

## NEBRASKA STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY COLLECTION RECORD

RG2624.AM: Stefan, Karl, 1884-1951  
Papers: 1934-1951  
Norfolk, Nebraska: U.S. Congressman  
Cubic Ft.: 22 cu.ft.; 43 boxes

### BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Congressman Karl Stefan was born March 1, 1884, on a farm near the town of Muellehausen and Zebrakov in Bohemia, which then was a part of Austria, and later of Czechoslovakia. He came to Nebraska with his parents at the age of about 2 years. He attended public schools in Omaha; also German and Bohemian parochial schools. In 1897, because of hard times, he quit school in the seventh grade.

His first job was in a packing house. He also worked for the publicity department of the Trans-Mississippi exposition and as a telegraph messenger boy. He attended a YMCA night school and studied telegraphy. He became one of the youngest and fastest telegraphers in the country.

Karl Stefan became a traveling telegrapher and worked in almost every state in the nation. During the Philippine insurrection he became a telegrapher for the Philippine constabulary. Stefan's first newspaper work was on the Manila Times. As he spoke seven languages he acted as an interpreter for tourist parties through Asia and Europe, after which he returned to Nebraska and worked on Omaha newspapers.

He was married in Omaha on January 30, 1907, to Ida Rosenbaum, and later two sons and a daughter were born. They moved after their marriage to Seattle, where he worked as a telegrapher.

The Stefan's came to Norfolk in 1909, where Karl worked as a telegrapher for the Norfolk Daily News. He later served as city editor, resigning from that job in 1924 when he purchased a cigar store, which he later sold.

Stefan helped build WJAG, the Norfolk Daily News radio station, in 1922, and was chief announcer and newscaster until elected to Congress in 1934. In 1934 his radio listeners urged him to run for Congress, and he received more than 72,000 votes as a Republican candidate in a Democratic landslide year. Stefan beat the incumbent Edgar Howard by 20,000 votes. He was the only Republican elected to Congress that year from Nebraska, and was the first radio man ever elected to Congress.

In 1935 he was a congressional delegate to the inauguration of President Quezon of the Philippines. In 1939 he was a delegate to the Inter-Parliamentary Union at Oslo. Stefan inspected several of the American consulates and left Europe just before World War II started.

Karl Stefan was a leader in foreign affairs, an enthusiast over aviation development and was a member of numerous appropriations committees. He was the ranking minority member of the house appropriations committee at the time of his death. He was official advisor to the United Nations conference in 1945, a member of the congressional air policy board in 1948 and a member of the eight-man central committee of the house appropriations committee.

Awards and decorations he has received include the following: Honorary Brigadier General, Philippine National Volunteers; Philippine Medal of Military Merit; Meritorious Service Medal, National Volunteers of Philippines; Philippine medal for service in the pacification of Luzon; Cross of Alfaro by Eloy Alfaro international Foundation for work on Inter-American Good neighbor Program; Order of National Merit Carlos Manuel de Cespedes of Cuba; honorary member, Spanish War Veterans; veteran member, Military Order of the Carabao. Mr. Stefan had been adopted by four Indian tribes, Omaha, Winnebago, Ponca, and Santee Sioux. The Indians gave him the name "Pah-Hug-Mon-Thee," meaning "Leader Man." The Congressman was also a member of the Rotary Club, Masonic, Odd Fellow and Elks lodges, U.C.T. and T.P.A., National Press Club and the Army and Navy Club.

Karl Stefan died on Tuesday, October 2, 1951 at the age of 67. He died as a result of a heart ailment. At the time of his death he was survived by his wife, one son, Dr. Karl Stefan, Jr., one daughter, Mrs. Robert Askren, two grandchildren, and one brother, Dr. William Stefan.

### **SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE**

This collection consists of 43 boxes of manuscript material arranged in six series: (1) Congressional files, 1935-1951; (2) Military and Naval Academies Correspondence, 1935-1951; (3) Personal Correspondence, 1935-1951; (4) Campaign Correspondence and Material, 1936-1951; (5) Speeches, Radio Programs, News Columns, 1934-1951; and (6) Miscellany.

The bulk of this collection consists of Congressional files relating to Karl Stefan's service in the United State Congress, 1935-1951, from Nebraska's 3<sup>rd</sup> Congressional District. These files primarily consist of correspondence, printed matter, Congressional bills and committee reports. Included are materials relating to domestic and foreign affairs, educational aid, farm material, Indian claims and Missouri River development.

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Republican Party. Nebraska  
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U.S. Department of State. Appropriations and Expenditures  
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Czechs in Nebraska  
Agriculture, U.S.  
Indians of North America-Government Relations  
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Roads – Nebraska  
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U.S. Congress. House of Representatives