

## NOTABLE DEATHS

---

JOSEPH THEODORE STEPPAN, soldier, taxidermist and field collector; died February 23, 1945, at his home in Des Moines, Iowa; born February 22, 1855, at Staab, an Austrian border fort in the Bavarian Alps, the son of a French nobleman, Col. Joseph de la Steppan, serving as colonel of the Fourteenth Heavy Riders Regiment in the Austrian army, and Theresa von Friedl, an Austrian noblewoman. He was sent to the Royal Military academy at Kornenburg, Austria, in 1867, then to the Academy of War in Vienna in 1872, and on leaving the academy became a second lieutenant in his father's regiment. Colonel Steppan was killed in 1866 in the Franco-Prussian war on the battlefield of Sadowa, Austria, where he is buried. Young Lieutenant Steppan served in the Austrian occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in 1876.

He saw eighteen battles in that war, and had two horses shot from under him, coming out of the engagements a first lieutenant; became a member of the staff of Crown Prince Rudolf of Austria; spent almost two years on a hunting and exploration trip with the Prince in Africa, crossing over to Egypt and south to Abyssinia and Lake Victoria-Nyanza, hunting and killing giraffes, zebras, elephants, hippopotami, rhinoceroses, tigers, lions, leopards, birds of many kinds, crocodiles and huge snakes.

After returning to Austria, Steppan, who had been the crack shot of his regiment, was obliged to resign his commission, owing to a duel with a major of the regiment. He then went to Holland where he was commissioned as lieutenant in the Dutch army and was sent to Java where he again engaged in other hunting exploits, sending his trophies to the Royal Museum at Rotterdam, where later he taught taxidermy and the title of Professor of Taxidermy and Dermoplastic was conferred upon him. After coming to the United States in 1886, nine years were spent trading in furs with the Indians of northern Canada and in the employment of the Hudson Bay company. Later he was employed for eight years as a taxidermist in the Chicago Academy of Science, the Columbian Field Museum, Chicago, and the Public Museum at Milwaukee.

In 1910 Professor Steppan came to Des Moines as director and taxidermist of the state museum in the Historical building, where his last and perhaps best work was done in the job of creating a well rounded museum, including anthropology, geology, and material relating to Indian and prehistoric life, through the acquisition and mounting of specimens which still form the body of the great museum here in Des Moines.

He was married in 1878 in Brussels, Belgium, to Wilhelmina Flebri, who died in Chicago on August 8, 1909. Again he was married on December 27, 1911, to Anna L. Van Allen, who with two daughters and two sons survive him. He was a Republican and a member of the Roman Catholic church. Since his retirement after twenty-five years as director of the state museum Professor Stepan had continued to reside here enjoying the many friends he had acquired in Des Moines.

---

NEWTON BENIAH ASHBY, writer, lecturer and U. S. consul, died at Tuscon, Arizona, March 26, 1945; born on a farm near Parkersburg, Montgomery county, Indiana, July 7, 1856, the son of William Henry Ashby and Margaretta Boyer Ashby. The family line was of Danish origin, coming to England with the Danish invaders in the tenth century. In his autobiography, "The Ashbys in Iowa," Mr. Ashby says: "Every town in England the name of which ends in "by" is of Danish origin. The town of Ashby or Ashby de la Zouche, and the castle of Ashby mentioned in Ivanhoe, are situated in the northeast corner of Leicestershire, England."

The Indiana family moved to Iowa in 1861 in a covered wagon, with three other similar wagons filled with provisions, household goods and machinery; arrived at the farm place north of Tallahoma in Otter Creek township, and not far from the present post-office of Norwood, in Lucas county, on May 3rd. His first years were spent herding cattle and sheep and in rural school; attended high school at Chariton; graduated in 1885 from Simpson college, Indianola; taught school and became a writer on the *Iowa Homestead* at Des Moines, the editor being "Uncle" Henry Wallace, whose daughter, Harriett E., he married in Winterset, the Wallace home, May 24, 1886; resided first at Mason City and then at Des Moines, and in 1891 removed to Cedar Rapids, purchasing a half interest in the *Farmer & Breeder*, becoming its editor, which he sold in 1893 to Henry C. Wallace and C. E. Curtis of Ames, the latter selling his interest to John P. Wallace, and the brothers moved the publication to Des Moines, continuing it as *Wallace's Farmer*.

Associated with Fred Faulkes at Cedar Rapids, Mr. Ashby became interested in state politics; in 1890 wrote a book, "The Riddle of the Sphinx," dedicated to the American farmer and devoted to farm problems and economics; while at Cedar Rapids wrote another book on economics entitled "Wealth and Civilization," treating of the relations between political events and economic progress, and laying the historical groundwork for the study of political economy; for years had been a Democrat in national politics and a Republican in Iowa as a prohibitionist until 1892, when he assisted in the election of Governor Boies, and was appointed by Presi-

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.