Sloat lived in the Steele home which he bought from Sylvester Steele.

For several years there were three operators working in shifts at the railroad station, which shows that the railroads were doing a thriving business.

Dr. Crump was the first doctor in Steele. He chose the place where the Wilcox home is for his residence. He was a Christian gentleman and a great addition to the community. His wife, Mrs. Crump, was a social leader, gifted in directing social events. She always helped the teachers coach their pupils in "elocution," preparing them for the "exhibition". The pupils were permitted to leave school and go to her home for coaching. In warm weather they stood on a stump in her yard and rehearsed their speeches.

More should be said about the doctors who have ministered so faithfully to the inhabitants of Steele. Among them are Dr. Childs,* Dr. Crump, Dr. A. B. Gramling, Dr. Clayton, Dr. Ross Tramel, Dr. R. F. McConnell, Dr. M. P. Stevens and Dr. T. T. Wheeler. These doctors were true to the "Country Doctor Type" of a few years back. They rode thousands of miles on horseback or in buggies answering calls both day and night, often visiting families where they knew there was little probability of receiving pay for their services.

Typhoid fever took its tole from the citizens for many years. Sometimes three or four members of a family would be attached by the dreaded disease and would live for weeks at the point of death. Often death struck twice within a few weeks within the same family.

Life of the settlers in Steele community was hard since there was always work to do and no modern conveniences to make the work easier, but the church offered the settlers a means of social contact as well as a spiritual up-lift. Weddings were always great social events as will be noted from the following account as given by some of the older citizens.

*Dr. Childs, surgeon in Confederate Army. A "southern gentlemen" type. He never practiced medicine in Steele, as he was retired due to his age when he came here.

It is remember that Dr. McConnell came here from Blount County. He boarded with the Trotter family, a leading family of Steele. Their home was above the average of that day (about 1900). They had beautiful china lamps hanging from the ceiling in their living and dining room, also wool rugs with huge roses and red velvet chairs. A piano, the first in Steele, graced their parlor. It was here that the Trotters entertained with an "infair" dinner honoring Dr. McConnell and his bride, the daughter of a local Methodist preacher, by the name of Nickolson, who lived at the Nora Crump home. Aunt Sally Ralls (colored), mother of Susie Ralls who spent her last days near Ashville helped with the dinner and added pomp to the occasion by her elaborate serving at the table. Dr. John Bass and Dr. Cason, of Ashville, Luke and Will Buffington (mere boys at the time) were among the guests at the dinner. Mrs. Trotter used her best china which included individual pudding dishes and individual salt cellars. The dining hall was darkened, the hanging lamps were lighted. The menu included boiled ham, boiled pudding and old fashioned pound cake, that was beat one hour by hand, before it was cooked. Aunt Martha Smith and other neighbors assisted in preparing the food and laying the table. The Nelse Moore house that stood where where the school house now stands was the home that Dr. McConnell built for his bride.

Another wedding of that period that commanded much attention in this area was that of Miss Ollie Crump, adopted daughter of Dr. Crump, to J. W. Gilliland of Attalla. Nothing was spared by Mrs. Crump, gifted in entertaining and doing things in grand style, to make the occasion to be long remembered in Steele.

The marriage vows were read before the alter in the Steele Methodist Church. The church was elaborately decorated with home grown flowers. Among out-of-town guests for this wedding were Mr. and Mrs. Edgar Lee of Attalla. Mr. and Mrs. Gilliland now live near Anniston.

In 1920 there was a School Improvement Society organized at Steele School. It was made up of the parents and teachers. They met at night and both parents attended. Mrs. S. J. Qualls was first president. Mr. J. F. Browne was principal and Mrs. John Russell and Anna Baggett were teachers. Dr. J. I. Riddle, who is now president of Judson College, was a visiting speaker at one of these meetings. He was then principal of Etowah County High School.

The members of the society engaged in debates sometimes for recreation and entertainment. It is remembered that this question was once debated on "be it resolved that the dishrag is more useful to the housewife than the broom." Uncle Nelse Moore with his southern drawl and his many comical expressions was the star comedian of the group.

In 1930 or 1931 Hugh Toland was principal of Steele School. The first P. T. A. was organized with Mrs. L. W. Buffington as first president. Some charter members were Mrs. Eula Burttram, Mrs. Bill Ellis, Mrs. Hugh Toland, Mrs. Essie Free, Mrs. Judy Smith, Mrs. N. J. Turner, Miss Jimmie Lou Turner, Mrs. Abbie Moore and Mrs. Anna Baggett. Prizes were given to the pupils for perfect attendance. Shrubbery was put out around the school building. Mrs. Judy Smith was later president.

