time. The Steele family, bought the Whisenant land and moved into the log cabin, so it is from this family that our settlement got its name. This was about 1845 and 1850.

Toliver Steele, grandfather of the Rev. Dozier Steele brought his wife and ten children, some of whom were grown but none married, from North Georgia in covered wagons. The children were Nancy, Mattie, Mary, Sarah, Abe, King, Joe, Quillian, Jeffie and Sylvester. Though the country was sparsely settled at that time the Steele children lost little time in finding other young people. Soon Abe Steele married one of Joel Chandler's daughters who lived with her parents near what is now called Cobbs Mill on Little Canoe Creek in Etowah County but then St. Clair County.

Joel Chandler was one of three men chosen to select a site for the Court House when St. Clair became a county. John Ash, John Massey, John Cunningham, Joel Chandler and George Shortwell were appointed to superintend the erection of the court house. Joel Chandler was a Justice of the Peace. His home was one of the first voting places in St. Clair County. Chandler Mountain was named for his family.

Pink Shahan married a Chandler, a sister to Mrs. Steele. It was he who had the mill built that has been known as the Shahan Mill, Cobbs Mill and the Killian Mill.

Ruff Owens and David Partlow built the mill. In the late 80's a thriving business was carried on there. It included, a flour mill, a grist mill, a saw mill, a cotton gin and a general merchandise store. Mrs. Dora Buffington and Susie Smith made the white silk bags which were used as bolting cloth for the flour mill.

The Battles family and the Countrymans were living in the flatwoods. Other families who lived in this vicinity before the War Between the States were: the Johns, whose cabin stood near John's Spring near the place where B. W. Pope's home now stands; the Hunsuckers, whose home was in Camp Sibert where Johnny Bowlin now lives; the Blairs and Turners whose home places were across the road from Wilson's Place in Etowah County now, but then was St. Clair County. The Currys owned the tract of land, (Moore Spring and branch) between the Steele claim and that of the Blairs. Dr. J. L. M. Curry who represents Alabama in Statuary Hall, Washington, D. C., was a member of or closely related to this pioneer family of Steele. The Baggetts' home place was across the ridge on land still owned by Luther Baggett. A Pope family lived on the Georgia Road where the old Free place was.

Milton John's paternal grandfather received the track of land including the John's Spring from the United States government as compensation for services in the Indian Wars.

The Baggett family came to this country about 1850. Luther Baggett's father, J. D. was three years old. During the Civil War J. D. Baggett, L. A. Deerman, Polk Smith and Frank Battles, who were with the Union Army, were taken prisoners by the Confederates and were being transported on the "Sultana" on the Mississippi River near Memphis to a prison camp. Due to an explosion the ship sank. Baggett, Deerman, and Battles swam to shore, Polk Smith, uncle of Milton Johns was drowned.

W. H. Baggett uncle of Luther was Tax Collector of St. Clair County after the War Between the States.

John Turner, father of Elijah Turner, married Jane Blair. During the War she stayed with her parents near Shiloh Church while her husband was away. One day in 1865, Elijah a child four years of age was playing in the road between Shiloh Church and the Blair home when a tired wayworn traveler stopped to talk to him. After being asked where his pa was, the child said, "He's fighting the Yankees." The returning soldier took his son in his arms and said, "Your Pa's come home." The John Turner home place was this side of Little Canoe Creek on the north side of the road. The Turners were among the first members of Shiloh Church which was established about 1830.

Mac Pope, grandfather of W. E. Pope built the grist mill near his home on the Free branch. This mill was later known as the Cook Mill also the Free Mill.

Most of these early settlers followed the Georgia Road from North or South Carolina or Georgia to Alabama. These settlers lived in rough log cabins, carried their water from springs, cooked on fireplaces, endured many hardships, but were a brave courageous people.

The pioneer families were mostly Baptist in belief. They built a log church in the flatwoods between 1840 and 1850. It was not until after the War Between the States that there were enough families in this community to build a church within its bounds. The Baptist moved their church from the flatwoods and built a log church near the location of the present Methodist church.

About this time there was a stage line running through Steele twice weekly. A. B. Moore in his "History of Alabama" states that "a stage line operated twice weekly between Tuscaloosa and Huntsville." More than likely this line went through Steele. It carried mail and passengers.

