

Clippings (compiled from SHPO files)
Steele House Museum
Scott State Park, Scott County
171-0000-00001

From the Scott County News-Lever, September 14, 1899:

Handel T. Martin, who is at work for the Kansas University is now engaged in making a thorough investigation of the ancient ruins on Beaver creek. It is hoped that Mr. Martin will be able to finally decide as to the antiquity and origin of these ruins as several theories have been advanced. It is reported that the ruins so far exposed are very interesting.

Ibid., October 5, 1899:

Mr. Martin, the assistant in paleontology, arrived on Wednesday and is now at work in the laboratory arranging and preparing for exhibition the relics found in the ruins in Scott county. These ruins have been known for sometime and Mr. Martin has spent several weeks making thorough excavations and study of them. He has found proof of a considerable Pueblo village. The ruins showed quite plainly the form of a house fifty feet long, build of adobe and stone, having seven rooms. Here were found charred corn, an Indian ax and other utensils showing that Indians and white men had dwelt there, or that the former had carried white men's utensils thither.

Dr. Williston and Mr. Martin have a most interesting story which will appear in the Quarterly.--K. U. Weekly.

“Scott County State Park.” *Scott City News Chronicle*, June 24, 1937, 50th Anniversary Edition.

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Scott City News Chronicle
June 24, 1937 - 50th Anniv. Ed

Scott County State Park

"The Playground of Kansas"

The grounds that now comprise the Scott County State park were the recreation center of western Kansas long before the idea was ever conceived of making it a state park. For many, many years individuals as well as parties have gone there to enjoy an outing or some fishing; to climb over the hills and rocks, or perhaps just to get into the wide open spaces and away from the grind of a busy business world.

Most of the present settlers of Scott county remember this tract as being first owned by Mr. and Mrs. Herb Steele, who filed on one of the quarters of land as a homestead and acquired the remainder of the land they owned through raising cattle and garden truck. Thousands of people imposed themselves on the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Steele, but they seemed to enjoy it, with the exception of only a few instances, when people didn't stop to think and didn't care whether they destroyed their property or not, just so they had a good time.

Nevertheless Mr. and Mrs. Steele had already visioned the place as a recreational ground, and wanted that it would remain as such after they had passed on as it contained much of historical value on the premises. It was the central spot for Indian pow wows in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and it was there that early Spanish explorers had their trading post. A monument stands on the spot where there headquarters once stood. The D. A. R. of Kansas are responsible for this memorial.

The Scott County State park is comprised of 1,280 acres of hills, rocks, boulders, valleys, creek and rivulet, winding their way from springs to the main stream, the Beaver. Because of its rugged and picturesque scenery, its abun-

dance of pure, cold water, it is said to be the most beautiful and most ideally situated state park in Kansas, and has been justly described as the "Playground of Kansas."

The large lake covers about 125 acres. 1,120 acres of the park were purchased from Mr. and Mrs. Steele, and the remainder from Mr. and Mrs. Bert Phillips. The latter tract is known as Timber Canyon and is an ideal tract and stream for park use.

The attention of the state fish and game commission was called to the possibilities of the tract in 1925 or 1926. There may have been doubt in the minds of the commission members when it was first suggested, whether such a place existed in western Kansas, but from the first time they saw it, they were impressed and wanted to make a park of it.

It took several months of consideration before Mr. and Mrs. Steele could be shown the possibilities of the tract for a state park and to prove to them that it would be forever used for that purpose. When that was done Mr. and Mrs. Steele and Mr. and Mrs. Phillips all sacrificed on their land in order to put the proposition over. Those who had a part in getting the owners and the commission together on the deal were G. E. McBride, J. H. McDonald, Dr. S. S. McGinnis, A. R. Lasley, and possibly others.

It was necessary at that time to pass a special bill through the state legislature authorizing the fish and game commission to purchase this tract of land for this purpose, and this was done. In honor of the work done by Mr. McBride in getting all the obstacles removed and the job finally put over, the lake in the park was named Lake McBride.

The state started work on the grounds just as soon as everything was legally closed. Slightly before

June 12, 1930, the work was completed and the park was officially opened on that date. The improvements at that time amounted to approximately \$100,000. This included a big dam that cost over \$50,000; two new residences for the superintendent and assistant, trees and various other things. Citizens of the state were not taxed one cent for this park, that is, in the way of a tax levy. The money all came from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses, and at the time the state began to build state lakes, the commission had over \$300,000 in its fund. This fund soon dwindled, of course, but more state lakes have been added just as fast as funds were available until now there are 10 or 12 in Kansas.

The first three to be approved and built were the Tonganoxie State park, the Meade County State park and the Scott County State park. Alva Clapp was state fish and game warden at that time and the commission was composed of Lee Larrabee, J. H. Lee and Frank Pinet. All of these except Pinet were present at the park on opening day.

C. W. Slaughter was the first superintendent of the park and served about two years. B. E. Hale, the present superintendent, has served five years, and is considered one of the best men for the job in the state.

Up until about a week before the park opened on June 12, 1930, the water had been backing up against the dam until there was just a nice little pool of water there. Then there came a cloudburst up the creek in Scott and Wichita counties, and with good rains falling here a few days before that date the lake was completely full of water and was running over the spillway about 18 inches deep the day the park was opened.

It was almost as if the rain had been ordered, for the state park greeted a crowd estimated all the way from 12,000 to 20,000 with a



El Quartelejo monument, erected by the Daughters of the American Revolution, marking the site of the only Indian pueblo in Kansas.

great body of water, more than the most optimistic persons ever thought there would be in the lake. The fact is, the lake has been full and running over the spillway ever since that day, with the exception of the few months after the flood which took out a part of the dam and drained out most of the water, taking with it a lot of the fish.

From that time on the Scott County State park has been one of the most popular recreational places in the middle west. Each year an opening has been held on June 12 with crowds varying from

12

Five or six thousand. This year the opening day crowd was conservatively estimated at 7,000, which shows the popularity of the park has not deteriorated in the least.

El Quartejo

Just one of the many features of the park is the monument to El Quartejo, which placed on a tract in the park by the D. A. R. In fact the monument was placed there while the land still belonged to Mr. and Mrs. Steele.

One day Mr. Steele noticed some outlines on the ground which looked suspicious, and wrote to the University of Kansas about it. Two men came out from the university and excavated. They found a pueblo of seven rooms, the smallest of which was 10x14 feet. The outer walls, then standing about two and a half feet high, were of heavy sand stone, procured from the cliffs nearby. The partitions were of smaller stones and adobe.

The pueblo had a roof of willows, covered with adobe. There was no sign of windows or doors. There were found charred wood, burned boughs, charred corn, squash seed, fragments of animal skins and bones, along with flint arrowheads, fleshers and scrapers, and a number of iron tools.