In 1937 C. G. Qualls was serving as principal. Mrs. Mae Renfroe was elected president of the P. T. A. The P. T. A. bought a piano and made costumes for the operetta.

Mrs. Henry Jones served as next P. T. A. president. She was succeeded by Mrs. Vivian Beason. Venetian blinds were put in the school building at the cost of $14.50 each.

Mrs. Leroy Partlow was the next P. T. A. president. During her administration an electric pump was put in the well and drinking founts and lavatories were put in all the classrooms.

Mrs. Ila Hutchins was the P. T. A. president in 1941 and 1942. From time to time library books were bought and added to the school library. More blinds were also bought for the school.

Mrs. Essie Free became president in 1942 or 1943. The women were felling the need of a lunchroom and worked toward this objective. In 1944, Jewel Wilson was elected president, Mrs. Essie Free, vice-president, Mrs. E. R. Shaw, secretary and treasurer. The lunchroom project was planned and soon put into operation. Mrs. Jewel Wilson and Mrs. Essie Free served the first lunch to forty-five pupils on October 26, 1944 at a cost of fifteen cents per pupil. The first menu consisted of potato chips, hot dogs, apples and milk. Due to the war it was hard to obtain dishes and cooking utensils. Mrs. Will Carden bought the forks in Birmingham. Mrs. Elden Shaw and Mrs. Jewel Wilson bought the stove and cooking utensils. For six weeks the women donated their work, coming two each day, cooking and serving the meals which were planned by Vivian Qualls. Lunches were served from the vacant classroom which was made into a kitchen.

Mrs. Howard Owens served two terms as president in 1949 and 1950. During this time the concrete block lunch room was constructed. It cost the P. T. A. $1000. The remaining building costs were paid by the county board of education. Mr. L. D. Byrd and the Rev. J. L. McHugh did the work with other helpers.

Mrs. Jack Hudgins was elected president in 1950. Immediate aims of the P. T.A. were to improve the school grounds and driveways. By February 1951 some of these aims had been accomplished. The organization began working toward the installation of indoor rest rooms.

By the spring of 1952 rest rooms had been installed in the school. Our thanks go to Superintendent Roy Gibson and the County Board of Education. The P. T. A. furnished $450 for drilling the well.

A spirit of cooperation and understanding between parents and teachers has existed throughout the years. The result of which cannot be estimated in a material way.

The First School Bus In St. Clair County

In 1922 Steele District had voted in the three mill tax, but not all the county had done so. In that fall, 1922, Steele Trustees, Luke Buffington, Jesse Shaw and Will Moore, working with Mr. Carl Q. Baxter, County Superintendent of Education and the County Board who issued a warrant for $500 bought a truck with the excess tax money from the district and started transporting pupils from Steele to Etowah County High School in Attalla, nine miles away. (Odenville, twenty-five miles away was the nearest high school in St. Clair Co.) Each pupil was supposed to pay one dollar per week to keep the bus operating.

A few Steele residents opposed the idea so strongly that Supt. Baxter asked for a ruling on its legality. Dr. Harwell Davis, now president of Howard College, at that time Attorney General, ruled in favor of the bus - it continued to run for six years. Then St. Clair County School people appealed to Steele patrons to allow their children to ride the St. Clair County Bus, that would be provided and would transport pupils free of charge to the newly organized High School at Ashville. Then the promoters of the first bus used their influence to support their own county school and sent their children to Ashville. Though some few went on to Etowah, providing their own transportation.

This first school truck in St. Clair County was a far cry from the modern buses that transport the children today. It was an open Model T. truck with oil cloth curtains that hung down at the sides and back in rainy weather. In sunny weather the curtains were rolled up and strapped at the top and the pupils enjoyed an open air ride. Two benches ran parallel with the truck bed. The pupils sat facing each other with their knees touching in the aisle. Usually two pupils rode in the front seat with the driver. If he were a single man or boy this was a choice seat. Two or three or sometimes as many as five boys stood on the wooden step at the back of the truck and rode in safety. The bus was wrecked once. No one was seriously hurt.

Often the roads were so muddy that the passengers got off and let the bus pull through the mud by itself or with the big boys pushing. Then after wading through the mud to the bus the pupils got on again and the girls tried to repair damages to their good looks before they reached school.

This was before the days of the Beauty Parlor, if one pupil needed a haircut (the shingled bob was in style) or had shopping to do in town the whole bus load went to town. So it happened that almost every afternoon of the week the Steele bus was parked on the streets of Attalla for about an hour.

If it rained very much the creeks were up, so often the bus was turned back at the deep water or drowned out in mid-stream and had to wait several hours to be pulled out by mules after help had been summonsed. If the riders were ready when the bus came by each morning -- Good ! If not the driver waited until they got there.

