

## Robert Wright Stewart

ISSN 0003-4827

No known copyright restrictions.

---

### Recommended Citation

"Robert Wright Stewart." *The Annals of Iowa* 29 (1947), 73-74.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.7015>

Hosted by Iowa Research Online

## NOTABLE DEATHS

---

ROBERT WRIGHT STEWART, lawyer, soldier, oil executive, died at Miami, Florida, February 24, 1947; born on a farm near Cedar Rapids, Iowa, March 11, 1867; attended Coe College and Yale University, from which he was graduated in law; became a member of the board of trustees of Coe and its benefactor in 1931 by donating the funds for erection of its newest and finest building, the Stewart Memorial library; first entered the practice of law at Pierre, South Dakota, quickly becoming a leading attorney in the northwest; served as county attorney, then in the South Dakota senate from 1893 to 1898; later represented the Standard Oil, International Harvester and the Chicago and Northwestern railway in important litigation in that region; became a major in the famed Third United States volunteer "Rough Riders" cavalry in the Spanish-American war and later was commissioned a colonel in the South Dakota national guard; in 1907 became general attorney for the Standard Oil company of Indiana at Chicago; in 1914 was elevated to general counsel and a year later became a member of the board of directors; helped to shape its expansion policies, espousing a "straightforward" attitude of executives toward the public and employees; was elevated to chairman of the board, and under his administration Standard Oil grew from a \$167,000,000 corporation to a one billion dollar concern; espoused an industrial relations plan whereby employees were given a voice in setting wages, hours and working conditions, which he considered one of his proudest contributions to industrialism; also was proud of his five-year employee's stock-purchasing scheme and at the end of which in 1926, some 339,000 shares of stock valued at \$26,500,000 were turned over to 17,000 employees.

But he was defeated in a sensational battle for control of the oil company by John D. Rockefeller, jr., in 1929, after the U. S. senate investigation in 1928 of the Teapot Dome and other oil lease scandals brought on Rockefeller's fight to remove Stewart in which Rockefeller gained control of large blocks of stock controlled by eastern capital thus achieving the ouster; and while in the oil scandals, Stewart's own senate testimony resulted in his being tried twice, first for contempt and then for perjury, in each case he was acquitted.

Mr. Stewart served as chairman of the board of directors of Standard Oil of Indiana from 1918 until 1929. In addition to his affiliation with Standard Oil, he also was an executive of the Fulton Fire Insurance Co. of New York and a trustee of the National City bank of New York and the Continental Illinois Bank and Trust Co. of Chicago. He is survived by his widow, Mrs.

Maude Stewart of Chicago, and four sons, James W. Stewart, Miami Beach; R. G. Stewart, Mexico, Mo.; Donald Stewart, Havana, and Jack Stewart, Greenwich, Conn. The ashes of the deceased were flown to Cedar Rapids for interment near his birthplace.

---

JOHN BRIAR, editor and official, died February 25, 1947, at his home in Wellington Villa, Alexandria, Virginia; born in Mount Pleasant, Westmoreland county, Pennsylvania, December 15, 1861, son of John and Elizabeth Briar; came to Iowa following the close of the Civil war, the family locating at Talleyrand, in Keokuk county; learned the butter making trade at Elwood in Clinton county and in 1882 went to Estline, South Dakota, where he built and operated the first creamery in that state; engaged also in buying and shipping draft horses from Iowa to South Dakota; removed to Des Moines in 1886 and was employed first by the J. W. Hill Nursery company; went with a chum, Vernon C. Reed, to Denver and then to Colorado Springs, where they operated a livery business; selling his half interest in the business to Reed, who later became very wealthy and died about ten years ago reputed to be worth sixty-five million dollars, Briar returned to Iowa in 1890 and started publishing the *Blockton Buzzsaw*, which he afterwards sold and came to Des Moines, becoming publisher of the *Des Moines Graphic*, a sensational Saturday weekly publication with a large street sale, which he edited several years, later becoming a reporter upon the *Iowa State Register*.

For some time Mr. Briar was the Iowa correspondent of the *Chicago Tribune*, but perhaps his most noteworthy newspaper work was upon the *Des Moines Capital* during the years prior to 1902 under the Lafayette Young ownership, becoming city editor and later an editorial writer; a supporter of the candidacies of Albert B. Cummins of Des Moines, for United States senator and then for governor, he became Governor Cummins private secretary from 1902 to 1908, and accompanied the latter to Washington when he was elected United States senator, serving him there as secretary for many years; purchased a tract of land favorable for plating and realized a handsome profit in its sale; became commissioner of War Mineral Relief, Department of Interior, in 1921 and served in that position until 1933.

Mr. Briar was married twice, first in Des Moines to Zoe McPheeters, who died in Des Moines September 6, 1906, prior to his leaving Iowa, they having no children; the second time to Florence Stowe, of Washington, who survives him, with a son, John Briar III, a grandson, John Briar IV, a grand daughter, Suzanne Briar, all of Wellington Villa, and a brother, Roy Briar, of Des Moines.

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.