

Links to the Past Discovered:

Letters from Sam Steele Provide Insight into Bygone Era

By Rev. Gerry McMillan

In the Summer 1998 issue of the Quarterly (Vol. 63 No. 3), an article was published on hero Sir Samuel Steele. Author and Rev. Gerry McMillan's article was also published in a local paper. The research and publication of these articles has allowed the author to meet others who are also studying the legend. Last year, letters that were written by Samuel Steele while he was in the NWMP and the Canadian Military in England were brought to the author's attention by a family living in Orillia, Ontario. So fascinating were these letters that the author decided to write about them. — Editor



Following his involvement with the North-West Mounted Police, Sir Sam Steele (1851–1919) served overseas as a high-ranking military officer.

While in England, during his final stage of life, Steele corresponded with Thomas Blaney of Coldwater. Letters retained by Blaney's descendants provide a glimpse into Steele's character and interests during the early 1900s.

Samuel Benfield Steele had a colourful career as an officer in the famed North-West

Mounted Police and in the Canadian Military. In 1899, Canada, as a part of the British Commonwealth, was obligated to send troops to South Africa when war broke out between the Boers and the British.

Steele would command a Canadian contingent to South Africa. Donald Smith (Lord Strathcona), the individual who had hammered the last spike at the completion of the building of the Canadian Pacific Railroad, financed Steele's troop. In Smith's honour, Steele would name the contingent, "The Lord Strathcona Horse."

Members of the Lord Strathcona Horse are presently a part of the UN Peacekeeping Force in Kosovo.

Steele would remain in South Africa after the war at the request of Lord Baden Powell (founder of the world's Boy Scout movement). He assisted in establishing a police force modelled after the North-West Mounted Police. Then, upon returning to Canada, he commanded the Canadian Militia units between the Great Lakes and the Rocky Mountains.

When the First World War broke out, Steele was stationed in England. As a high-ranking officer he would be responsible for the training of Commonwealth soldiers.