When the driver put a little hand mirror in the front of the "truck" in order to see the back step, the riders declared that he was spying on them, suspecting them of disorderly conduct. The driver was patient and always on the job. Part of the time he was paid ten dollars a month. At other times he was allowed to keep what remained of the collected fares after operating expenses were paid.

The riders quarreled among themselves, sang, played games and courted and in spite of all most of them never stopped until they got that High School Diploma. The bus drivers serving during this time were: The Rev. J. L. Garnett, then pastor of the Crawford's Cave Methodist Church Circuit, Dick Clayton, Edmond Crump and Birge Smith.

Among the first pupils riding the bus were Eudell Hallmark, Pearl Autrey, Wilma Mullinax, Vivian Buffington, Ruth Turner, Robbie McWaters, Weavers Freeman, Wilma Johns, Montez Little, Bertie Whisnant, Grace Shaw, Modene Jones, Ethel Brown, Dick Clayton, Jesse Johns, Charlie Russell, Gordon Wilcox, Cecil and James Qualls, Edmond Crump, Willard Trammel and Fred Bell.

It might be interesting to note that Dr. John Ingle Riddle, now president of Judson College, was principal of the Etowah County High School at that time.

Of the number who rode the bus during the six years it was operated sixteen became teachers. Seven are still teaching. Seven hold college degrees. One is a lawyer, one Supervisor of School Transportation, five hold responsible office positions in different industries of the state, one is in Railway Postal service, one a Railroad Signal Maintainer, one heads an automobile company. Others hold reliable positions and are good citizens wherever they are. As their parents were sold on the idea of education, their success proves that education pays off.

Today Steele with a population of 641 claims to rank third in size in St. Clair County. In December 1952 Steele was incorporated into a municipality. W. E. Pope is mayor. Aldermen are Alfred O'Donnell, Paul Pope, Clyde Morrow, Hoyt Hammonds and Tom Wood. Rex Buffington is city clerk.

As the forest in early days furnished homes for the settlers, fuel for heat, tannic acid for the tan yards and ties for the railroad, so today the forest is supporting a large lumber industry in Steele. The Pope and Free Lumber Company employs about thiry men with an average weekly pay roll from $2500 to $3000.

There are seven stores in Steele. They are owned and operated by B. W. Pope, Paul Pope, Roy Beason, Horace Sharpton, T. A. Lassetter, A. B. and Clyde Morrow. Two cafe's are operated by Lena Gaskey and Eva Blackman.

Jack Hudgins manages the Steele Garage. John Russell runs a grist mill and Willis Owens, a barbar shop. Myrtle Owens operates a beauty parlor in her home.

Burt Brock is post master. N. J. Turner delivers mail daily on a 66 mile route.

About 60 Steele citizens are employed in industries of Attalla, Gadsden or Alabama City. They commute daily. Eleven men and women follow the teaching professic James and Carl Smith are in the photography business. Seven of our men are employed by the railroad company, while eight are carpenters by trade.

Several older citizens are retired from the Railroad, Government Service, the Ministry, and teaching but are still active in community activities.

Within the city limits one hundred ninety five (195) homes have electricity. Steele has eighty-one telephones listed in the directory. The city is selling bonds to finance a water system for the town.

Steele has three full time churches. The Baptist with P. W. Mitchell as pastor; the Methodist, Ellis Johnson, pastor; and the Nazerene Church, of which J. A. Emerson is pastor. The Nazerene Church in Steele was organized in 1945. The churches work together in a commendable way toward the betterment of community life.

Other evidence that our citizens are aspiring toward a higher plain of living is thr organization and work of the Steele Lions Club, the Garden Club and a Boy Scout Troop.

The Steele Lions Club was chartered in January 1952 with 34 members. Ben Burttram was elected president of the Club.

The Steele Garden Club was organized in March 1953. It has 25 members. Mrs. Bivian Free is president.

The Reverend Ellis Johnson is Scoutmaster of the Scout Troop which is sponsored by the Methodist Church.

The Steele P. T. A. is doing a worthwhile work with Mrs. Deward Hollingsworth as president.

The contract has been let and work has begun on a $70,000 addition to the school plant. An auditorium, classroom, principal's office and a heating plant will be included in the new building. Steele Community would like to express its appreciation to Superintendent Roy Gibson and the St. Clair County Board of Education for their efforts in promoting this project.

Steele has not grown as the "Magic City" in Alabama grew, neither has it made the rapid strides that some of its neighboring towns have. But there is a spirit of friendliness and cooperation among its inhabitants that has caused it to be said, "If you once live in Steele you always want to live there."