There was evidence that both Indians and whites had occupied the place. There is a very interesting story which goes with the old pueblo, most of which is historically accurate. It is almost certainly known that the Spaniards used this pueblo as a trading post before the Pilgrims landed on Plymouth Rock.

Park is Picturesque Place

The park embodies every feature of an ideal recreational spot. Splendid graveled roads wind in and out all over the park, enabling the motorist to drive along the roads and see almost every feature of the place without much walking. However, should the visitor desire more violent exercise, there are hills and rocks and crevices to climb that threaten to out-do the foothills of the Rockies.

Trees have been planted and smaller dams have been built until the park presents a much prettier view than it did even at the first opening in 1930. A concession house operated by J. T. Keeling takes care of the needs of campers and fishermen.

Although the lake lost a lot of good fish in the flood a few years ago, fishing is still very good, and nice catches are reported right along. Occasionally somebody gets a "big one" that takes some proof to make his friends believe it.

Numerous camping sites are located at convenient places about the park, where many folks go to cook and eat lunches and dinners. Camp fires are not allowed to be built promiscuously over the part, as that would detract from the beauty and cleanliness of the grounds.



Mr. and Mrs. H. L. Steele, taken shortly after their homestead had been sold to the Fish and Game commission to be made into the Scott County State park.

Much of the progress and popularity of the Scott County State park is due to the splendid supervision of Superintendent Bond E. Hale, whose parents and grandparents were pioneer settlers of Scott county.

Callender, Maxine. *The Steele House*. Available in Scott County files at Scott County Library, 110 W 8th St, Scott City, KS.

THE STEELE HOUSE

By Maxine Callender

On the west side of Ladder Creek, also known as Beaver Creek to many of the "old timers" of the area, in Lake Scott State Park, is located the Steele House. This native stone house was the first and last house ever occupied by Herbert and Eliza Steele, early pioneers of Scott County, Kansas. Atop a bluff just north of their home stands a monument erected to the memory of this intrepid pioneer couple.

Herbert Steele was born in East Bloomfield, New York, in the year 1859. In 1882, the then 23-year old Herbert, in the company of his mother's sister and her husband, journeyed to Abilene, Kansas, to be followed two years later by his father and mother, Joel and Elizabeth Steele, and ten brothers and sisters. A few years later in 1887, the elder Steeles and one of their daughters drove by covered wagon to Logan County, Kansas, where Joel filed a homestead claim and where the family settled. One daughter married and remained in Abilene, and eight children--four boys and four girls--followed their parents to Oakley, Kansas, in spring of 1888. The eight Steele children traveled by covered wagon, bringing with them an extra mare, two colts and two cows. They followed the Union Pacific railroad route and the 200-odd miles were accomplished in about two weeks. It is not clear from records whether Herbert Steele was a part of this journey or whether he traveled to Logan and Scott Counties alone and prior to or after the other family members.

One of Herbert's brother, Theron Steele, filed a homestead claim in Scott County, Kansas, and the Homestead Patent was filed of record in January 1904, and was signed by Theodore Roosevelt. Sometime after filing his claim and before he had perfected it, Theron died, and the property reverted to his father and mother as his sole heirs. Herbert purchased the land from his father and mother and proceeded with completing the homestead requirements. He additionally acquired other parcels of land in the area, amassing some 640 acres. In 1893, Herbert married Eliza Landon, daughter of Samuel Landon, also an early pioneer settler of Scott County.

Eliza was born in Sullivan County, Tennessee in 1858. Eliza's mother and father with their six children came to Kansas by train, although the exact date is not known. The family apparently had lived in Missouri just prior to coming to Kansas, and Eliza had taught school in Missouri--a profession she continued to follow after coming to Scott County. She was 35, Herbert 34, when they married in 1893.

Herbert and Eliza's first home was a dugout at the site where they later erected the four-room house built from sandstone gathered from the surrounding bluffs. Suffice it to say, he built well, as the Steele house still stands some 90 years later. The Steeles also built a stone barn, a stone chicken house, and a stone milkhouse. The milkhouse was cooled by water flowing from a large natural spring nearby.

Herbert and Eliza had three children--a daughter born June 10,

1893, who died in infancy, a son Leslie LeRoy born September 18, 1894, and a daughter Ethel Mildred, born August 15, 1899 and who died in 1902. The son, "Roy", was an outstanding student and athlete. He graduated from Scott County High School in 1914 and taught school for one year. He was offered a position as Principal of the Modoc schools the following year; however, before assuming his new position, he fell ill of an old head injury received during his high school athletic days, and died in early September 1915.

The Steeles' primary livelihood was a large truck garden operation and large orchard, all irrigated from the big spring used to cool the stone milkhouse. The Steeles never owned an automobile or truck. The produce, which was sold to residents of Scott City, Kansas, was transported the 12 miles from their farm to the city by horseback, by horse and buggy or spring wagon. Herbert always carried his 30-30 rifle on these trips with the hopes of shooting game for supper, and also for protection against the bobcats and rattlesnakes which were prevalent in the area. Eliza, as did the other hardy pioneer women, spent their days busy with the many tasks necessary to feed, clothe, and otherwise care for her family. In addition to cooking, baking, churning butter, washing, ironing, sewing, and weaving, she milked cows and helped with the garden work.

During the forty years that Herbert Steele lived in Scott County, Kansas, he became famous for his own special brand of hospitality. His farm was the setting for many outings for residents in the western part of Kansas. The unique and beautiful

canyons, the superb fishing and hunting, and the just plain restful atmosphere attracted many groups and individuals to fish, hunt, and picnic. It became the dream of both Herbert and Eliza in later years that their homestead would become a public park and recreation area, and while neither survived to witness the fruition of this dream, thousands of visitors each year are a living memorial to the Steeles and their exemplary life.

In 1927, the Kansas Legislature enacted legislation creating the Kansas State Forestry, Fish and Game Commission and providing for the development and operation of fish and game lakes and parks. Largely through the efforts of three Scott City men, Grover McBride, H.D. McDonald, and Dr. S.S. McGinnis, the original five-man Commission became interested in establishing a lake and park in the vicinity of the Steele homestead. The commission eventually acquired title to 1280 acres of land, including the 640 acres from Herbert and Eliza Steele. The Steeles retained a life estate in the property. Herbert died in 1929, and Eliza died in 1930, shortly before the dedication of the park on June 12, 1930. Lake McBride, as it was called at the time in honor of Grover McBride, and Scott County State Park were one of the five original areas developed under 1927 act. The Steele House, through the efforts of the Scott City Business and Professional Women, has been completely restored and refurnished with articles characteristic of that period of Kansas history. Many of the items are originally used by the Steeles, and others have been donated by persons interested in restoring the house in as authentic a manner as possible. The

Steele House has been operated as a museum from the time the park first opened until the present time.

