

Steppe, Clarence Maddrey ^[1]

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by William S. Powell, 1994

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Clarence Maddrey Steppe, landscape nurseryman, was born at Dana in eastern [Henderson County](#) ^[2], the son of Norman Fanning and Annie Laurie Fordham Steppe. Known throughout life as "Kit," he was graduated at age fourteen from Marion High School in [McDowell County](#) ^[3], where his father was superintendent of schools for fifty years. He then entered [Lenoir-Rhyne College](#) ^[4]. After graduation in 1931, he earned a diploma from the American Landscape School (1933) and attended [Wake Forest College](#) ^[5] for a short time. Between 1934 and 1938 he worked for the National Park Service on projects in the [Great Smoky Mountains National Park](#) ^[6], on [Mount Mitchell](#) ^[7], and at [Mount Vernon](#) ^[8].

From 1941 to 1946, during [World War II](#) ^[9], Steppe served with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and with the navy. For a part of the time he was engaged in projects at the new Supreme Court building on Constitution Avenue in Washington, D.C., and on assignment to the navy he directed the first drilling for oil on the north slope northeast of Point Barrow, Alaska. He also worked for a year (1945–46) on the Manhattan Project and received a presidential citation for outstanding scientific achievement. From the [University of Tennessee](#) ^[10] he held B.S. degrees in civil engineering and nuclear engineering (both awarded in 1945) and one in political science (1946). In 1946 Steppe was a graduate student in history at [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[11]. Between 1946 and 1951 he was with the [Division of State Parks](#) ^[12] in the [North Carolina Department of Conservation and Development](#) ^[13]. He served a term as president of the Navy League of the United States and remained active in the Naval Reserve until 1964.

In 1951 Steppe founded Wayside Nurseries on U.S. 64 east of Raleigh, and in time he received fifteen national awards for landscape engineering from the American Association of Nurserymen. He held a patent for the Pink Sachet, a flowering dogwood tree. Among his noted commissions were those at the North Carolina Farm Bureau headquarters near Raleigh and at Balentine's Cafeteria and Confederate House in Cameron Village and Quail Corners Shopping Center, both in Raleigh. He also landscaped portions of the [Research Triangle Park](#) ^[14]. He considered his best work to have been at the Cherry Hill Mall in Haddonfield, N.J., but he was equally as pleased with the campus of [St. Andrews Presbyterian College](#) ^[15] in Laurinburg, the Charlotetown Mall in Charlotte, and the grounds of the [Reynolds Tobacco Company](#) ^[16] in Winston-Salem. In 1977 he was named honorary lieutenant governor of North Carolina and was recognized as layman of the year by the North Carolina Baptist Men. In 1983 he sold his business in Raleigh and retired.

Steppe was married first to Muriel Alma Spurr, and they were the parents of William Norman and Elizabeth Maddrey. Following a divorce, he married Helen Marie Allred; their children were James Fordham, Rebecca Joy, and David Lewis. Divorced again, he took a third wife, Muriel Wunder Fiscus; his fourth wife was Gilda Marini Brackett. There were no children of the last two marriages.

Because of poor health, Steppe left Raleigh in December 1988 to live with his daughter, Maddrey, in Groton, Conn. Although he was a [Baptist](#) ^[17], had served as a deacon, and had taught Sunday school for many years, his fourth wife was a [Roman Catholic](#) ^[18] who lived in Watertown, Mass. At his death special arrangements were made for his funeral to be conducted by a priest of her church and for a military burial service by the U.S. Navy; he was buried in her family lot at St. Patrick Cemetery, Watertown.

References:

Boston Globe, 27 May 1991.

Raleigh News and Observer, 1 July 1973, 26 May 1991.

Rebecca Joy Steppe, "My Father: Clarence Maddrey Steppe" (typescript, possession of the author, Knightdale, N.C.).

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