

# J. C. Steinman, Leading Monticello Citizen, Passes at 88 Years

Prominent in Affairs of Green County for More Than a Half Century—  
Funeral Services Tuesday

J. C. Steinman, 88, Monticello's first citizen and prominent in the affairs of Green county over fifty years, passed away at his residence on Main street in Monticello at 4:30 o'clock yesterday afternoon after an illness of a few hours. Death is attributed to senility complications.

Funeral services are announced for Tuesday afternoon at 2 o'clock from Zwingli Evangelical and Reformed church, with Rev. A. R. Achtemeier officiating and interment in Highland cemetery. The body will be taken from the Voegeli funeral home to the Steinman home Sunday morning. Tuesday noon until the time of the services the body will lie in state at the church.



J. C. Steinman, on his 88th birthday, 1939, at the spot he identified as the site of Rich Goebel's first Green county cheese factory, opened in 1848. Factory is visible in picture of old Albert Boller farm in Washington. To his left is outlined by growth of weeds. As a boy he deloused milk tins.

## Came Here as Youth

Eighty-one years a resident of Green County he made more than one man's impression on the life of the period in which he lived. During that time he rose from emigrant boy to man of affairs and important public position.

He was rugged of constitution and although retired from active business and feeling the impairment of advancing years he continued a regular daily routine to occupy his time. He never lost interest in life or his pride in his home and garden. Through the past summer he worked in his garden on his knees and personally directed the painting of his residence.

He was a remarkable man in many respects. His memory made him a source of unflinching historical information. He was a regular reader of The Times every afternoon and did his reading without glasses. He saw the birth of the Green county factory system of cheesemaking and it is appropriate that the tablets marking the sites of the first cheese factories bear his name.

Mr. Steinman as a resident of Monticello fifty-nine years was known as an enterprising citizen of the highest integrity, churchman, business man, banker, neighbor. He was active and useful for many years, growing in public respect as his character gained for him position of leading citizen. Coming to Green County as an immigrant boy he made the best of limited advantages to educate himself and completed an interesting and successful career. He retired from active business 30 years ago.

### **Authority on Taxation**

The study he gave to the tax problem in connection with Gov. Robert M. LaFollette's taxation and equalization reform laws and establishment of a state tax commission won for him statewide recognition as tax authority as Green county supervisor of assessment forty years ago.

Mr. Steinman was also authority on historical facts since he became a resident of Green County in 1861. Each year for over 40 years, starting a new book January 1, he has kept a day-by-day diary that is a complete history of doings and events, weather, births, marriages, deaths, accidents, fires, new buildings, everything of any consequence in his home and neighboring community. His diary has been useful many times in establishing definite dates in the lives of his neighbors.

### **Saw First Cheese Factories**

Fifteen years ago when The Times first suggested as proper time to seek out and establish for all time the exact location of Green county's first cheese factory producing cheese for the outside market. Mr. Steinman was able to furnish unquestioned information to support historic data gathered at that time.

Working on a farm in Washington township in a Swiss settlement where farmers were milking six to 10 cows and he knew Nick Gerber as he came from Ohio in 1868 and founded Green county's first cheese factory in the making of limburger cheese, Mr. Steinman was 14. One of his chores after milking was to drive from the Blum farm to the Babler farm with the milk morning and evening. A year later, in 1869, he knew by personal information that Mr. Gerber opened the first Swiss cheese factory north of Monticello. He assisted in placing the roadside boulders bearing bronze tablets of the Green County Historical society now marking the sites of the first two factories for the benefit of future generations. He spoke at the dedication at the old Babler farm on Sunday, Sept. 10, 1939, and recalled Green county's first Cheese day in 1873. Thus he made valuable contribution to the basic history of Green county's dairy industry.

### **Always Hardy and Active**

Hard work in the open in his young manhood made him a marvel physically and by simple living and right habits he kept himself fit except for disability due to arthritis of increasing severity in recent years. Too nervous to longer write with a pen he penciled long letters, written without glasses, that were legible to every word and letter.

Automobiles came into use at the time he was supervisor of assessment and despite popular prejudice because drivers of horses feared the cars and the few owners were among the well-to-do, he put a car into practical use. Engaged in his taxation work he placed farm valuation by personal observation, driving over unimproved highways and covering the county as it was never traveled before by one man. He kept up with new cars and frequently made long trips, his regular winter stays at Hot Springs, Ark., for baths for his ailment, palling for overland auto trips. His building operations at Monticello include a large garage and dance hall.

### **Lost Father in Civil War**

John Casper Steinman was born in the village of Nieder Urnen, Canton Glarus,

Switzerland. He was 7 when he emigrated with his mother and his grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Casper Steinman. His father, Melchior Steinman, had left Switzerland before them, arriving in February, 1861. He met recruiting officers working among the emigrants on New York's waterfront who were offering bonus of \$300 for enlistments in the civil war with assurance that the war would be nothing more than a skirmish that would soon be over. Joining the Union army for what he thought was a brief period that would permit him to join his family on arrival he was sent to Tennessee and participating in the first engagement he was mortally wounded and died in nine days.

