

What Manner of Man

What manner of man was this founding father, E. Sydney Stephens? To look at photos of the man, one is not particularly impressed. He was only of average height, pudgy and tending to jowls. He was virtually bald. Born September 4, 1881, he had just turned fifty-four at the time of the Columbia meeting. He was president of E. W. Stephens Publishing Company in Columbia.

Sydney Stephens died October 17, 1948. Students in the wildlife conservation class at the time remember Dr. Rudolf Bennitt, associate zoology professor at the University of Missouri, standing before the class and crying as he announced Stephens' death. What sort of man could evoke such emotion?

Dan Saults, former Information officer and assistant director for the Department, once wrote that Stephens came from the Missouri Valley Bourbons, the old families that reigned over the geographical, financial and cultural core of Missouri.

Public service came naturally to him. His father had been active in public affairs, and a brother of Sydney's, Hugh Stephens, became a Jefferson City banker and headed the Citizens Road Association, which in the 1920s and 1930s sponsored movements leading to the state's modern highway system.

Sydney Stephens was brought up in comfortable circumstances and given the advantages of a well-to-do youngster. He attended Missouri University and Harvard where he had been a classmate of Franklin D. Roosevelt. He cultivated a Harvard pose of casual urbanity: mannered, witty, detached. Like FDR, he used a long cigarette holder, which he flourished as he talked.

Charles Callison said: I would apply the word urbane to Syd Stephens. He was a very charming, cultured gentleman that I think many people would be surprised to find in a little town like Columbia, Missouri.

He was a polished man, with a good sense of humor, a great storyteller with a fine feel for the language, written or spoken.



E. Sydney Stephens, chosen as leader in the drive for a non-political fish and game department, had a long history of public service.

His motivation in conservation came out of the fact that he was a hunter. He was a quail hunter and a waterfowl hunter. He was personally acquainted with the well-to-do duck hunting groups in St. Louis and elsewhere, people like Roland Hoerr, Russell Dearthmont, Edward K. Love Syd was a hunting buddy of those people. That was the group that brought in the great outdoor writer Nash Buckingham.

Stephens took on all the difficult public relations problems. He was a master at that.

Stephens was pretty skillful in managing the Commission, but I don't think it would be fair to say that Syd ran it all.

Callison said that Stephens once gave a speech in which he lectured the outdoor writers of the country on their shortcomings. It so impressed them that they made him an honorary life member of the Outdoor Writers Association of America, an honor that especially pleased Stephens.

Former Commission Administrative Secretary Bettye Hornbuckle Gibson said: Sydney Stephens was the guiding light that took us through ten years and really got us established, more than any one person. One person doesn't do it all-but he had the finesse, the know-how and the dedication to guide us through that very bad period. I think somewhere along the line we have lost the understanding of how much E. Sydney Stephens contributed to the conservation movement in the state.

Mr. Stephens said one time, "I'll never have any money, but that's not important to me. *This* [the Department] is my swan song, my one contribution to the state I love.

That's the way he worked and he spent endless hours at it.

Dan Saults said: Stephens was an aristocrat, a beautiful man, and always had beautiful manners. He never insulted anyone . . . he did, but they didn't know it. To illustrate the kind of man he was, I sat in on a hearing on Asbury Roberts one time. [Roberts was the first Chief of Protection Division, and was fired in 1947.]

Riley Gladden was acting agent supervisor in the east-central district, but had never been confirmed. He was called in by Stephens and Syd told him, Riley, I want you to tell me everything about Asbury Roberts, everything he's done.

Riley said, Mr. Stephens, I can't do it. Mr. Roberts is my boss. It doesn't matter how I may feel about him, I'm not going to say a word against him. I just can't do it.

I waited for Syd to send him to Kingdom Come, but he just sat there for a long time, obviously getting his temper under control. Then he dismissed Riley, curtly. I thought that Riley's future with the Department might be rather bleak.

But next day, the first item of business was Syd saying, I want Riley Gladden as supervisor of agents in the east-central. Someone brought up that Gladden didn't have much education or something, and Syd said, I don't give a damn whether he has a college degree or not. There's a *man!*

"I went away with a heightened opinion of both men.

Rudolf Bennitt and Stephens were only acquaintances before the campaign started. Then they became close friends. And Stephens listened to Eugene Poirot expound on soils and trace elements when nobody else was paying much attention to his findings. Dr. William Albrecht [University of Missouri soil scientist] was probably an important figure in Stephens' staff. He apparently called the group his kitchen cabinet. "

Stephens was an early exponent of the relation of soils to wildlife and forestry, and this became a cornerstone of future programs of the Department, possibly the first conservation department in the nation to do so.



