

Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with Harold Steele

Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
& Illinois State Museum's

Oral History of Illinois Agriculture project

Interview # AIS-V-L-2008-031

Harold Steele, a farmer, former President of the IAA, and former CEO of the Farm Credit Administration, was interviewed on the date listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's and Illinois State Museum's *Oral History of Illinois Agriculture* project.

Interview dates & location:

Date: June 17, 2008

Location: Steele residence, Princeton, IL

Interview Format: Digital video

Interviewer: Don Shandrow, ALPL volunteer

Technical Support (cameraman, etc): Mark Suszko of IL Information Service

Transcription by: Tape Transcription Center, Boston, MA

Edited by: Rozanne Flatt, ALPL volunteer

Total Pages: 28 pgs Total Time: 0:59 + 0:53 + 0:49 / 0.98 + 0.88 = 2.68 hrs

Sessions 1 & 2: Growing up on the farm & life as Pres. of IL Farm Bureau

Session 3: Walking tour of Steele's extensive farm artifacts collection

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on 12/19/2008.

Interviews are archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Illinois.

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Abstract

Harold Steele, *Oral History of IL Agriculture*, AIS-V-L-2008-031

Biographical Information Overview of Interview: Harold Steele was born on July 8, 1922 in Sublette, IL, grew up on the family farm that his great-grandfather established in 1873 in nearby Dover, and attended the University of Illinois, including ROTC. He enlisted in the army in 1942, was inducted in June 1943 and took Field Artillery Basic Training in Ft. Sill, Oklahoma. After engineer training at the University of Illinois, he was transferred to Ft. Benning, GA, for Infantry Basic Training and Officer Candidate School. Commissioned in the Infantry in October 1944, Steele was assigned as the Platoon Leader of the 2nd Platoon, Company I, 3rd Battalion, 353rd Infantry Regiment, 89th Infantry Division. Harold served in France, Germany, and Austria where he met his wife, Margery Whiteley in Vienna.

Steele returned to farming when he got back to the states. He spoke extensively about the technology advances that transformed agriculture. He focused on the efficiency of confinement hog operations and the roles of George Brauer and Russ Jeckel. In 1970, Harold was elected Vice President of the Illinois Farm Bureau and soon became president, serving in that position for 13 years. During that time, he dealt with issues in regard to the farm credit system, the international agricultural market, trade missions to Japan, China, and Russia, and commodity groups, among many other things. He addressed the ever-evolving role of the farmer and the struggles that accompany the profession. Following his time with the Farm Bureau, Harold became the CEO of the Farm Credit Administration and served there for four years.

Harold has a large collection of primitive agricultural tools, including a model horse made by the Coffin Brothers Harness Company, various arrowheads, a reaper that is over 100 years old and still functioning, a groundhog threshing machine, a maple burl specimen (as well as products made from maple burl), many one-of-a-kind farm tools, a stone flour mill, a 1933 vintage F-12 harvester, an LP tractor from 1952, a few John Deere tractors, a Roger Piper Speedigger (made in Princeton, IL), and a hay loader. Most of this equipment is still in working order today. Harold explained the function of many of the pieces and spoke about the reasoning behind keeping the history of agriculture alive. He passed away on Feb. 1, 2019.

Subject Headings/Key Words: diversified agriculture; University of Illinois; ROTC; Field Artillery Basic Training; 89th Infantry Division; Margery (Whiteley) Steele; threshing machine; the invention of the combine; hog confinement; Smithfield; Prairie Farmer Magazine; land-grant college system; Illinois Farm Bureau; Illinois Agriculture Association; *Farm Week*; farm credit system; Archer Daniels Midland Company; international agricultural market; trade missions; Meat Export Federation; Ronald Reagan; Farm Bill; Farm Credit Admin.

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