Early in 1964, by legislative action, the park area was transferred to the jurisdiction of the Kansas State Park and Resources Authority. The Authority has undertaken extensive development program to upgrade and expand the facilities in the park. In 1970, the Kansas Legislature officially redesignated the area as Lake Scott State Park .

The Steele House is representative of the simple early-day architecture which was found throughout the western frontier. It stands as a reminder of an important period of rural frontier, and will be maintained in perpetuity as a memorial not only to Herbert and Eliza Steele, but to all the stalwart pioneers who helped in the settlement of the West and particularly this great state of Kansas.

Hardy, Tad. "In the Shadow of the Bluffs," *Kansas Magazine*, 4th Issue, 1991.

IN THE SHADOW OF THE BLUFFS

The native sandstone home of Herb and Eliza Steele, built by the couple nearly 100 years ago, enjoyed a wide reputation for hospitality. Today, it is a museum in Scott County State Park.

Story and photography by Tad Hardy

A steady breeze rattles the yucca and sways the silver sage which dots the chalky crest of a rising bluff in Scott County. Near its rocky edge stands a wine-red, granite stone, a four-ton boulder formed deep within the earth's mantle and brought to the peak of this rugged cliff by the nickels and dimes of elementary schoolchildren.



Thick stone walls frame the path from the back door of the Steele House to nearby Beaver Creek.

over 60 years ago. The stone and its concrete resting place bear a simple inscription: "Steele Memorial, erected by the public in honor of Mr. and Mrs. H.L. Steele, exemplars of western Kansas pioneers."

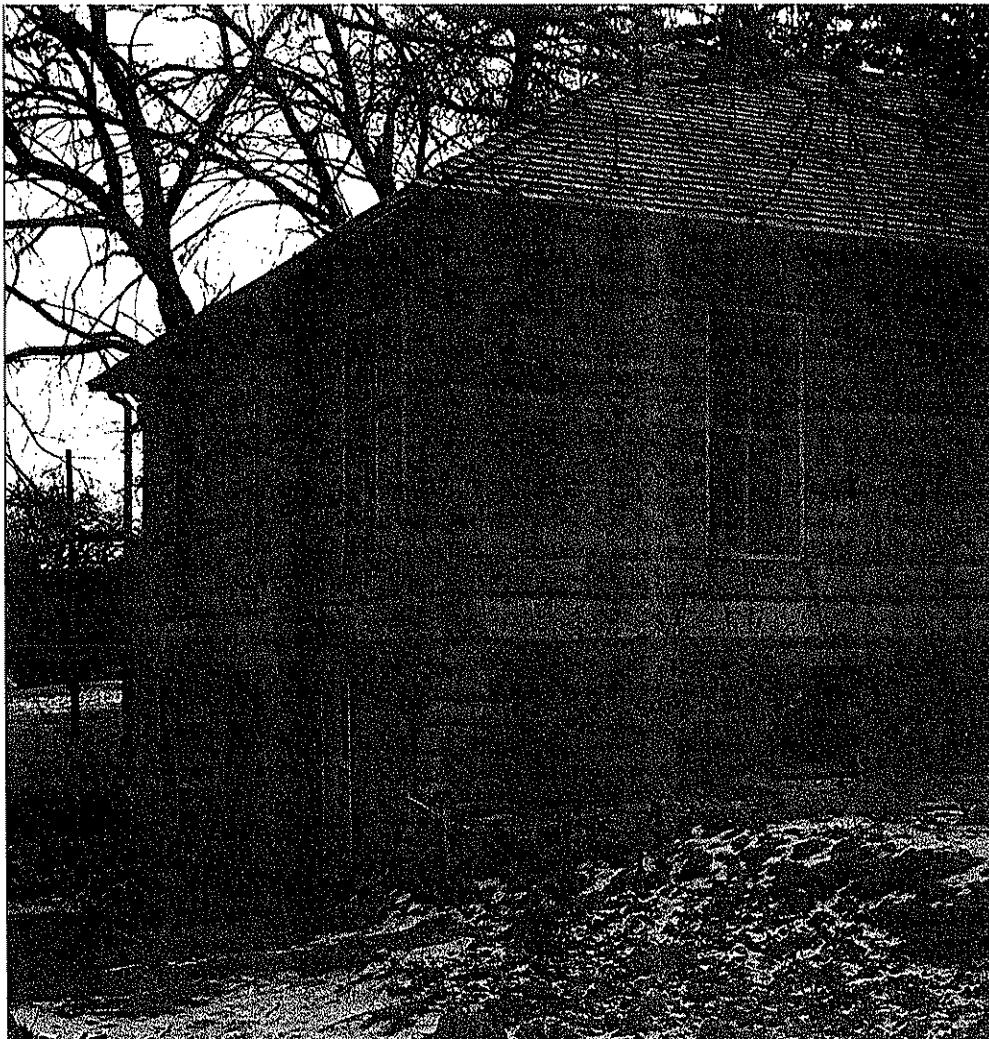
Several hundred feet below, partly hidden in the shadow of the bluff, is the stubborn, weathered homestead Herb and Eliza Steele forged from native sandstone almost 100 years ago. Its framework is still sound and, except for a covered porch and a few rain gutters for protection, the old Steele Home looks much as it did at the turn of the century. Inside the partially restored house is a mixture of original Steele belongings and period pieces arranged carefully in the small, quiet museum. But, it is the house itself and the surrounding hills that best tell the story of its early inhabitants.

Herbert L. Steele was a young man nearing his mid-20's when he left New York with his aunt and uncle and headed "west" to Abilene in the early 1880's. By 1888, Herb, his parents and brothers and sisters had followed their covered wagon to land on the Scott-Lane County line and filed a claim to call it their own.

Eliza J. Landon, a Tennessee native and a second grade school marm, lived with her family on a timber claim nearby. Herb and "Liza" united their frontier families when they married in 1892. One year later, they purchased a section of bluff-laden ranch land in northern Scott County.

The land had everything — hills, soft valleys and sifted soil lining the bed of Ladder Creek. Trickling from the bluffs were natural springs that made their way to the creek bed below. These springs provided cool irrigation water for the vegetable gardens and orchards of cherry, apple and peach trees planted by the Steeles.

The couple hand-quarried blocks of sandstone from the land and built their two-story house into the side of a low hill less than 100 yards from the creek. A kitchen and Liza's workroom occupied the house's lower, dugout portion which was protected from August heat and December chill by the surrounding sod. From her ground level back door, Liza could enjoy the orchard view. Upstairs were two living rooms and two bedrooms,



also at ground level, that faced the bluff where the monument stands today. The porous sandstone and mortar walls, well over a foot thick, no doubt insulated the house and trapped warmth from the kitchen below in the winter.