The Billy Jones old house built about 1827 was used as an over-night stopping place or Inn. This Inn was across Gulf Creek from Steele. Blairville (Wilson's Place in Etowah County) and Ashville were the nearest post offices. It is said that

the old road that runs between Pierce Russell's home and the Bert Pope home was called the Huntsville Road. It ran by the John's and Baggetts' old places and Cobb's Mill in Etowah County.

The planters with cotton to sell had to haul it to Huntsville, Montevallo or Rome to be sold.

In the years just following the War Between the States other families came to this section. Among these were the Lutes, Shaws, Gaddys, Trotters, Wilcoxes, Smiths (parents of John Smith), Edmonsons, Moores and Pritchards.

Up until 1876 all settlers worshipped together in the Baptist church which was constructed of logs. Now the Baptists (Owens, Moores and Steeles) became progressive and built a new church near the location of their present church. The few Methodist families which included the Gaddys, Crumps, Pritchards, Shanks, and Edmonsons bought the deserted Baptist church and the church lot from the Ben F. Owens family. In the year 1880 a new Methodist church (a frame building) was erected on this lot. It was used by the Methodists until 1938 when the brick building was constructed that is in use today.

The first Baptist church on their present lot was destroyed by a cyclone soon after it was built in 1877. Uncle Billy Moore did most of the work in putting up the frame building. The people must have been slow paying him for when the cyclone came he said it was because the people wouldn't pay him. Another church was built the next year. In 1939 the third church on this lot was torn down to make way for the present brick building.

About the year 1870 or 1871 the A. G. S. Railroad was built through Steele. This greatly changed the life of the community. Toliver Steele who gave four acres of land for the depot and section houses was the first railway station agent. The Railroad Company named the station "Steele" in his honor.

It seems that Steele was very proud of his position for when the trains stopped he walked out and introduced himself to the conductor as "ToLiver Steele the Station Agent" and offered any assistance that might be needed. On one occasion it is said that he flagged a train to stop and when it did so the conductor said "Well, where is the passenger?" Mr. Steele said, "Well, there weren't any to get on, I just thought somebody might want to get off."

Soon after the coming of the railroad a post office was opened in the Trotter store. Mr. Bill Trotter, a one-armed confederate veteran was the first postmaster. Mr. Trotter not only handed out mail he was supposed to meet the trains and deliver the mail to them. One train passed through Steele near midnight-Mrs. Trotter, carrying a lantern always met this train with Mr. Trotter. On one occasion after delivering the mail to the train they saw a dark cloud gathering so they ran back to their home to escape the on coming storm. As they closed the front door behind them a cyclone struck Steele and destroyed the Baptist.

Other post masters have been: Fred Smith, Fanny Cobb, Jane Wheeler, J. J. Edmondson, R. T. Moore and Burt Brock.

In 1903 the first rural route was started from the Steele post office. Luke Buffington was the first postman. He rode horseback. During the twenties three rural routes ran from Steele post office. N. J. Turner and W. J. Ellis were other carriers.

Uncle Abie Steele ran a tanyard before, during and after the War Between the States. Uncle Abie's work was so important to the Confederate cause that he was exempt from service in the army. His tannery was located in and near the branch from the Steele Spring just across the railroad near the present home of Cecil Mullinax. In the late 1870 or early 80's this tannery included a shoe and harness shop run by J. M. Gaddy, Buck Griffin and a Mr. Cates. Mr. Gaddy was a cobbler, a carpenter and helped to build the first Methodist church in Steele. He was the great grandfather of the writer.

The first school house in Steele was on the hill near the Willingham home. It was a one room, log building with a large fireplace to heat it. This school was supported by tuition from each child. At one time Miss "Pet" Cox taught in one room of her home located where the C. E. Berttram house now stands. A Mr. Beck taught a school of eighteen continuous months in the log Baptist Church near the present Methodist Church. The building was heated by a large fireplace, while the children sat on puncheon benches which had peg legs and no backs. Due to Mr. Beck's name as an able professor several scholars boarded here to attend his school. Della Trotter, Lola Shanks, and some of the Moore boys attended.

