

# General John Steele

By SUSAN C. FRAZER

The first Steele in this country of whom the descendants of General John Steele have absolute knowledge, proved by history, wills, family Bibles, court house records and the gravestones in the old churchyard at Chestnut Level, was Captain William Steele, Sr., born 1707, married Rachel Carr, of Maryland, who was born 1726. He settled along Puddle Duck Run, a small branch of Conowingo Creek. Prior to 1727 the road commonly called the Foundry Road, is described as running past William Steele's farm. He took up 200 acres of land, established a tannery as early as 1730. In 1756 he was in the Provincial Service; commanded a company of associators. He was a staunch Presbyterian patriot, but on account of his advanced years he was unable to endure the fatigues and hardships of an active campaign during the Revolution. His four stalwart sons fought for independence. Captain William Steele died at his home, Drumore Township, (his home is still standing about 2½ miles from here,) October 23d, 1780. The widow, Rachel Carr Steele, died April 18th, 1798. They are buried in the old graveyard of the Presbyterian Church at Chestnut Level. The eldest son, Archibald Steele, was born in 1742. The second son, William, was born July 30th, 1750; he married Elizabeth Bailey who was born October 14th, 1754, and they were married September 14th, 1775. He commanded a Company in the war of the Revolution; fought gallantly on Long Island. He with his wife is buried in the old graveyard of the Presbyterian Church at Chestnut Level. Their daughter, Ann, married first, William Dickson; her second marriage was to Major Thomas Jordan, of Chanceford Township, York County; he was an officer in Gen. Jas. Porter's regiment in the Revolution. Their daughter, Rachel, married Jacob Bailey, son of Robert Bailey, a prominent man in the county. The fourth son of Captain William Steele, James, the youngest son, married Mary Humes. He was too young to join the Revolutionary army, but finally as a boy enlisted, marched as far as Baltimore with his company when they heard of the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown. He distinguished himself during the war of 1812; was made a General; died in 1847, and is buried in cemetery at Harrisburg; his wife died in St. Paul, Minn., in 1864, and is there buried. The third son, John Steele, the subject of this paper, was born June 5th, 1758; he was

sent to the Chestnut Level Select School under the tuition of Rev. James Latta, D. D.; the elder brothers, Archibald and William, were then fighting in war of the Revolution, but on account of his youth his parents refused to allow him to join the army. He was being prepared for College to become a clergyman of the Presbyterian Church. He left school without the consent of his parents, telling his venerable preceptor that until his country was free he must leave his studies for the camp. He entered the army as a volunteer, and though young, soon attained the command of a veteran company. Washington made him a Colonel, appointed him on his staff. At the age of 19 he commanded Mrs. Washington's bodyguard; when the General was away he lived at her quarters at Morristown, N. J. There was great danger of an attack during the absence of the General. He had 60 troopers under him for her defense; so had no fear of the outcome of an attack. (There is a letter here to-day on exhibition which he wrote in 1780, telling of his life at the home of Mrs. Washington.) He was severely wounded at Brandywine, so severely that he was thought dead; six of his faithful soldiers carried him after the battle on a blanket to bury him in the woods to prevent the British from mutilating his body; when they reached the woods with his body they discovered signs of life in him; they carried him a long distance from danger of capture, reaching the home of two elderly ladies, who, though entire strangers to him, nursed him assiduously and were the means of his restoration. His sense of obligation to them and his gratitude were lasting as life. Before he could return to active military duty his father heard what had befallen him and after much search found him in Bucks County, whither he had been carried after many removals, with a view to his safety.

Returning health and strength restored the young soldier to arms, not at all discouraged by what he had suffered. He followed General Washington through many battles, participated in the capture of Cornwallis at Yorktown, where he was field officer of the day when Cornwallis surrendered his sword to Washington.

At the conclusion of the war he returned home with an arm disabled, poor and penniless. Abigail Bailey, daughter of Robert Bailey and Margaret McDill his

wife, the sweetheart of his youth, waited eight years for his return and remained true to her pledge and they were married March 4th, 1784.