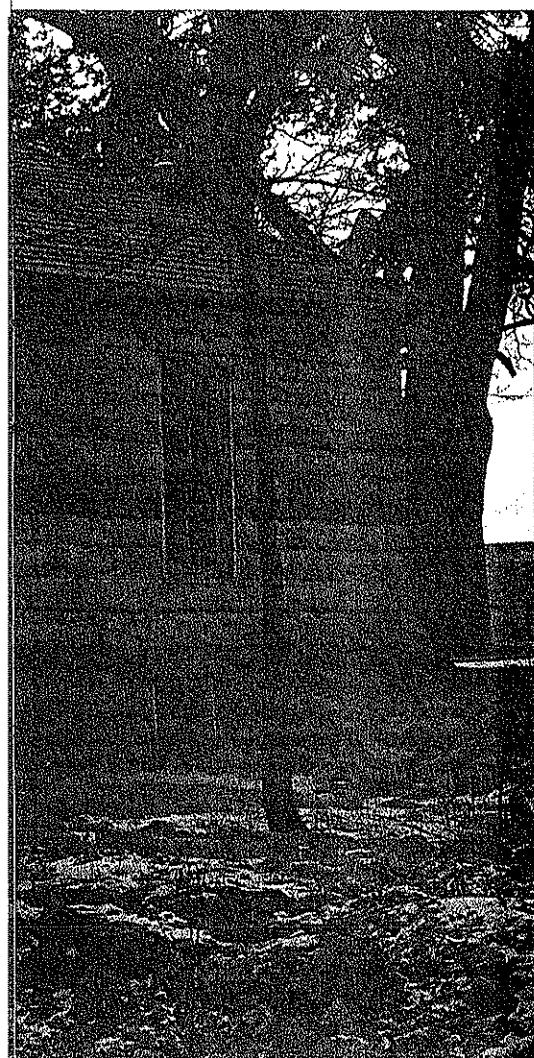
Herb enclosed a bubbling spring just north of the house for home use. The rock floor of the Steele's spring house cooled and freshened the family's livelihood. Milk and cream from the dairy cows were stored here as were fresh eggs from the layers kept in the quarried chicken house on the bluff. Liza divided a good deal of her time between the spring house and the gardens, washing produce for market in Scott City or fetching water, milk and stored goods for meals. The spring also provided an opportunity to share a cool drink with visitors and passersby. In time, the Steele's home and hospitality gained a wide reputation. Their land was always open to anyone who asked.

It seems only natural that the Steeles would later sell the majority of the nearly 800 acres of their acquired land to the Kansas State Forestry, Fish and Game

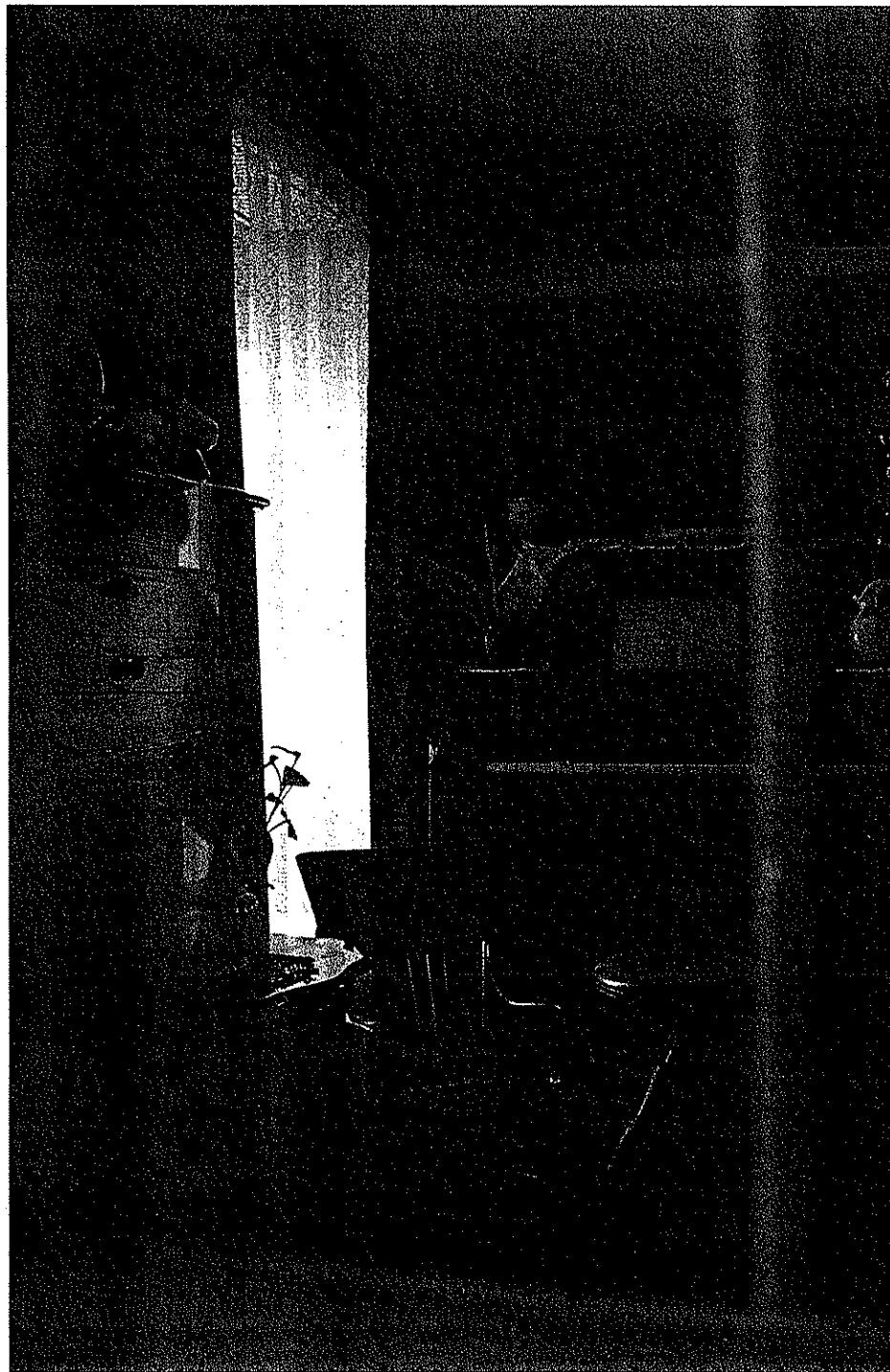
Commission to create a state park. The mission to honor the couple's ideals with a memorial was undertaken by a family friend, the Rev. Mike Elliott, and, through the donations of schoolchildren, he funded the drive to erect the red granite monument overlooking the state park and lake. It was unveiled at the park's dedication in 1930, less than a year after Herb's death and only days before Liza died.