About 1880 a new two-story frame school building was erected on the lot where C. G. Qualls's house now stands. The upper story was used by the Masons, the lower for the school. About 1900 this school was known as the Valley Grove College. It is said to have rated with the best schools in the county.* Students came from different sections of the county and boarded in Steele. Professor J. A. B. Stovall was an able and well-loved teacher of the College. The faculty usually included two or three members. Other teachers of this time were Mrs. Lizzie Nunnally Gramling, Mrs. Lucy Edmonson Wheeler, Miss Della Cox, E. B. Moore, H. T. Moore, W. A. Whitmire (1885-1887), L. W. Buffington and Susy Ausburn (aunt of Ward Forman). E. B. Moore studied at Walnut Grove College. He was a successful teacher at home as well as aboard. It is remembered that when uniform state examinations for teachers became required there was a teacher shortage, since many were not able to pass the examination. The above named teachers were certified however.

While Valley Grove College was at its best, a movement got underway to change the name of Steele to Valley Grove. This idea did not get much support and when the Railroad Company "turned thumbs down" on it, the movement soon died out.

*Supt. N. B. Spradley in his report in 1900 names seven schools as deserving special mention for good work. Valley Grove was one of these schools.

In 1901 the school building was destroyed by fire and another two-story building was erected. The deed to this building and lot was made jointly to the Odd-Fellows, Masons and Steele School. This building was used until 1928 when the present rock building was constructed. In 1950 a modern concrete block lunchroom was built for the school.

Teachers other than those previously mentioned who have served as principals of the Steele School are Bill Griffin, Miss Ethel Gilchrist, Miss Beatrice Knight, C. E. Bertram, J. Franklin Brown, L. D. Byrd, J. M. Rich, Hugh Toland, Dodd Cox, Ormond Buffington and C. G. Qualls. The following have been listed as teachers in the school: Lila Blair Gaines, Bertie Turner Qualls, Julia Harrison Shaw, Euell Gilchrist, Anna Baggett, Nolle Turner Countryman, Annie Lou Gaines Venable, Ruby Russell Lois Beason Russell, Golah Beason Stovall, Emma John Miller, Wilma Mullinax Nabors, Eudelle Hallmark Harris, Mrs. Dodd Cox, Abbie P. Moore, Lou Turner, Lois Lawrence, Lillie Mae Beason, Annie Whitfield, Vivian Qualls, Weavers Moore, and Grace Langston. Mrs. Anna Baggett an excellent primary teacher taught at Steele School for 34 years. She retired in 1953. C. G. Qualls has been principal at Steele for fifteen years.

About 1900 Steele was incorporated with Bob Little as Mayor. Alderman were J. W. Moore, Luke Buffington, G. G. Wright. Al Smith and E. B. Malton were policeman. The incorporation was later declared illegal.

Sloat and Bush, two northerners built a peach packing house across the railroad from the station about 1900. They had many young peach orchards started on the hills around Steele and on Chandler Mountain. During packing season several people were employed to prepare the fruit for shipment.

Sloat and Bush constructed a basket factory where Willis Owen's house is. Logs were soaked in hot water and steamed, then run through the vaneer machine. They made small baskets for packing fruit. The business was established on borrowed money and for some reason did not pay off so the basket factory was short lived.

Sloat lived in the Steele home which he bought from Sylvester Steele.

For several years there were three operators working in shifts at the railroad station, which shows that the railroads were doing a thriving business.

Dr. Crump was the first doctor in Steele. He chose the place where the Wilcox home is for his residence. He was a Christian gentleman and a great addition to the community. His wife, Mrs. Crump, was a social leader, gifted in directing social events. She always helped the teachers coach their pupils in "elocution," preparing them for the "exhibition". The pupils were permitted to leave school and go to her home for coaching. In warm weather they stood on a stump in her yard and rehearsed their speeches.

More should be said about the doctors who have ministered so faithfully to the inhabitants of Steele. Among them are Dr. Childs,* Dr. Crump, Dr. A. B. Granling, Dr. Clayton, Dr. Ross Tramel, Dr. R. F. McConnell, Dr. M. P. Stevens and Dr. T. T. Wheeler. These doctors were true to the "Country Doctor Type" of a few years back. They rode thousands of miles on horseback or in buggies answering calls both day and night, often visiting families where they knew there was little probability of receiving pay for their services.

Typhoid fever took its toll from the citizens for many years. Sometimes three or four members of a family would be attacked by the dreaded disease and would live for weeks at the point of death. Often death struck twice within a few weeks within the same family.