Before her marriage she lived with her brother in Lancaster, Francis Bailey, who printed the first almanac, and on the title page was a picture of Washington, Bailey calling him "Washington, the father of his country," the first person who did it. She often sat in his office with her sewing and watched him setting type. One day she said to him, "Francis, I think I can help you," at once commenced operations and actually set up the first pocket almanac which was printed in this State. The knowledge of printing she obtained was of great value to her husband in later life. With firmness, decision, enterprise and activity, she united all the amiable attributes of an accomplished lady; she was well suited to be the wife of young Steele. It was perhaps as much owing to her knowledge of the business of a printer, as to the versatility of the genius of her husband that they went to Philadelphia and engaged in that business which Franklin immortalized and which has immortalized Franklin, setting a praiseworthy example of industry and independence of character when the arts were comparatively new in this country. General Steele with his own hands cast the type with which he and his wife set up the first American edition of Dillsworth's Spelling Book and a copy of the New Testament, publishing edition after edition. Subsequently General Steele removed to a paper manufactory which he established on the Octoraro at Steelville; there also he multiplied copies from his standing types and occasionally repaired them by casting the defaced letter anew. Agriculture was his favorite pursuit and from his paper manufactory and printing he retired to his farm in Drumore, at the Unicorn. While cultivating his native fields he frequently represented his district in the House of Representatives and in the Senate of Pennsylvania. He was very useful in settling difficulties between the different claimants of land in Luzerne County which were long a source of agitation and anxiety in the community whilst acting as Commissioner for his State. To him Logan, the Indian Chief, made his famous address while chairman of a Commission which was sent to make a treaty of peace with

the Indians who had been at war with the whites of Western Pennsylvania and Virginia.

In 1808 he was appointed Collector of the revenue of the United States for the Port of Philadelphia and filled this important office with exemplary ability and fidelity until 1826, when he resigned on account of impaired health.

At the conclusion of the war when Washington bade farewell to his officers at Newburg, he with them formed the Society of the Order of the Cincinnati, which was to perpetuate their friendship, hardships and memories of the war as they returned to their homes and avocations of life. The membership in it was an inheritance to descend to the eldest son of the eldest son in each family for all time. General Steele was one of the founders of this Order. At his death his eldest son, Captain John Steele, of the War of 1812, of Harmony Hall, Lancaster County, inherited it; the insignia is of gold, the American eagle with outstretched wings holding the olive branch in the mouth. William Porter Steele, the eldest son of the Captain, inherited it; then his son, Charles Stetson Steele. He had four daughters but no son, so his eldest grandson, Hugh Hutchinson, of Herndon, Va., is the inheritor; Charles S. Steele was the last male Steele of the General's line; the inheritance now goes out of the Steele name. Of his home life, the highest evidence of the prudence, self-government and equanimity of himself and wife, is that during their married life of 43 years they are said never exchanged an unkind word. This was their testimony concerning each other which was corroborated by their children and intimate friends in their family. General Steele was an elder in the Presbyterian Church at Chestnut Level; very often officiated in that capacity in the Third Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia, of which he was a trustee and one of its valued members. He died on the 22nd of February, his wife two weeks later, on the 13th of March, 1827. They lived the life of Christians,—entered into the rest which remaineth for the people of God. They are buried in the churchyard of the Third Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia on Pine Street between Fourth and Sixth, where a monument of simple proportions is erected.

# BRIEF OF THE TITLE TO THE GENERAL JOHN STEELE

## TRACT NEAR UNICORN, IN DRUMORE TOWNSHIP

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania To John Steele.	Tract of land called "Trenton." Patent Deed dated Nov. 21, 1809. Record in Pat. Book H, Vol. 1, p. 623. Containing 201 Acres.
John Steele's Heirs and Exors. To William Boyd.	Dated Oct. 6, 1829. Record Book N-5-370. Will dated Dec. 4, 1823.
William Boyd To Robert Steele.	Dated Oct. 6, 1829. Record N-5-374.
Robert Steele To James N. Henderson.	Dated April 30, 1838. Not recorded. Now in possession of Charles B. Evans.
James N. Henderson To James Barnes.	Dated Mar. 11, 1839. Record R-11-262.
James Barnes To Robert J. and William Barnes.	Eighty-eight acres adjoining to the east- ward had been bought to it. Dated May 17, 1880, Record R-11-265. For 288 Acres.
Robert J. Barnes, William Barnes, To John N. Haverstick.	Dated March 30, 1882. Record S-11-485. For 179 Acres, part of farm.
John N. Haverstick's heirs To John L. Minnich.	Dated April 1, 1896. Record C-15-349. For 179 Acres.
John L. Minnich's Admrs. To I. C. Arnold.	Dated Mch. 27, 1905. Rec. S-17-589.
I. C. Arnold To Jerries DeLong.	Dated May 5, 1905. Rec. S-17-589.
Clerk of Orphans' Court To Catherine DeLong.	Dated April 30, 1914. Rec. A-22-2. 179 Acres.
Catherine DeLong's Exors. To Paul DeLong and Lewis E. Shoemaker.	Dated Mch. 31, 1921. Left for record but not yet recorded.