Today, the Steele Home is still in the shadow of the bluff. The upstairs living area has been partially restored by the Scott City Business and Professional Women's Club and a group from the Scott County Historical Society. One room displays kitchen items used by Kansas pioneers including homemade soap, Liza Steele's dented coffee pot, an iron kettle cradled over the coals on the range and buffalo chips to fuel the fire. A sitting room at the front of house and the bedroom behind it contain several pieces of furniture that traveled to Kansas by covered wagon. Rugs woven by Liza on her loom grace the floors. Near the window in the sitting room stands a cherished book-

Both front and rear entrances of the nearly 100-year-old, native sandstone house are at ground level.

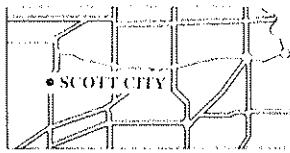


Roy Steele's homemade bookcase and the sitting room share the stillness of the afternoon sun.



case made by the Steele's only son, Roy, while in high school. Roy died at the age of 20 yet he outlived two sisters who died in infancy.

Sadly, most of the museum rooms must be viewed through locked doors or metal screening to protect against the vandalism that has occurred over the years. The house's outer walls bear names and dates crudely scratched into the sandstone by decades of visitors seeking to secure a place in history with the house. But, in the spirit of Herb and Liza Steele's hospitality, the front door still remains open to anyone who asks, and the spring still bubbles cool water for the passing traveler. ■



The Steele Home Museum is located 13 miles north of Scott City in the Scott County State Park and is open year round. For further information, contact the Scott County Historical Society, 1013 Myrtle, Scott City, KS, 67871. Scott City is in Scott County on Highways 83 and 96.

Callender, Maxine. "Herbert L. Steele."

HERBERT L. STEELE

By Maxine Steele Callender

HERBERT L. STEELE was one of the oldest of 11 children in the family of Joel Winslow Steele and Elizabeth Susan Walker Steele. He was born near East Bloomfield, Ontario County, New York, on December 13, 1859, and there grew to adulthood.

Sometime after the modifications of the Homestead Act in 1873, the lure of a more prosperous life in the west enticed "Herb" to accompany his mother's sister and her husband, Tom and Gusta Rice, to Dickinson County, Kansas. Apparently it was a good move as Herb's parents and his brothers and sisters soon followed in 1884 and settled on a farm north of Abilene. Approximately two years later the adventuresome Herb again decided to move further west—this time to the vicinity of the Scott-Logan line, near Ladder Creek or Beaver Creek as it was later known. Herb again encouraged his parents and family to follow and in 1887, his parents and one sister came with their covered wagon loaded with all of their belongings, and filed a claim in Logan County, near the Scott County line. (It was believed that Herb took out a claim prior to his parents joining him, but no record has been found.)

The following spring Herb went back to Dickinson County and brought his younger brothers and sisters "west"! They followed the Union Pacific Railroad from Abilene to Oakley, camping at night along the road. The boys slept under the wagon, sheltered from the spring rains, and the girls slept in the wagon. They gathered wood and coal that had fallen along the railroad tracks for their campfires. It took them 13 days to make the 200 odd mile trip to their new home. One of the older girls, Dora, took out a claim near her parents in Logan County and opened a school for her younger brothers and sisters and for the children of the neighborhood.

On August 20, 1892, Herbert married Eliza J. Landon, daughter of Samuel R. Landon. Eliza was born in Sullivan County, Tennessee in 1858. She traveled with her parents and two brothers and three sisters to Missouri where they apparently stayed for several years as Eliza began to teach school there. The family then traveled by train from Bogard, Missouri, to Scott County, Kansas, where Samuel filed on a timber claim in Timber Canyon, along Beaver Creek.

Again Eliza began teaching school. According to an entry in the Scott City newspaper, the Sentinel Herald, published on August 21, 1890, Eliza Landon was among the persons to be named to have been granted teaching certificates. Eliza's was for the second grade. Perhaps this is where she met a fellow school "marm", Dora Steele, because soon Herbert Steele and Eliza were united in marriage by Rev. Watson at the M.E. parsonage in Scott City.

According to a real estate transfer entry in the local newspaper in October 1893, the east $\frac{1}{2}$ of the SW $\frac{1}{4}$ and the west $\frac{1}{2}$ of the SE $\frac{1}{4}$ of section 12 in township 16, containing 160 acres according to government survey, was sold to Eliza J. Steele for \$225. Ladder Creek ran through the middle of this property, and it was here that Herb and "Liza" settled. Their first home was a dugout on the west side of this creek. Here they began to build their permanent home, a house that is still standing after more than 80 years! Herb and Liza hand quarried hard native yellow-white sandstone from the surrounding bluffs and built this unique house, a "split-level"! The house was built on the side of the hill sloping down to the creek. You entered the front of the house at ground level and when you went downstairs you were also at ground level as you left the house by the back door. The family living and bedrooms were in the four rooms upstairs while the two rooms downstairs were used for the kitchen and Liza's workroom. The back room downstairs was cool as it was cut back into the side of the hill, surrounded on three sides by soil.

Herb and Liza began to improve their ranch, again building with hand quarried blocks of the hardest native sandstone they could find. Across the road that ran in front of their house, and up the hill to the northwest of the house they built

a stone chickenhouse and the foundations and lower walls of a huge barn. The upper walls of the barn, and roof were built out of wood. They also built a stone milkhouse, or Spring House as it was later known because it was built over a big natural spring—this was located just to the northwest of their house. This Spring House was the very heart of the family activity and livelihood, for the cool water which gushed from the spring rippled across the rock floor of the building and cooled the crocks of milk, cream and butter, the containers of fruit and vegetables, the crates of eggs; all of the things the family needed to keep cool. It was here that the vegetables from the large gardens were washed and prepared for market—and as the water from the spring wound its way to the creek below it was used to irrigate the gardens. The water for the needs of the family inside the house was caught in buckets from this spring and carried the short way to the house.

This Spring House continued to have even greater significance, it was here that over the years hundreds of passersby were given a cool drink of water; when Herb was in the hospital, just before he died he called for a drink of water from this spring, and when Liza died she was found inside this Spring House.

Herb and Liza raised cattle and farm crops but the family's primary livelihood was the large vegetable garden and extensive fruit orchard located below the house, along the banks of the creek. Protected from the strong wind and the turbulent weather by the bluffs and the large cottonwood trees, the orchard and garden always reaped a good harvest. The orchard included apple, cherry, and peach trees that were planted from seeds brought from Missouri and Eastern Kansas, wild grapes, berries, and plums grew along the banks of the creek. Liza and Herb harvested these crops and prepared them for marketing in Scott City and other nearby towns. In addition to the fruits and vegetables, eggs, milk and cream were carried to market. Herb would load his spring wagon, and with his team would make the overnight trip into Scott City, 12 miles distance. While Herb was gone the farm and ranch chores were the responsibility of Liza and her young son, Roy. A neighbor girl, Ella Lenihan, would often come over to stay with the baby girl so Liza could be away from the house.