Life of the settlers in Steele community was hard since there was always work to do and no modern conveniences to make the work easier, but the church offered the settlers a means of social contact as well as a spiritual up-lift. Weddings were always great social events as will be noted from the following account as given by some of the older citizens.

*Dr. Childs, surgeon in Confederate Army. A "southern gentlemen" type. He never practiced medicine in Steele, as he was retired due to his age when he came here.

It is remember that Dr. McConnell came here from Blount County. He boarded with the Trotter family, a leading family of Steele. Their home was above the average of that day (about 1900). They had beautiful china lamps hanging from the ceiling in their living and dining room, also wool rugs with huge roses and red velvet chairs. A piano, the first in Steele, graced their parlor. It was here that the Trotters entertained with an "infair" dinner honoring Dr. McConnell and his bride, the daughter of a local Methodist preacher, by the name of Nickolson, who lived at the Nora Crump home. Aunt Sally Ralls (colored), mother of Susie Ralls who spent her last days near Ashville helped with the dinner and added pomp to the occasion by her elaborate serving at the table. Dr. John Bass and Dr. Cason, of Ashville, Luke and Will Buffington (mere boys at the time) were among the guests at the dinner. Mrs. Trotter used her best china which included individual pudding dishes and individual salt cellars. The dining hall was darkened, the hanging lamps were lighted. The menu included boiled ham, boiled pudding and old fashioned pound cake, that was beat one hour by hand, before it was cooked. Aunt Martha Smith and other neighbors assisted in preparing the food and laying the table. The Nelse Moore house that stood where where the school house now stands was the home that Dr. McConnell built for his bride.

Another wedding of that period that commanded much attention in this area was that of Miss Ollie Crump, adopted daughter of Dr. Crump, to J. W. Gilliland of Attalla. Nothing was spared by Mrs. Crump, gifted in entertaining and doing things in grand style, to make the occasion to be long remembered in Steele.

The marriage vows were read before the alter in the Steele Methodist Church. The church was elaborately decorated with home grown flowers. Among out-of-town guests for this wedding were Mr. and Mrs. Edgar Lee of Attalla. Mr. and Mrs. Gilliland now live near Anniston.

In 1920 there was a School Improvement Society organized at Steele School. It was made up of the parents and teachers. They met at night and both parents attended. Mrs. S. J. Qualls was first president. Mr. J. F. Brown was principal and Mrs. John Russell and Anna Baggett were teachers. Dr. J. I. Riddle, who is now president of Judson College, was a visiting speaker at one of these meetings. He was then principal of Etowah County High School.

The members of the society engaged in debates sometimes for recreation and entertainment. It is remembered that this question was once debated on "be it resolved that the dishrag is more useful to the housewife than the broom." Uncle Nelse Moore with his southern drawl and his many comical expressions was the star comedian of the group.

In 1930 or 1931 Hugh Toland was principal of Steele School. The first P. T. A. was organized with Mrs. L. W. Buffington as first president. Some charter members were Mrs. Eula Burttram, Mrs. Bill Ellis, Mrs. Hugh Toland, Mrs. Essie Free, Mrs. Judy Smith, Mrs. N. J. Turner, Miss Jimmie Lou Turner, Mrs. Abbie Moore and Mrs. Anna Baggett. Prizes were given to the pupils for perfect attendance. Shrubbery was put out around the school building. Mrs. Judy Smith was later president.

In 1937 C. G. Qualls was serving as principal. Mrs. Mae Renfroe was elected president of the P. T. A. The P. T. A. bought a piano and made costumes for the operetta.

Mrs. Henry Jones served as next P. T. A. president. She was succeeded by Mrs. Vivian Beason. Venetian blinds were put in the school building at the cost of \$14.50 each.

Mrs. Leroy Partlow was the next P. T. A. president. During her administration an electric pump was put in the well and drinking fountains and lavatories were put in all the classrooms.

Mrs. Ila Hutchins was the P. T. A. president in 1941 and 1942. From time to time library books were bought and added to the school library. More blinds were also bought for the school.

