

INTRODUCTION.

These reminiscences of pioneer life from Mr. Steele's pen appeared in the ORILLIA PACKET in 1893-4.

John Coucher Steele was a native of the Norman town of Coutances, where he was born on September 27th, 1817. He was educated there and at Upton Grammar School, Worcestershire, England. In 1832 he accompanied his father, Captain Elmes Steele, R.N., to Canada, and settled in Medonte, taking his share in the struggles and difficulties incident to pioneer life in those early days. In 1847 he settled on his own farm, close to "Purbrook," the old homestead occupied by his father, but in the early fifties moved to the Township of Oro, where he purchased the Dunsmore farm, (east half lot 16, concession 6), on which he lived until 1887. As Clerk of the Tenth Division Court he then (on a re-arrangement of the divisional boundaries) moved to Coldwater, where he continued to reside until his decease on the 20th of August, 1909, much respected. Few had a longer experience or knew more of the early history of the County of Simcoe, either political or municipal, than Mr. Steele. He was for a few years Councillor, and then Reeve of Oro for 18 years, having been elected to the chair of the Township Council for seventeen consecutive years by acclamation. He was Warden of the County in 1875, and he was ex-officio a Director of the Northern Railway.

Mr. Steele was a candidate for the constituency of East Simcoe for the Ontario Legislature in 1879, but was not elected. In 1865, when a member of the County Council, he succeeded in having the County entertain a large force of regulars and volunteers under the command of General Napier. The force got free transportation to Barrie, where a grand review was held. This act on the part of Mr. Steele stimulated the military spirit, and resulted in a company being formed at East Oro, under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel, then Captain, O'Brien of Shanty Bay. Mr. Steele succeeded in obtaining a sum of money from the Township for a drill hall and armoury, to supplement the Government grant, and induced the farmers to provide musical instruments and flags. His purse was always ready to assist in the good work of keeping the force in a position to be useful in the defence of the country. Rifle shooting he encouraged by getting the Council to vote prizes to marksmen, and during his time the riflemen of the County had a high place. Personally his militia service consisted of taking part in the suppression of the rebellion of 1837, in a corps raised for the purpose, in which he and his brother, the late Mr. Henry Steele, were officers.

Canada may justly be proud of the record of her early pioneers, and the County of Simcoe will long remember their blameless lives and their ready promotion of all that tended to the welfare of their country.