Herb and Liza never owned an automobile or truck, the trips into town, whether on business to the court house or to transport their produce, were always by horse and buggy, spring wagon and team or on horseback. Herb always carried his 30-30 rifle with him with the hope of shooting game for supper, and also for protection against bobcats, wolves and rattlesnakes which were so prevalent in the area.

Herb often called on his nephews, Elba and Hyland Steele, for assistance with the ranch and farming chores. They each remembered their Uncle with great love and pride, but also with a great deal of respect. Herb always stood up for his rights as related in this incident by one of the nephews.

As was the usual procedure, on one of the many trips into Scott City to sell produce, the spring wagon was loaded carefully so as not to bruise or ruin anything on the long, bumpy ride. About halfway to Scott City, Herb met an automobile driven by a local land agent taking a client out to see some property. The land agent was driving quite fast and as he approached and met Herb, he honked and honked, never slowing down. The noise spooked the horses and they bolted and ran, scattering the produce, eggs and milk all over the fields and road. The angry Herb quieted his team, but the produce, being ruined, was left on the roadside. Knowing the automobile and its passengers would return to Scott City by the same road, Herb blocked the road with the team, tied the reins to the wheel of the spring wagon, sat down behind the wagon and patiently waited. When the automobile approached, the land agent had to stop and found himself looking down the barrel of Herb's 30-30. Herb climbed in the seat of the spring wagon and the automobile followed him, slowly and at gun point to the sheriff's office in Scott City.

Herb tended his ranch with faithful love and devotion. The huge barn housing his horses, milk cows and other livestock

was only a short distance from the house, necessary for the protection of the stock from the wild animals that roamed freely in the surrounding hills. During the Christmas holidays from high school, one of Herb's nephews was helping him with the evening chores. The nephew had finished milking and was standing in the barn door, noticed three dogs romping some 150 to 200 yards away. He remarked to his uncle that he thought they only had two dogs; Herb quietly picked up his ever present 30-30 and walked to the door, took aim and fired—the third "dog", a coyote, flew straight into the air, seemingly all legs, before it fell dead to the ground. The nephew was amazed that his uncle could tell which one was the coyote, and even more amazed that he could hit only the coyote in the group of the three animals so far away.

Eliza was a typical pioneer woman, very hard, capable and wise, and always at her husband's side to render aid. In addition to the many household chores which included making soap, baking bread, churning butter, she helped with the milking, the separating of the cream, and of course, she helped with the garden and orchard. The produce that was not sold was never wasted for Eliza made cheese, hominy, sauerkraut, jellies, jams—her storage cellar was always full with the fruits and vegetables she canned. She was very talented in needlework; she spun thread out of the wool that Herb sheared from the sheep and wove fabric for the family clothing. She had a huge loom in the room downstairs off her kitchen where she wove beautiful carpets for the family's use as well as to sell. No scrap of fabric was wasted, these were made into beautiful quilts, some of which were used by the family, some were sold. Also to supplement the family income, Herb repaired clocks, sewing machines, and other small machinery.

The local "school marm" stayed with Herb and Liza during the school terms. She often helped Liza with the household chores. The one room schoolhouse where she taught was located about a mile south of the Steele home and the "marm" either walked or rode a horse to school, as did her pupils.

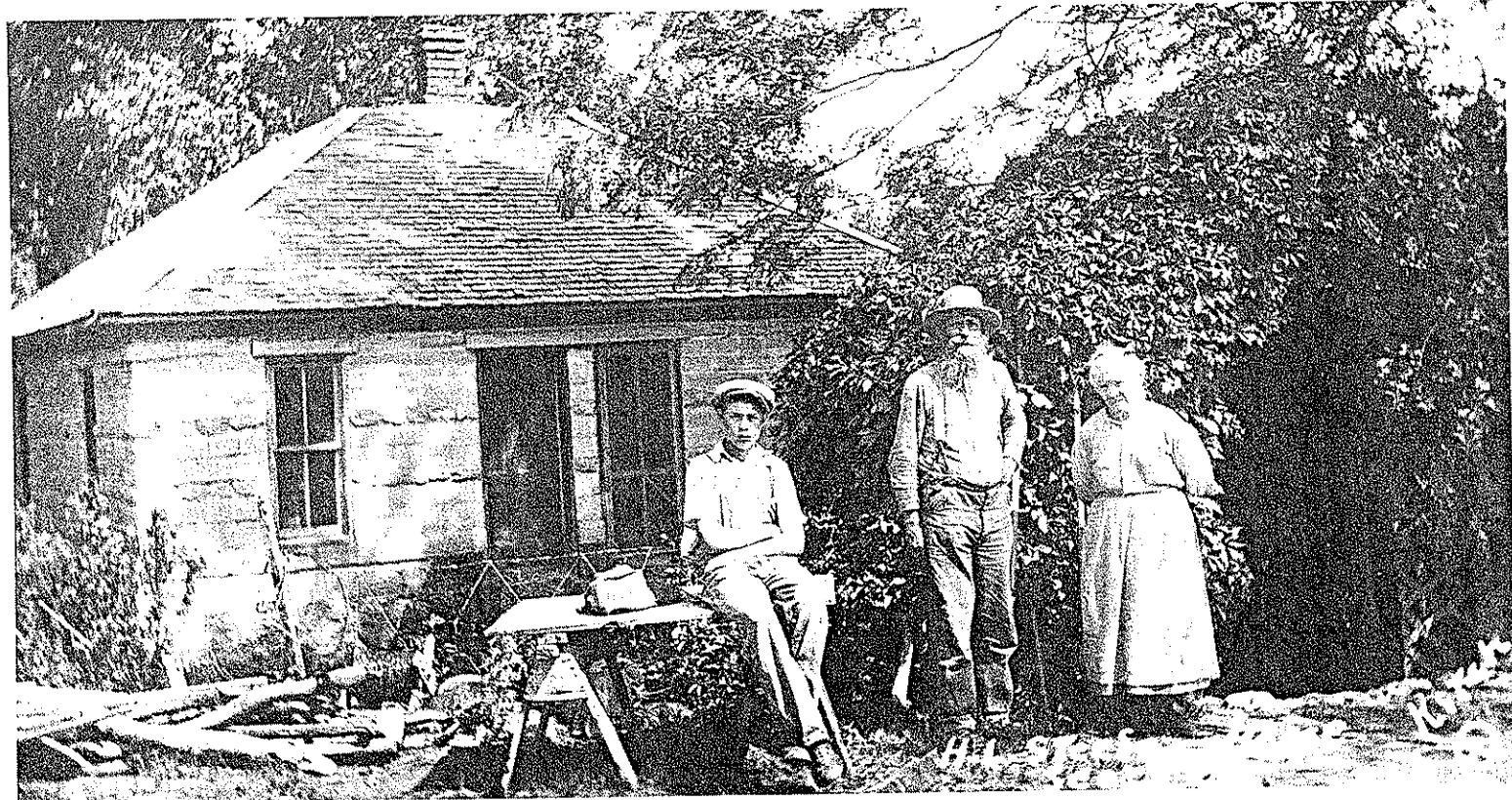
Herb and Liza had three children: a daughter was born June 10, 1893 who died in infancy; a son, Leslie LeRoy was born September 18, 1894; and another daughter, Ethel Mildred was born August 14, 1899. Ethel was never well, and died before she was two years of age.