Mrs. Essie Free became president in 1942 or 1943. The women were felling the need of a lunchroom and worked toward this objective. In 1944, Jewel Wilson was elected president, Mrs. Essie Free, vice-president, Mrs. E. R. Shaw, secretary and treasurer. The lunchroom project was planned and soon put into operation. Mrs. Jewel Wilson and Mrs. Essie Free served the first lunch to forty-five pupils on October 26, 1944 at a cost of fifteen cents per pupil. The first menu consisted of potato chips, hot dogs, apples and milk. Due to the war it was hard to obtain dishes and cooking utensils. Mrs. Will Carden bought the forks in Birmingham. Mrs. Eldon Shaw and Mrs. Jewel Wilson bought the stove and cooking utensils. For six weeks the women donated their work, coming two each day, cooking and serving the meals which were planned by Vivian Qualls. Lunches were served from the vacant classroom which was made into a kitchen.

Mrs. Howard Owens served two terms as president in 1949 and 1950. During this time the concrete block lunch room was constructed. It cost the P. T. A. \$1000. The remaining building costs were paid by the county board of education. Mr. L. D. Byrd and the Rev. J. L. McHugh did the work with other helpers.

Mrs. Jack Hudgins was elected president in 1950. Immediate aims of the P. T. A. were to improve the school grounds and driveways. By February 1951 some of these aims had been accomplished. The organization began working toward the installation of indoor rest rooms.

By the spring of 1952 rest rooms had been installed in the school. Our thanks go to Superintendent Roy Gibson and the County Board of Education. The P. T. A. furnished \$450 for drilling the well.

A spirit of cooperation and understanding between parents and teachers has existed throughout the years. The result of which cannot be estimated in a material way.

The First School Bus In St. Clair County

In 1922 Steele District had voted in the three mill tax, but not all the county had done so. In that fall, 1922, Steele Trustees, Luke Buffington, Jesse Shaw and Will Moore, working with Mr. Carl Q. Baxter, County Superintendent of Education and the County Board who issued a warrant for \$500 bought a truck with the excess tax money from the district and started transporting pupils from Steele to Etowah County High School in Attalla, nine miles away. (Odenville, twenty-five miles away was the nearest high school in St. Clair Co.) Each pupil was supposed to pay one dollar per week to keep the bus operating.

A few Steele residents opposed the idea so strongly that Supt. Baxter asked for a ruling on its legality. Dr. Harwell Davis, now president of Howard College, at that time Attorney General, ruled in favor of the bus - it continued to run for six years. Then St. Clair County School people appealed to Steele patrons to allow their children to ride the St. Clair County Bus, that would be provided and would transport pupils free of charge to the newly organized High School at Ashville. Then the promoters of the first bus used their influence to support their own county school and sent their children to Ashville. Though some few went on to Etowah, providing their own transportation.

This first school truck in St. Clair County was a far cry from the modern buses that transport the children today. It was an open Model T. truck with oil cloth curtains that hung down at the sides and back in rainy weather. In sunny weather the curtains were rolled up and strapped at the top and the pupils enjoyed an open air ride. Two benches ran parallel with the truck bed. The pupils sat facing each other with their knees touching in the aisle. Usually two pupils rode in the front seat with the driver. If he were a single man or boy this was a choice seat. Two or three or sometimes as many as five boys stood on the wooden step at the back of the truck and rode in safety. The bus was wrecked once. No one was seriously hurt.

Often the roads were so muddy that the passengers got off and let the bus pull through the mud by itself or with the big boys pushing. Then after wading through the mud to the bus the pupils got on again and the girls tried to repair damages to their good looks before they reached school.

This was before the days of the Beauty Parlor, if one pupil needed a haircut (the shingled bob was in style) or had shopping to do in town the whole bus load went to town. So it happened that almost every afternoon of the week the Steele bus was parked on the streets of Attalla for about an hour.

If it rained very much the creeks were up, so often the bus was turned back at the deep water or drowned out in mid-stream and had to wait several hours to be pulled out by mules after help had been summonsed. If the riders were ready when the bus came by each morning -- Good ! If not the driver waited until they got there.

When the driver put a little hand mirror in the front of the "truck" in order to see the back step, the riders declared that he was spying on them, suspecting them of disorderly conduct. The driver was patient and always on the job. Part of the time he was paid ten dollars a month. At other times he was allowed to keep what remained of the collected fares after operating expenses were paid.

