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Pictured: The Steeles’ house as it sits today.

Pictured: Paul Beckley (seated), with the Steeles, circa 1913.
In October 1893, Eliza, her second-grade teacher, married Herbert, having come to Scott County in 1892. The Steeles were among the first permanent settlers in Scott County after it was organized in 1886. Herbert was born in 1859 in East Bloomfield, New York, the first of 11 children. Some 25 years later, his family found their way to Dickinson County. It is unclear when Herbert moved to the Logan/Scott county area, but it may have been in the late 1880s or early 1890s. A brief 1890 newspaper article notes that Herbert was mending timepieces in the area, so he must have lived in the region. Conversely, an article announcing Herbert's death states that he came to Scott County in 1892. There are no records to indicate where Herbert lived between his arrival in the Logan/Scott county area and his marriage to Eliza.

Eliza Landon was born in 1858 in Jonesborough, Tenn. The Landon family were living in Missouri in 1880, and land patent records indicate they were in Scott County by 1889. Eliza was a teacher before she married Herbert, having received her second-grade teaching certificate in 1889. They were married in Scott City in 1892. It is unknown where the Steeles lived between the time of their marriage and when they built their house. Though the couple had three children, none survived their parents.

A House of Stone
In October 1893, Eliza bought the land where their house stands for $225. It is located on the west side of Ladder Creek upstream from where Lake Scott now sits. At first, the couple lived on this property in a simple dugout built into the east-facing slope east of an unimproved county road. In circa 1894, they "renovated" their dugout and added a floor above it, building the two-level stone house we see today. The original road is now paved and familiar to park visitors as West Scott Lake Drive.

Built of limestone blocks, the house faces west so that the entrance to the main floor is one story and the east elevation is two stories. The house measures 30 feet long by 30 feet wide; the roof eaves are 25 feet above grade at the rear of the house. The house is topped by a wood-shingled roof. A central brick chimney evident in historic images no longer exists.

Inside, visitors are treated to a glimpse of the Steeles' lives in the early 1900s. The seven-room house has five upper-level rooms, including a parlor and a family living area on the west side, each with a separate front door and two bedrooms on the east side with a walk-in, windowed pantry between them. Continuing to the lower level, the east room was used as a "summer" kitchen where Eliza would can and preserve a variety of fruits and vegetables. This room has a door to the outside through the east wall. The west basement room was Eliza's workroom and where the Steeles repaired tools and other equipment used around the ranch.

The Steeles raised cattle and crops, but gardening was their livelihood. They sold fruits and vegetables harvested from their orchard and garden Scott City either from a horse and buggy or spring wagon and team, as they never owned a motorized vehicle. The garden was east of the house, and the orchard was to the south, (where the park maintenance facility is situated).

The stone springhouse north of their house not only supplied their water but was used to store perishable food items. Across the road west of the house, they built a large barn for horses, milk cows, other livestock, hay, wagons and buggies. North of the barn was a stone chicken house, but the barn and chicken house were demolished long ago.

Eliza tended to a variety of chores, which included cooking, charming butter, washing, sewing, weaving and milking the cows. She also made cheese, hominy, sauerkraut, jellies and jams, spun wool from their sheep and wove fabric for clothing, rugs and quilts. To supplement their income, Eliza sold some of her creations while Herbert repaired clocks, sewing machines and other small machinery.

History Unearthed
A gentle mound of soil and rocks north of their house drew the Steeles' curiosity, and in 1898 Herbert invited University of Kansas paleontologists to excavate the mound. They found the remains of a seven-room pueblo that archeologists believe to be the location of El Cuartelejo, a Plains Apache village where Toaos and Piuris Pueblo Indians lived after fleeing New Mexico in 1664 to escape Spanish rule. Later excavations throughout the canyon revealed evidence of other Native American habitation and led to the 1964 designation of a large portion of the canyon as the El Cuartelejo Archeological District National Historic Landmark. In 1922, the Steeles deeded two acres of the El Cuartelejo site to the Kansas Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), so it could be preserved and shared with the public. The land has since been deeded to the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT). The restored foundation of the pueblo can be seen north of the Steele house, along with a monument erected by the DAR in 1925.
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Pictured: Rear of house showing walkout basement.
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