Conservation Agent Riley Gladden's reputation for integrity won Stephens support for his promotion to the post of district supervisor in 1947.

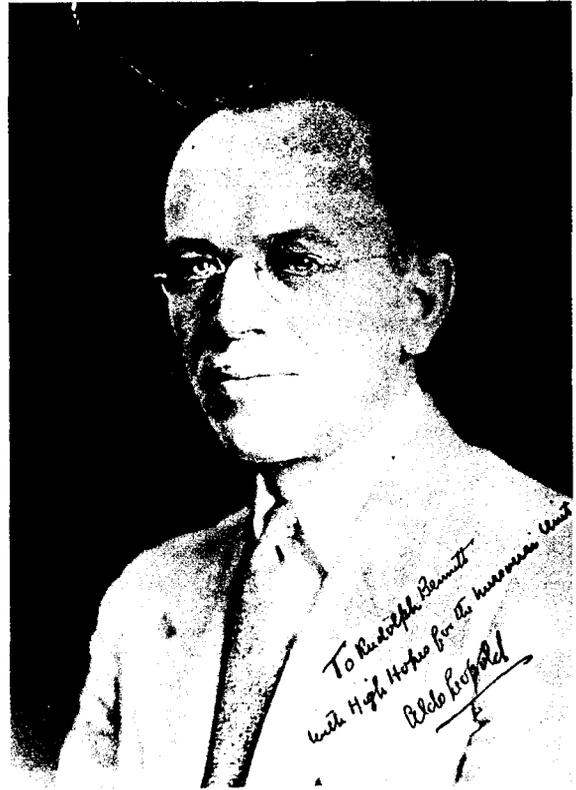


Eugene Poirot's soil nutrition experiments, working with soil scientist William Albrecht, influenced Stephens views on wildlife management.

Townsend Godsey, the Department's first information officer, described Stephens. Syd was a playboy, you know. Hugh, his brother, was a staid banker. But Syd recognized public relations and was the prime motivator in producing the Department's first motion picture, ***Back to Missouri***, to offset criticism of the Commission.

Syd had a lot to do with the basic organization of the Department, and you'd never have thought of Syd as being interested in that area, either. He was just a publisher and had an old, broken-down printing department. But he was of an old family of George Caleb Bingham-Sappington tie-ups. Rudolf Bennitt had quite a bit of influence on Stephens, because Stephens respected him as being someone knowledgeable about his field. I don't think Syd was terribly knowledgeable in wildlife conservation, but he was interested in it. I would say the technical stuff flowed through Stephens from Bennitt. Stephens was a Democrat. He was a Baptist. His grandfather founded Stephens College.

Bill T. Crawford, who headed the Department's Wildlife Research Section for many years recalls, Stephens was the only commissioner or layman who was given honorary membership in the Wildlife Society. Essenti-



Aldo Leopold, the father of game management, became a close friend of Stephens, who helped him in his 1928 survey of wildlife conditions.

ally, they called him a professional, even though he wasn't.

Rudolf Bennitt had a lot of influence on Stephens, but that worked both ways. Aldo Leopold got in touch with Stephens when he was doing his game survey. Why? Because Stephens knew everything about Missouri.

He went to school with Franklin D. Roosevelt. He read Leopold's ***Game Management*** book and was influenced by it. It taught him about the deterioration of habitat, and the worthlessness of stocking game if the habitat was gone. But the Fish and Game Department didn't pay any attention to it. So, Stephens made a great promise: We're going to put wildlife conservation in Missouri on a technical basis. We're going to hire people who are professionals, who know what they're doing. And who was one of the first people he hired? Starker Leopold . . . Aldo Leopold's son, who was working on his doctoral degree at the University of California.

Syd Stephens was primarily a hunter, and



Stephens was never happier than when water/owl hunting at the cabin near Sumner that he shared with Columbia banker, R. B. Price.

it was hunting that was his passion and what initially brought him into the conservation field. Almost every aspect of the outdoors intrigued him, but hunting was what he loved most, especially quail hunting over fine dogs, and waterfowl hunting. The decrease in animals to hunt, dramatically highlighted by the drought of the 1930s, was the spur to work for a new approach to wildlife restoration and management. Undoubtedly Rudolf Bennitt widened his interests to embrace every aspect of conservation, beyond things for his gun.