The riders quarreled among themselves, sang, played games and courted and in spite of all most of them never stopped until they got that High School Diploma. The bus drivers serving during this time were: The Rev. J. L. Garnett, then pastor of the Crawford's Cave Methodist Church Circuit, Dick Clayton, Edmond Crump and Birge Smith.

Among the first pupils riding the bus were Eudell Hallmark, Pearl Autrey, Wilma Mullinax, Vivian Buffington, Ruth Turner, Robbie McWaters, Weavers Freeman, Wilma Johns, Montez Little, Bertie Whisnant, Grace Shaw, Modene Jones, Ethel Brown, Dick Clayton, Jesse Johns, Charlie Russell, Gordon Wilcox, Cecil and James Qualls, Edmond Crump, Willard Trammel and Fred Bell.

It might be interesting to note that Dr. John Ingle Riddle, now president of Judson College, was principal of the Etowah County High School at that time.

Of the number who rode the bus during the six years it was operated sixteen became teachers. Seven are still teaching. Seven hold college degrees. One is a lawyer, one Supervisor of School Transportation, five hold responsible office positions in different industries of the state, one is in Railway Postal service, one a Railroad Signal Maintainer, one heads an automobile company. Others hold reliable positions and are good citizens wherever they are. As their parents were sold on the idea of education, their success proves that education pays off.

Today Steele with a population of 641 claims to rank third in size in St. Clair County. In December 1952 Steele was incorporated into a municipality. W. E. Pope is mayor. Aldermen are Alfred O'Donnell, Paul Pope, Clyde Morrow, Hoyt Hammonds and Tom Wood. Rex Buffington is city clerk.

As the forest in early days furnished homes for the settlers, fuel for heat, tannic acid for the tan yards and ties for the railroad, so today the forest is supporting a large lumber industry in Steele. The Pope and Free Lumber Company employs about thirty men with an average weekly pay roll from \$2500 to \$3000.

There are seven stores in Steele. They are owned and operated by B. W. Pope, Paul Pope, Roy Beason, Horace Sharpton, T. A. Lassetter, A. B. and Clyde Morrow. Two cafe's are operated by Lena Gaskey and Eva Blackman.

Jack Hudgins manages the Steele Garage. John Russell runs a grist mill and Willis Owens, a barber shop. Myrtle Owens operates a beauty parlor in her home.

Burt Brock is post master. N. J. Turner delivers mail daily on a 66 mile route.

About 60 Steele citizens are employed in industries of Attalla, Gadsden or Alabama City. They commute daily. Eleven men and women follow the teaching profession. James and Carl Smith are in the photography business. Seven of our men are employed by the railroad company, while eight are carpenters by trade.

Several older citizens are retired from the Railroad, Government Service, the Ministry, and teaching but are still active in community activities.

Within the city limits one hundred ninety five (195) homes have electricity. Steele has eighty-one telephones listed in the directory. The city is selling bonds to finance a water system for the town.

Steele has three full time churches. The Baptist with P. W. Mitchell as pastor; the Methodist, Ellis Johnson, pastor; and the Nazarene Church, of which J. A. Emerson is pastor. The Nazarene Church in Steele was organized in 1945. The churches work together in a commendable way toward the betterment of community life.

Other evidence that our citizens are aspiring toward a higher plain of living is the organization and work of the Steele Lions Club, the Garden Club and a Boy Scout Troop.

The Steele Lions Club was chartered in January 1952 with 34 members. Ben Burttram was elected president of the Club.

The Steele Garden Club was organized in March 1953. It has 25 members. Mrs. Bivian Free is president.

The Reverend Ellis Johnson is Scoutmaster of the Scout Troop which is sponsored by the Methodist Church.

The Steele P. T. A. is doing a worthwhile work with Mrs. Deward Hollingsworth as president.

The contract has been let and work has begun on a \$70,000 addition to the school plant. An auditorium, classroom, principal's office and a heating plant will be included in the new building. Steele Community would like to express its appreciation to Superintendent Roy Gibson and the St. Clair County Board of Education for their efforts in promoting this project.

Steele has not grown as the "Magic City" in Alabama grew, neither has it made the rapid strides that some of its neighboring towns have. But there is a spirit of friendliness and cooperation among its inhabitants that has caused it to be said, "If you once live in Steele you always want to live there."