## Chas. B. Evans' Title to Part of Steele Tract with New Buildings on Which the Monument is Erected.

Referring back to deed from James Barnes to Robert J. and Wm. Barnes for the whole tract, Record R-11-265 we find:

Robert J. Barnes died Sept. 3rd, 1891, testate. Wm. J. Barnes, Exor.	Will Robert J. Barnes, dated 1891, Will Book J-2-198. Gave Wm. J. Barnes authority to sell his interest.
Wm. J. Barnes personally and as Exor. of Robert J. Barnes. To Charles B. Evans.	Dated Apr. 3, 1909. Record W-19-433. For 109 A. 40 P.

# Report of Celebration Committee

Read by Chairman D. F. MAGEE.

Report of the Committee having charge of the Drumore celebration, and the erection of the Monument Saturday, Sept. 17, 1921.

Your Committee respectfully reports that in pursuance of the purposes and intent of the resolution under which it was appointed it took up the work which was assigned it and carried it to a successful finish and herewith submits in some detail the work done.

The Committee as finally filled and appointed consisted of the following members: D. F. Magee, Chairman; Adaline B. Spindler, Secretary; Prof. H. H. Beck, A. K. Hostetter, I. C. Arnold, Miss Daisy E. B. Grubb, Miss Susan C. Frazer, Mrs. John A. Nauman, Mrs. Grace Collins Scott, H. Frank Eshleman, George W. Hensel, Jr., Mr. and Mrs. Edgar B. Maxwell, Mr. and Mrs. T. C. Evans.

The Chairman afterwards added to this Committee a large number of persons and assigned to them work on special Committees, the following being the names of the Committees and respective chairman:

Vocal and Instrumental Music, Prof. H. H. Beck, Chairman; Invitations, H. Frank Eshleman, Chairman; Foundation and Stone, George W. Hensel, Chairman; Tablets and Marker, Prof. H. H. Beck, Chairman; Reception and Social, Mrs. John A. Nauman, Chairman; Old Homes and Grounds, Edgar B. Maxwell, Chairman; Exhibit of Relics, John L. Summy, Chairman; Dinner and Refreshments, Thos. C. Evans, Chairman; Autos and Transportation, Levi McAllister, Chairman.

The Chairman herewith wishes to acknowledge with the thanks of the Society the enthusiastic spirit and the willingness to work shown by all chairmen and their able assistants. Each of them filled their parts most willingly and ably and to this united effort is the grand success of the undertaking due; and while he would detract nothing from the excellent work done by all, he feels that justice demands that special mention should be made of the excellence and generosity of the work done by Mr. and Mrs. Edgar B. Maxwell and Prof. H. H. Beck.

The Maxwells literally took off all gates, laid down all bars and threw open all doors to their beautiful and hospitable home and invited all the countryside to

come in and enjoy themselves to the limit in any and every part of the farm and buildings. They spared neither time, labor or expense in preparing the stand and tables for our entertainment; and the result of their labor gave to us the most beautiful and artistic staging and setting for the celebration that any of us have ever seen.

Prof. Beck rendered invaluable services in the search for and selection of the stone, and in the planning and design of the tablets and the composing of the excellent legends that are found on each.

It took many days of work and thought and much time spent, the story of which is all told in the beautiful monument and tablets thereon to show to the generations to come, the noble patriots of our County, sons of Drumore. Standing on firm foundation far under ground this perfect shaft of trap rock and enduring bronze will stand for years unnumbered to tell its story of noble deeds, a reminder of the good work of the Lancaster County Historical Society.

Your Committee selected for the authors of the four papers to the men to be commemorated, the following: Doctor David Ramsay, H. Frank Eshleman, Esq.; Gen. John Steele, Miss Susan C. Frazer; Col. Thomas Porter, Robert B. Risk, Esq.; and Archibald Steele, D. F. Magee, Esq.

The papers prepared by each will speak for themselves and are a valuable accession to our historic archives; they are herewith attached and made part of this report.

It may be noted here that the original intention to have Mr. Magee prepare a paper upon the ancestry of John C. Calhoun was not carried out for the reason that Mr. Magee after most exhaustive search in all attainable sources and direction, did not feel that it was possible to produce with the certainty and accuracy that our Society expects, proof that the direct Calhoun ancestry had been resident in our County. The Calhouns who did live and reside for several generations in Drumore, and of whom descendants are still here in the Pennys. were apparently connected with the John C. ancestry, probably cousins, there was available no record proof that Patrick Calhoun, the father of John C. Calhoun, was born or lived here.

But nothing was lost to our historic

records by the substitution of Archibald Steele in his stead; for our Society has learned thereby that in him she gave to our country one of the bravest and most heroic men in all the Continental Army.