For many years he hunted waterfowl along the Missouri River with his hunting buddy, R. B. Price, Columbia banker. Occasionally he would hunt the St. Charles bot-

toms with St. Louis area sportsmen, and some of their club facilities made the Missouri River hunting camps he shared with Price look pretty shabby. Eventually, he and Price bought a small parcel of land that adjoined Swan Lake National Wildlife Refuge that Department Biologist A. R. Mottesheard found for them. They fixed up a comfortable cabin and Stephens was in his glory when he was entertaining friends there.

So well loved was Sydney Stephens that upon his retirement after ten years as Commission chairman a testimonial dinner was given to honor him, on September 15, 1947, at the Coronado Hotel in St. Louis. Conservation's most famous people from all over the nation came to St. Louis to pay homage to Stephens.¹

At the dinner, it was Russell L. Dearmont of Cape Girardeau, attorney, former state



Stephens manners won respect of associates.

¹ Among those who came to honor him were Nash Buckingham, author, sportsman and conservation leader; David A. Aylward, president of the National Wildlife Federation; J. Hammond Brown, president of the Outdoor Writers Association of America; Seth Gordon, executive director of the Pennsylvania Game Commission; Aldo Leopold, professor of wildlife management at the University of Wisconsin and philosophic guru of wildlife conservation in America; Harold Titus, author, editor and retiring chairman of the Michigan Conservation Commission; Ira N. Gabrielson, president of the Wildlife Management Institute; former governor Lloyd C. Stark; J. N. "Ding" Darling, conservation editorial cartoonist, former head of the U. S. Biological Survey and founder of the National Wildlife Federation.

senator and one of the drafters of the conservation amendment, who outlined the background of Stephens.

While Missouri was yet a part of the Upper Louisiana Purchase, in 1819, Syd Stephens grandfather, James L. Stephens, migrated from Kentucky and settled at Columbia. There he became a successful and prosperous merchant and, among other things, endowed the small Baptist girls school which is today the widely known Stephens College.

The late E. W. Stephens, following in the footsteps of his pioneer father, became one of the prominent and most influential citizens of Missouri. He founded the Columbia *Herald*, the leading weekly country newspaper of its time; established the publishing company bearing his name, which today has a worldwide business. Among many public services, E. W. Stephens headed the commission which gave to the state of Missouri perhaps the most stately and certainly one of the most beautiful state capitol buildings in the country.

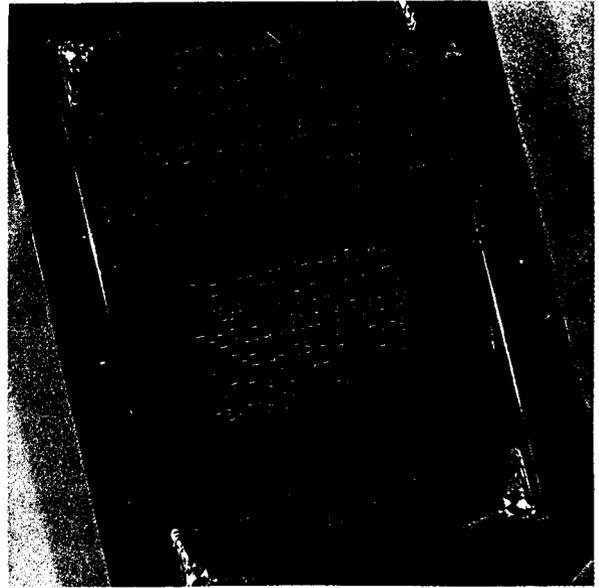
Educated in the Columbia public schools, a graduate of the University of Missouri—later a graduate of Harvard—Syd Stephens returned to Columbia, Missouri, in 1905 and became associated with his father in the E. W. Stephens Publishing Company. He is president of the company today.

Throughout the years, he has been one of the leaders in almost every public undertaking of importance in Columbia. He has served in the Chamber of Commerce and as a member of the City Council. It is said his career almost ended in 1910 when he introduced an ordinance levying a tax of fifty cents a year on horse and buggies for use of the streets!

