

# Library picture worth a thousand words

A picture and article among the clippings at Farmington Community Library's new Heritage Room showed two people near a tree, and on the tree was a sign.



Ruth Moehlman was nailed to the tree in front of the home of Frank and Bertha Steele

in December 1949. The sign and a certificate, signed by the Governor of Michigan, are still owned by the family members who live in the house Frank Steele built on the family farm.

The sign was presented to the Steeles as one of the farms in Oakland County that was owned by the same family over 100 years.

The farm is now the Old Homestead subdivision. The tree is no longer in front of the house at 3810 11 Mile Road, but an eighth generation of the original settler's family are now growing up in the Frank Steele house, which is part of the Farmington Hills Historic District.

### PIONEER'S HOME

In 1824 when Farmington was founded, Edward Steele rode horseback from East Bloomfield, New York to select his farm in the Michigan territory. He was 24 years old at the time.

He picked out 240 acres which also contained a fast moving stream. It was the age of waterpower, so the stream was a valuable asset.

Edward Steele rode home. By the time he returned with his family three years later, he had set up a partnership for running a grist mill with his brother, Hartman, and Howland Mason, a skilled miller. Mason fashioned the bedstone and



runner to grind the wheat from stones in the neighborhood. It was the first grist mill in this part of Oakland County.

As Edward Steele farmed his land, a little village grew up around the mill. Edward and his wife Louisa had a son, Carlos, in 1828. Edward Steele died 16 years later.

He was only 36 and left young Carlos to run the farm. The mill was sold and had numerous owners. When it became economically unrewarding to operate, it was dismantled in 1930.

Carlos married his second wife, Ella Nelson, in 1866. They had eight children, four of whom attended Michigan State Normal College at Ypsilanti, now Eastern Michigan University and became teachers. The youngest, Frank, taught in Detroit and became principal at the Macmillan School. He married Bertha Crosby in 1901. Bertha was the daughter of Andrew Crosby, the first Michigan man to enlist in the Union Army during the Civil War.

It was reported that Frank Steele met Bertha Crosby at college. After they married, they lived in Farmington village, and Frank was able to commute by Detroit United Railway to his job teaching in Detroit. From the turn of the century to the late 1920s, the Detroit United Railway was Michigan's mass transit system.

### BURNED HOME REPLACED

In 1904, the original family house on the Steele farm burned, and Frank's parents

Carlos and Ella moved to Farmington Village. Frank purchased the family farm from them.

After World War I, Frank and Bertha Steele had a stone bungalow built on the family farm. Construction began in 1919 and was completed in 1920. Local contractors Fred Schnepeter and Amos Otis did the work. The stone and some of the lumber was from the Steele farm.

A generator supplied electricity for the house. As road transportation improved, Frank Steele was able to commute to his position in Detroit by model T Ford, and there was a stone garage to house the family car. A Ford tractor was used on the farm, where a hired hand did most of the work.

Both Frank and Bertha Steele were active in the Farmington community.

Frank served on the Township Board and was a Justice of the Peace.

Frank Steele also wrote a history of Sleepy Hollow and the mill for the Oakland County Pioneer and Historical Society in 1936, leaving a record of Farmington's first mill and the little town that existed for a short time.

Bertha Steele died in 1954. In 1955, in cooperation with abutting land owners, Old Homestead Subdivision was platted on the Steele farm.

Frank Steele died having left no children, and by that time, the farm had been subdivided.

The house went to Frank Steele's niece Florence Steele Shampy whose daughter Betty and her husband Robert Bohm were the next owners.

Their son, also Robert Bohm, and his wife Mary now live in the house with their children. They are completing some restoration work on their antique home.

The stone bungalow, built on land that has been in the family since 1824, is a very special part of Farmington Hills.

Ruth Moehlman is a local historian and resident of Farmington Hills.



BYRON MITCHELL | OBSERVER

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