The poem written by Will F. McSparan, a son of Drumore, upon the life of Archibald Steele, was a most excellent production and reflects as great an honor upon the literary attainments and poetic genius of another Drumore son as it does upon the heroic valor of the revolutionary soldier. It is attached herewith and made part of this report.

The threatening weather of the morning kept many away from the celebration; nevertheless the gathering was a very large and notable one and it was estimated that there was present about eight hundred people, many of them coming from a long distance and quite a number of the Steele descendants were present.

Six hundred invitations were printed and sent out to the members and their friends, as also to a large number of others whom it was thought would be interested in the celebration through old associations.

All of the surrounding historical Societies in other Counties were specially invited. Invitations were sent to the Governors of Pennsylvania and other state officials, as also Robert Arthur Cooper, the governor of South Carolina, and the Mayor, John P. Grace, of Charleston, S. C. All replied, excusing themselves on account of other more urgent engagements; but all expressing their appreciation and extending to our Society their well wishes for our success. Besides the number of Steeles present, Hon. George T. Porter, a son of Governor Porter, of Indiana, was present, as also John McCardel, one of Indiana's big men of the day, once a Martie boy, was with us and gave us a fine address.

Hon. Cyrus T. Fox, Secretary of the Berks County Historical Society, was present and gave an address; also the Rev. John B. Laird was present and gave an address that was interesting and timely.

A number of very interesting pictures, relics of the Steele family, including a picture of General John Steele, and Col. Archibald Steele, as also a letter from Dr. David Ramsay, the Bible of General Steele, and also his sword used in service, were among the most notable. The pictures in oil, brought by Miss Sue C. Frazer were much admired.

Good pictures of all of the present homes on the sites of the old homesteads, as also a picture of the monument, were taken by D. B. Landis, the official photographer, some of which were used in illustrations. Mr. Landis has sets of fives of these pictures which he is furnishing at cost, one dollar for the five.

The country dinner furnished by Caterers Eckman and Smith consisting of chicken, roasting ears, sweet potatoes and all the side dishes, topped out with ice cream, was highly appreciated and partaken of by upwards of three hundred people.

Extra trolley cars were furnished by the Traction Company and all were accommodated and the service of automobiles to carry the visitors on the tour of the residences of the four heroes of the day was fully adequate to all demands though owing to the threatening weather many of them were late in arriving as they believed they would not be wanted.

The whole programme from the start in the morning to the final bugler's call of reveille was carried out completely and on time in every feature, and not one number was even five minutes late.

Honorable George T. Porter, a lineal descendant of Colonel Thomas Porter and a son of Governor Albert G. Porter, of Indiana, was so well pleased with the work of the Society throughout that he volunteered a contribution of One Hundred Dollars towards the expense of the monument.

The legends on the monument are as follows:

#### DR. DAVID RAMSAY

Historian—Surgeon—Patriot  
Born one mile southwest, 1749  
Continental Army Surgeon  
Friend of Washington  
Constructive leader in Congress  
Talented man in letters  
The Father of American History  
He is best known for his History  
of the American Revolution, Life  
of Washington,  
History of America, and  
Universal History Americanized  
Practiced medicine and died 1815  
in Charleston, S. C.

#### GENERAL JOHN STEELE

Born three miles north, 1753  
Resident of this farm  
Volunteer at 18. Captain at 19.  
Colonel on Washington's staff at 21  
Wounded at Brandywine and  
at Germantown  
Pennsylvania Legislature (House,) 1801  
Speaker of Senate, 1806  
Collector of Port Philadelphia,  
1808—1825  
As commissioner to treat with  
warring tribes, to him was ad-  
dressed the famous speech of  
Logan, the Indian chief,  
Died 1827.

#### COLONEL THOMAS PORTER

Born three miles north, 1738  
A pioneer spirit of American  
Independence  
Committee of Sixty, 1774  
Organizer of ten Lancaster County

Author: Frazer, Susan C.

Title: General John Steele / by Susan C. Frazer.

Primary Material: Book

Subject(s): Steele, John, 1758-1827.  
Society of the Order of the Cincinnati.  
Minutemen (Militia)  
United States--History--Revolution, 1775-1783.

Publisher: Lancaster, Pa. : Lancaster County Historical Society, 1921

Description: 20-23 p. : ill. ; 23 cm.

Series: Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society ; v. 25,  
no. 8

Call Number: 974.9 L245 v.25

Location: LCHSJL -- Journal Article (reading room)

+++++

Institution Name  
Institution Address  
Institution Phone Number  
Institution E-mail Address