Syd helped establish the Boone County Hospital—along with three drives for Stephens College building funds. He served as a member of the University of Missouri Inter-Collegiate Athletic Committee for twenty years; served as vice-chairman of seven World War I bond sale campaigns and directed the District Red Cross drive; was a member of the Missouri Memorial Tower, Stadium and Field House Committee; and has since 1918 been vice-president of the Missouri Stadium Corporation

Other important public services, too

numerous to mention, preceded his selection in 1935 as president of the Conservation Federation of Missouri, charged with the responsibility of drafting the conservation amendment to our state constitution, and organizing and directing the campaign for its adoption. The amendment was adopted in 1936 by a vote of 879,000 to 351,000—the largest majority ever received by an amendment to the Constitution of Missouri.



Plaque presented to Stephens in 1947 is now proudly displayed in the halls of the Conservation Department that he helped create.

Governor Lloyd Stark appointed Mr. Stephens a member of the first Commission and he was reappointed by Governor Forrest Donnell for a second term. His brilliant and fearless leadership as a member and chairman of the Commission for the past ten years are well known to you all. I only add that, in my opinion, this Missouri conservation program will ultimately bring more health, happiness and prosperity to present and future citizens of Missouri than any other state directed program.

How did commission officials in other states feel about Stephens? Harold Titus, who was retiring after nineteen years as chairman of the Michigan Conservation Commission, said: On many occasions I have talked with Missourians about Syd Stephens and have always been a little irked because of what

W A R N I N G

It is a felony for anyone to sign any initiative or referendum petition with any name other than his own, or to knowingly sign his name more than once for the same measure, or to sign such petition when he is not a legal voter.

INITIATIVE PETITION

To the Honorable Dwight H. Brown, Secretary of State for the State of Missouri:

We, the undersigned, citizens and legal voters of the State of Missouri and the County of St. Louis - - - - - respectfully demand that the following proposed amendment to the Constitution of the State of Missouri shall be submitted to the legal voters of the State of Missouri for their approval or rejection at the regular General Election on the 3rd day of November, 1936, to-wit:

The control, management, restoration, conservation and regulation of the bird, fish, game, forestry and all wild life resources of the State, including hatcheries, sanctuaries, refuges, reservations and all other property now owned or used for said purposes or hereafter acquired for said purposes and the acquisition and establishment of the same, and the administration of the laws now or hereafter pertaining thereto, shall be vested in a commission to be known as the CONSERVATION COMMISSION, to consist of four members to be appointed by the Governor, **not more than** two of whom shall be members of the same political party. The commissioners shall have knowledge of and interest in wild life conservation. Vacancies shall be filled by appointment by the Governor for the unexpired term within thirty days from the date of such vacancy; on failure of the Governor to fill the vacancy within thirty days, the remaining commissioners shall fill the vacancy for the unexpired term. The first members of said commission shall be appointed for terms, as follows: one for a term of two years, or until his or her successor is appointed and qualified; two for terms of four years, or until their respective successors are appointed and qualified; one for a term of six years, or until his or her successor is appointed and qualified. Upon the expiration of each of the foregoing terms of said commissioners, a successor shall be appointed by the Governor for a term of six years, or until his or her successor is appointed and qualified, which term of six years shall thereafter be the length of term of each member of said Commission. The members of said Commission shall receive no salary or other compensation for their services as such. The members of the Commission shall receive their necessary traveling and other expenses incurred while actually engaged in the discharge of their official duties.

Said Commission shall have the power to acquire by purchase, gift, eminent domain, or otherwise, all property necessary, useful or convenient for the use of the Commission, or the exercise of any of its powers hereunder, and in the event the right of eminent domain is exercised, it shall be exercised in the same manner as now or hereafter provided for the exercise of eminent domain by the State Highway Commission.

A Director of Conservation shall be appointed by the Commission and such director shall, with the approval of the Commission, appoint such assistants and other employees as the Commission may deem necessary. The Commission shall determine the qualifications of the director, all assistants and employees and shall fix all salaries, except that no commissioner shall be eligible for such appointment or employment.

The fees, monies, or funds arising from the operation and transactions of said Commission and from the application and the administration of the laws and regulations pertaining to the bird, fish, game, forestry and wild life resources of the State and from the sale of property used for said purposes, shall be expended and used by said Commission for the control, management, restoration, conservation and regulation of the bird, fish, game, forestry and wild life resources of the State, including the purchase or other acquisition of property for said purposes, and for the administration of the laws pertaining thereto and for no other purpose.

The general assembly may enact any laws in aid of but not inconsistent with the provisions of this amendment and all existing laws inconsistent herewith shall no longer remain in force or effect. This amendment shall be self-enforcing and go into effect July 1, 1937.