"Roy" was described as a brilliant young man, an out-

standing student and a fine athlete. Roy graduated from Scott County High School in 1914 and taught grade school for one year after that. He was engaged to be married and had accepted a position as principal of the Modoc schools when he became quite ill. Roy had been injured two years earlier, while still in high school, by being struck in the head with a baseball during a game. Some say this caused his death, other attributed it to a brain tumor. He was taken to a hospital in Pueblo, Colorado, where he died on September 8, 1915, almost 21 years of age. He was buried in the Pence Cemetery beside his two sisters. The girl to whom he was engaged, never married. She became one of Scott County's most outstanding grade school teachers.

Herbert Steele's brother, Theron filed a homestead claim just south of Herb and Liza's home. This homestead patent was filed in January 1904, and was signed by Theodore Roosevelt. A short time after filing, Theron died and the property reverted to his elderly father and mother as sole heirs. Herb purchased this land from his parents for \$400 and proceeded with completing the homestead requirements. (Theron's Pond is a landmark on this quarter of land which is now included in the State Park.) Herbert later acquired other parcels of land in the area, amassing over 800 acres.

Just to the north of the Steele home, discovery was made of the ruins of an Indian Pueblo. There are several stories as to how Herb discovered the ruins, perhaps they are all true! According to one source Herb was plowing the area and noticed the ground squirrels were chewing on charred grain, as if out of a fire place. Upon investigation he discovered they were bringing the charred grain up out of their burrows, not taking it down into them, and wrote to the University to relate his findings and asked them to investigate further. Another source states that Herb noticed some outlines or mounds on the ground which seemed to be a foundation of a building. Knowing he was the first to have erected a building on this land, and being aware that Indians had lived in the area, he wrote the University asking them to investigate. Still another source, Herb found so many arrowheads, beads and pieces of pottery as he plowed the parcel of ground that he began to investigate and realizing he must have found an Indian camp, he wrote to the University. No matter which story if any is true, Herb was aware that he had made a discovery that should not be ignored, and wrote to the University of Kansas about it. They



Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Steele in front of their home. Paul Beckley on the saw horse.

sent a team to investigate and upon excavation a pueblo of seven large rooms was outlined. Herb and Liza followed the proceedings with keen interest and the area was not disturbed by the plow again. Historians established this El Quartejo Pueblo as the most northerly of all Indian Pueblos. A monument was placed on the site by the D.A.R. and Herb and Liza attended the dedication with extreme pride.

It is easily understood when one sees the "Old Steele Home" and the surrounding area why, even the newly married couple found this quarter of land for sale, they purchased it, and why they toiled and worked for years to earn the money to buy the surrounding parcels of land as they became available to them. When they crossed the endless, flat, treeless, prairies of Scott County and suddenly dropped off into the canyon made by the winding Ladder Creek (Beaver) bordered with a lush growth of native trees, vines, ferns, and flowers, the numerous small springs bubbling their clear pure water to the surface of the land and trickling down the beautiful buffalo grass covered hills into the creek, and above the stark white limestone cliffs dotted with trees, yucca, and cacti, they thought they were suddenly in another world. Along the creek were flat grassy meadows and wildlife was abundant. Timber Canyon, above them had been homesteaded by several families, so they would have neighbors. Herb and Liza were down to earth pioneers, eager to live with nature. They built their ranch buildings without disturbing this beautiful setting, indeed they only enhanced its beauty by building up the area, making it available for others to enjoy.

These unique and picturesque canyons, plus the fantastic fishing and hunting, drew people onto the property. Groups of school children were welcomed on picnics; cool, fresh spring water was available to them, as to the hundreds of others who came. The young people took advantage of the romantic atmosphere, hiking and picnicing and holding hands! The restful, peaceful, surroundings attracted the other people. The Steele's became famous for their own special brand of Kansas hospitality. They were happy to see each and every person who came to visit their ranch, as long as they did not abuse the privilege, and stopped first, at their home and asked if they might wander in the peaceful setting. Herb and Liza were annoyed, and pestered, and often damage was caused by occasional picnickers, hunters and fishermen, but they never closed their beautiful land to those who had the courtesy to stop and ask if they might partake of this beautiful environment. If passersby did not stop by the house and ask permission they soon found themselves looking down the barrel of the 30-30, with Herb and his horse close behind!

After their son's death, it is no wonder they began to think of what would happen to their beloved ranch when they, too, died. They must have realized how others also enjoyed its beauty and began to think about it as a park. With this in mind, and encouraged by the local druggist, Mr. Grover E. McBride, and two other Scott City men, H.D. McDonald and Dr. S.S. McGinnis, the idea became a dream of both Herb and Liza. In 1928, the Kansas Legislature enacted legislation creating the Kansas State Forestry, Fish and Game Commission, providing for the development and operation of fish and game lakes and parks. This commission became interested in establishing a lake and park in the vicinity of the Steele ranch. After much consideration and deliberation, and with the stipulation that it be used only for a park, Herb and Liza sold 640 acres of their beloved property to the Commission, retaining the right to use the land as they had been, and with the right to live out their lives in their home.

Just because they had sold their property, Herb and Liza did not become disinterested. In fact, their interest grew as they began to see their dream take shape. Herb watched with keen interest the progress made on the site of the dam. He probably was more aware of how the completed lake would look than the engineers as he knew each hill and gully on this land he loved so much.

Just when the work was beginning on the construction of the dam, Herb became ill, was taken to the Scott City Hospital



Mr. and Mrs. Herbert L. Steele and son, Leslie LeRoy

where he died a few hours later, on Wednesday, September 25, 1929. Funeral services were held at the Baptist Church, conducted by his friend, the Rev. Mike Elliott, and burial was next to his children in the Pence Cemetery.

It seems appropriate that the words spoken by someone who personally knew and loved Herb should be included in this narrative. The following excerpts are taken from the obituary of Herb, as spoken by Rev. Mike Elliott, and from the printed obituary in the News Chronicle on Thursday, September 26, 1929.

