

Steele made a profound mark on British military leaders and politicians alike.

In 1914, Steele published his autobiography, *Forty Years in Canada*. Robert Stewart has rendered Canadian history a tremendous service having his book *Samuel Steele: Lion of the Frontier* reprinted, commemorating the 100th anniversary of the North-West Mounted Police "Great March West."

Sam Steele's letters home provide unique insight into a bygone era.

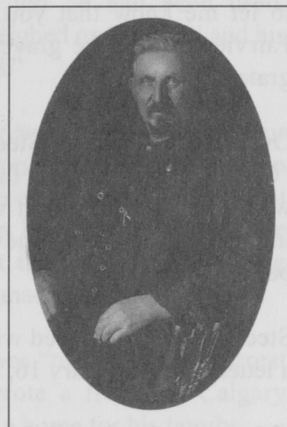
In the spring, Sheelah Roberston of Orillia showed me numerous letters that Steele wrote to her grandfather, Thomas Blaney of Coldwater. While Steele was in both the North-West Mounted Police and in military service, these two men corresponded with each other. Reading these letters is like reliving history.

Thomas Blaney, a father of nine, was a sheriff, a bailiff, a constable and a butcher. He had a butcher shop in Coldwater. Before moving to Coldwater, he lived on the 12th Concession of Oro-Medonte.

John Steele, Sam's brother, was a clerk at the Division Court. Elmes Steele, Sam's father, was a magistrate. It's inevitable that Blaney maintained contact with the Steele family.

In October 1913, Samuel Steele wrote Blaney from Fort Osborne Barracks in Winnipeg. Steele was still in the NWMP at

*Thomas Blaney of Coldwater regularly corresponded with Samuel Steele.*



the time. John Steele had recently passed away. Sam was asking Blaney to look after a tombstone.

Steele writes: "You may be able to find me the cost of a nice solid tombstone ... anxious that nothing should be undone. You could place a brass tablet inside the church. My father gave land there, so there should be a good sized plot to set aside for other graves."

"My father also built the first old wooden church which served for many years and the least the rector and the church warden could do, would be to see the grave would properly kept in good state of repair, don't you think so?"

Elmes Steele purchased the property and built the Anglican Church in Oro-Medonte. The original structure burned down. Today, a rebuilt St. John's Anglican Church is situated on the very same property.

Samuel Steele is still concerned about the family plots in a letter he dispatched to Blaney on August 13, 1917: "My great grandmother Catherine Bond died in the old home and when I went there I could not find the grave nor do I think anyone can. They must have a register of the death. I would be glad if you could drop parson a note asking him to look it up as I want to put up a tablet to her memory. She died about 1849 not before 1848 and was about 93 ..."

Concerning the situation with the grave plots, Steele wrote Blaney: "It's kind of you



*Sheelah Robertson shares her grandfather Thomas Blaney's letters with Rev. Gerry McMillan.*