Each person signing this petition for himself or herself says:

I have personally signed this petition; I am a legal voter of the State of Missouri and the County of S t . L o u i s and the above named Congressional District; my residence and postoffice are correctly written after my name.

NAME	RESIDENCE <small>(If in a city, give street and house number. If not, give town or township in which signer resides.)</small>	POST OFFICE <small>(Give of city and state. If not in city, give rural route, including town and state if different)</small>
1 - <i>J. M. Allen</i>		
2 - <i>J. L. Stephens</i>		
3 - <i>P. B. Brighton</i>	1123 Moorelands Dr.	<i>RICHMOND HTS, MO</i>

impressed me as a spirit of unduly proprietary interest in Syd Stephens, when up in Michigan we feel that he partially belongs to us, and in all the other states from Maine to California, from the Great Lakes to the Gulf-people think that Syd Stephens belongs to them!

J. N. Ding Darling, of Des Moines, paid tribute to Stephens leadership ability by saying: It was a surprising thing that happened in Missouri all of a sudden ten years ago. Along with the Stephens leadership, other giants in the field of conservation seemed suddenly to spring up from the Missouri soil.

They appeared in the state university, the state agricultural college, in the press, and among the people there was a new vigor of interest in conservation. A state federation

was born and a governor with an understanding of the principles of conservation was elected. That was Governor Stark and without his understanding and sympathy toward the statewide program, much of the progress so gloriously achieved might have had much tougher sledding.

Rudolf Bennitt and professor W. C. Etheridge became recognized national leaders among the research scientists and soil conservationists and, as if by common consent, the country press and the schools joined the statewide evangelism. Thus, in ten years time Missouri has become not only the envy but the goal of nearly all the states in the union in its methods and management and application of conservation principles.

And I cannot close the list of Missouri s



Two of conservation's elder statesmen, J. N. Ding Darling, conservation cartoonist, and E. Sydney Stephens, share a moment at the testimonial dinner for Stephens in September, 1947.

accomplishments without mentioning your wisdom and good fortune in the selection of your executive director-I. T. Bode. If there had been a better man in the country for the job, Sydney Stephens would have hired him.

Conservation's greatest philosopher, Aldo Leopold, summed up the importance of Stephens' contributions. What Sydney Stephens has done for conservation in Missouri (and through Missouri's example: for conservation in North America), is by this time so ably expounded that I shall address myself to the converse question: what should Missouri do to ensure the continuance of Sydney Stephens' work?

Frankness compels me, first of all, to point out that it is not unusual for a state to

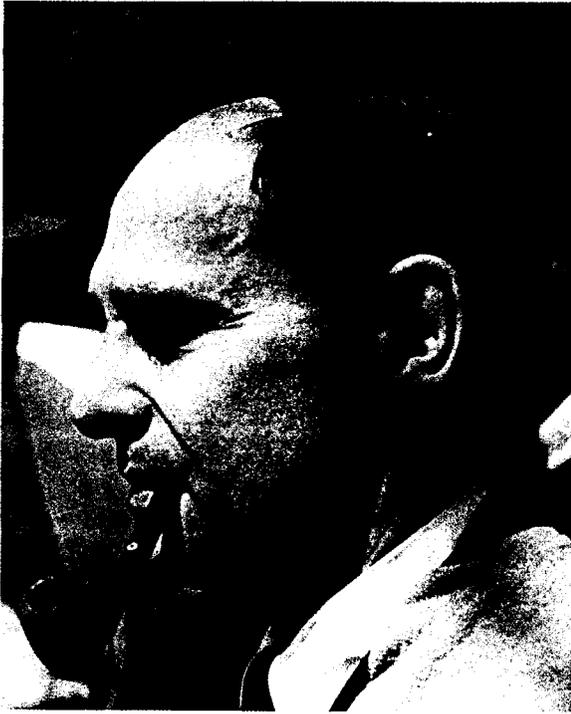
fall down on the job after an able leader has retired from active service. It is in the nature of leadership to inspire people to build better than they know. The crucial question is: what are the usual causes of falling down? If Missouri can be on her guard against the errors that have caused recessions of progress in other states, she will, to that extent, have ensured the continuance of the Stephens momentum. (I use that term deliberately, for few states have come as fast and as far as Missouri has under his leadership.)