### **Came By Sail Boat**

His wife and son and the parents were on the ocean in a sailboat 57 days and received the tragic news as they landed in New York harbor. Disappointed and depressed the family determined to journey on to Green county. They arrived in Monroe May 13, 1861, the boy's seventh birthday. Here they joined an uncle, Deitland Thomm, who came ahead of them and settled in Washington township, five miles west of Monticello. The boy lived with his uncle and the mother found employment. In 1862 she married Fredolin Zimmerman, four miles southwest of New Glarus. The boy at 14 worked on a farm for \$6 a month for six summer months and in the winter worked for his board while attending district school.

The village of New Glarus attracted him in 1870 and there he learned harness making. He attended confirmation school and April 2, 1871, he was confirmed by Rev. J. T. Etter with a class of 26.

### **Bought Small Farm**

He spent part of 1876 in Iowa and except for one season in 1877 when he made cheese at Farmers Grove before going to New Glarus he worked out doing farm work, grubbing and ditching until January 13, 1878, when he married Barbara Legler, New Glarus township. They settled on a small farm five miles west of the village of New Glarus purchased on a small down payment and paid 9 per cent interest on the balance. During the first few years farm product prices were down, milk 65 cents a hundred, hogs \$2.25, eggs five cents a dozen, cattle and horses very cheap. Starting with \$500 saved during nine years, He made what he considered a successful start, and in 1883 he sold his farm and located in Monticello, where he joined Fred Knobel in business as Steinman and Knobel. With \$5,000 in cash, little education and no business experience, they opened a general merchandise store in January, 1883, occupying a frame building until 1889, when Mr. Steinman built the first brick building in Monticello, 32'x70', two stories. This was two years after the railroads came into Monticello, which began to grow, the railroads increasing the importance of the village as a business center.

Mr. Steinman in the early '80s was in the cheese business in connection with the firm of Steinman & Knobel. They operated five factories and in the sale of the product Mr. Steinman made business trips to all parts of the country, calling on jobbers.

### **Chairman of Mt. Pleasant**

Mr. Steinman was elected chairman of the town of Mount Pleasant in 1885 and was reelected. This was his introduction into public affairs and was followed by thirteen years on the county board as supervisor from the village of Monticello. He was elected Green county supervisor of assessments in 1901, when the office was newly created by

the state. He resigned as county supervisor to be a candidate for the new position and the board on the first ballot vote gave him the election with nineteen votes. At the end of four terms he retired because of impaired health. He filled the office nine years while the state passed through early administration of new taxation laws. The Wisconsin tax commission recognized his ability, calling him in frequent consultation and appointed him to the Green county board of review.

During his term as supervisor of assessment he was in the clothing business at Monticello and with his son, George, then 17, in charge of the store, Mr. Steinman devoted his time to official duties, also doing auctioneering, and selling real estate and insurance. He acquired the interest of F. K. Studley in the Studley & Karlen Lumber company in 1904, and also half interest in the grain and feed business of Karlen & Pearson, the lumber and feed business being since continued under the name of Karlen & Steinman Lumber company.

E. J. Blum, John Dick and Mr. Steinman in 1906 merged their three stores into a corporation known as the People's Supply company, conducting a general store with Mr. Steinman as president.

### **Charter Church Member**

He was a charter member of the Reformed-Zwingli church of Monticello, he with 12 others starting the congregation in 1887. A new church was erected in 1888 and Mr. Steinman has been a consistory member since the beginning and the treasurer.

Several substantial buildings and homes erected by Mr. Steinman have contributed to the improvement of the village. Six acres south of the village purchased by him in 1910, annexed as Steinman addition, were built up with fine new homes. He was stockholder of the Bank of Monticello and a director until 1940. As a citizen his political affiliations were republican and he became a strong progressive and follower of the senior LaFollette. He was elected Green county delegate to the state convention at the time "Old Bob" won his nomination resulting in his first election as governor.

The wedded life of Mr. and Mrs. Steinman continued 59 years. Since the death of Mrs. Steinman March 31, 1937, Mr. Steinman has lived in the old home. Surviving of nine children are three sons, George C. Steinman, in the clothing business; Fred H. Steinman and John C. Steinman, in the lumber business, and two daughters, Mrs. Herman L. Karlen and Mrs. M. E. Lynn, all residing in Monticello. There are also eleven grandchildren and eleven great grandchildren.

Mr. Steinman at the time of his death was president of the People's Supply company and also president of the Karlen-Steinman Lumber company. Throughout his life it was almost a daily habit for him to visit the down town section of Monticello

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