"Scott County's most unique character has crossed the border-line and rests today under the shade of the trees. The old hills and rugged cliffs of Beaver Creek will never be the same again. He was a part of them . . . This man's face was transformed through the years until he looked like the hills and cliffs he loved so well. He loved every rock and rill. For forty years he roamed over them and they grew into the very fibre of his being. Other years will come and go and literally thousands of people will pass over the ground that he trod, but Beaver will never be the same again."

"What transformation this man and the wife who is left behind wrought among the hills of Beaver Creek! For forty years they struggled and toiled adding here and there until they had made of the place a thing of beauty. So attractive, in fact, that when the State of Kansas, seeking a spot for one of its parks found the Steele homestead, they did not go any farther. It could not have been obtained for any better purpose and when the project is completed it will bear the testimony of this man and his mate of the years.

"It seems to me that it would be fitting for Scott County to honor its most unique character. When the state park project is completed it will be open to the public. Each year thousands will visit it and enjoy its natural beauty. It is presumptuous on my part to suggest that on a spot somewhere among the rugged cliffs a marker be placed in memory of this man? Would it not be fitting for the citizenship of this county by popular subscription to place a simple marble shaft with a proper inscription chiselled thereon somewhere within the bounds of the park. The state would gladly donate such a spot and con-

of this man. Nothing we could do would please him more than that."

And so the idea of a memorial to Herb and Liza was imprinted upon the minds of all of the citizens of Scott County, young and old alike. Rev. Elliott was chosen chairman of a committee to put the suggestion into effect and a fund was created. Largely through the donations of the school children of Scott County enough money was raised to erect this monument. A four-ton red granite boulder was brought in from Colorado and placed on a concrete base at the end of a prominent bluff overlooking the Beaver Creek valley. Looking down from the monument you can see the simple stone home of Herb and Liza, the hills and valleys that they loved so well, the ruins of the ancient pueblo that he discovered and the lake he envisioned. The inscription on the monument reads: *Steele Memorial, erected by the public in honor of Mr. and Mrs. H.L. Steele, exemplars of Western Kansas pioneers.*

On June 12, 1930 in a natural amphitheater in the hills just below the monument the formal dedication of the park took place. Here the people assembled, the band played, the announcements were made, the messages given, and the Steele Monument was unveiled. Eliza Steele gave a splendid address, thanking the people of Western Kansas for their consideration of her and her husband. This was a big moment in her life, the realization of the dream that she and Herb had visioned.

Liza returned to her home, alone. With pride she had watched the progress of the construction of the dam, the improvements of the roads, and the park taking shape. She had been honored by the people of Scott County and the surrounding counties as no one had been honored before. She continued to open her arms and her home to the public that came to rest on "her" ranch. It was less than a month after the dedication, on July 9, 1930 that her body was found in the spring house by Cyril Slaughter, a friend. Rev. Elliott also conducted her funeral services and she too was buried beside her children and husband in the Pence Cemetery.

Again the importance of quoting from words spoken by someone who knew Herb and Liza Steele seem appropriate. These excerpts are from the message delivered at the dedication of the Steele Memorial at the formal opening of the park on June 12, 1930. The message was delivered by the Secretary of the Kansas Baptist Convention, and published in the Kansas Baptist magazine, June 1930.

"Let us mention some of the characteristics of pioneers and consider how Mr. and Mrs. Steele have exemplified them:

1. The Pioneer has the spirit of adventure. Others may be content to tarry in familiar places, satisfied with the established order; but the pioneer must go forward. He is impelled to seek new frontiers.

"Mr. and Mrs. Steele are examples of this restless spirit. Each made the long trek—he from the state of New York, she from Tennessee, through Missouri. Each entered a homestead in this county, thus enrolling themselves among the builders of this great West. They typify the thousands who came to lay foundations here.

2. The Pioneer has a cluster of characteristics that qualify him for his time and his task. He has vision. He sees potential values in his new environs and dreams dreams of their future development. He has persistence. Others may abandon the enterprise, but the true pioneer endures.

"The persons whose names are on the Memorial have exemplified these characteristics. Acquiring possession of this rugged gorge with its abounding springs, they loved and almost worshipped it as the work of God. They revered the ruins of the Pueblo and foresaw their future historic values. Unite-ly they determined with life purpose to protect, develop and pass on to coming generations these unique possessions.

"Each had physical limitations that might have discouraged, but they grew constitutions of iron and plodded on unflagging and untiring in their industry."

"The vast majority of those who in the '80's entered claims in this great West, left them with the passing of years. But these, and the resolute minority whom they represent, persevered."

3. The Pioneer never finished his task. He lays the foundation, upon which others must build. He dreams the dream others see it come true."

"It is almost pathetic that Mr. Steele could have not lived to see the dam completed, watch the water back up the valley past his home and take an active part in this, the opening day of the Park. He had toiled and hoped, but was not permitted to

witness these events."

In his poem, *The Pioneers*, Berton Braley writes:
"They're the fighters who fight undaunted
For the utterly hopeless cause,
Ridiculed, jeered and taunted
With never a lull or pause.
But after they've fought and perished,
And after their work is done,
The cause they've loved and cherished
Is lifted to fame, — and won.
They're the warriors fine and splendid
The fond and the faithful few
Whose battles and work are ended,
Or ever the dreams come true."

"In closing, you would have me voice your appreciation of the mind, or minds, that conceived the idea of erecting in this park a memorial to these two heroic persons, and the many they represent.

"You would have me express appreciation also for the mind, or minds, that selected the monument. How fitting that a giant boulder of granite, uncut by human hands but beautifully shaped and polished by the forces of nature, should be chosen to typify these people of toil and courage.

"And the location! How fitting that this memorial, idealizing the bravery and achievements of our Pioneers, should tower on yonder outstanding point, overlooking Old Quartelejo, overlooking the home place and holding in view all the activities of this great park.

"No other object in these scenes will contribute more to the building of character than that silent, bold stone with its tribute to our Western Kansas Pioneers. With the passing of the years the youth of succeeding generations will climb that hill, approach that monument, meditate upon its inscription and from that elevation gain new inspiration for true and noble living."

And so today that monument still stands, overlooking the same grand park, the same home which Herb and Liza loved. This home, through the efforts of the Scott City Business and Professional Women and The Scott County Historical Society has been restored and refurnished with articles typical of Pioneer homes. Many of the items are those originally used by the Steeles. And so this museum, this home of Herb and Liza's is still open to those who wish to visit. The Spring still bubbles the cool pure water for those wanting a refreshing drink, and the hills still beckon for those who wish to roam. Herb and Liza still share their ranch with others.



Mr. and Mrs. Herb Steele at El Quartelejo Monument