I am too old a hand to think I know the complete answer, but I will venture to list briefly some of the dangers that beset any state which is trying to make conservation a living reality.

Of first importance is a sustained high



Dr. Rudolf Bennitt was Stephens' advisor and friend, and served as a technical advisor to the new Conservation Commission. Many of Bennitt's wildlife students later worked for the Commission.



Irwin T. Bode in 1838 was at the height of his powers as organizer and administrator of the revolutionary new Department of Conservation.

average of quality commissioner appointments. It is incredible how much harm can arise over a period of years from even ten percent bad selections. Appointments can average no better than the governors who make them, or than the legislators who confirm them, or than the voters who elect both.

Another danger arises from the misconception of who is the conservation public. Because sportsmen make most of the noise and pay most of the bills, it is easy for a commission to forget other groups. One of the earmarks of statesmanship in Sydney Stephens regime was his early recognition of the landowner and farmer as the ultimate prime mover in conservation.

A third danger arises from insufficient width-between-the-ears in the average citizen-conservationist, who is too often willing to buy success (real or fancied) in his own pet resource by selling others down the river. I am going to be specific here because my scars still itch. I come from a state where the deer hunters and resort owners insist on maintaining a top-heavy deer herd at the

expense of the future forest, at the expense of all the other wildlife that inhabits the deer range, and at the expense of the ultimate welfare of the deer themselves. Missouri has equivalent problems-every state has them. These problems raise the basic question: should a commission give the public what it wants, or what it needs? Again the earmark of statesmanship: Sydney Stephens always aimed steadfastly at a high proportion of actual needs, and somehow made the public want them. That sounds simple, but if anyone thinks it really is, just try it sometime.

A fourth danger is the tendency, latent in any state, for administration and research to draw apart, or to lose track of each other. Show me a state where these two look down their noses at each other, and I show you a state coasting down a blind alley. To keep knocking these two heads together is one of the most important duties of any commission. To knock heads gracefully, a commissioner must be a good friend of both, and must critically appraise both. Sydney Stephens has always been the good friend of both, and he has never lost his capacity for critical appraisal. His 1946 speech, *Where are We, and What Time Is It?* is a milestone in conservation statesmanship.

I could extend this list much further, and in each case point out some new earmark of sagacity, foresight and courage in the man we honor tonight. I need not do so, for we who love him need no convincing. What we do need is assurance of Missouri's sagacity, foresight and courage in the years to come. I have mentioned four pitfalls of policy which Missouri might step into; let me now avow the belief that if conservation can become a living reality anywhere, it can do so in Missouri. This is because Missourians, in my opinion, are not yet completely industrialized in mind and spirit, and I hope never will be.

Conservation, at bottom, rests on the conviction that there are things in this world more important than dollar signs and ciphers. Many of these other things attach to the land, and to the life that is on it and in it. People who know these things have been growing scarcer but less so in Missouri than elsewhere. This is why conservation is possible here. This

is what Sydney Stephens teaching adds up to. This is why land-minded Missourians can, if they will, build on the foundations Sydney Stephens has laid down for them.

A bronze plaque was presented to Stephens, which is now proudly displayed at the Department he loved.

Stephens retired from the Commission at the end of June, 1947. The new Commission voted to honor him with the Master Conservationist Award and I. T. Bode wrote, on August 22:

Dear Mr. Stephens:

It is with sincere pleasure that I inform you of your selection for receipt of one of the Master Conservationist Awards for 1947. It is planned to have the presentation of Awards for 1947 at the testimonial Dinner which is to be given for you in Saint Louis the evening of September 15, and it would be appreciated if you would indicate your willingness to accept the Award at that time.

Dr. [Forrest Olin] Capps will no

doubt contact you in the near future to determine which type of Award you prefer—the lapel pin or the watch charm.

My sincere congratulations on your selection for this well deserved Award.

Very truly yours,
I. T. BODE

Attached to this formal letter was a handwritten note:

This is the formal notice. But, my Lord, how I d like to tell you what my old heart wants to say.

The award has never been granted to one more deserving of the title it carries.

God bless you.

Bode

And penciled alongside were the words: Me, too. Bettye.

It was that kind of respect and admiration that Syd Stephens generated in the hearts of those who knew him.



Five men who contributed much to Missouri's conservation progress: Robert A. Brown Jr., Aldo Leopold, J. N. Ding Darling, E. Sydney Stephens, and Edward K. Love at testimonial dinner, September 15, 1947, in St. Louis.