

Presentation given on behalf of Nebraska College S.R.I.C.F. to a Stated Meeting of Gladewater Masonic Lodge # 852, Gladewater, Texas, on Monday 16 February 2015 {Presidents Day}

BRO. ADOLPHUS STERNE, FREEDOM FIGHTER, STATESMAN, NOTARY and JUDGE

by Frater James A. Marples, VIII^o
Life Member, Nebraska S.R.I.C.F.



Portrait of Bro.: Adolphus Sterne 32^o and a Knight Templar.
He is wearing his 32^o regalia collar.



(Above: image of a Bordeaux medal commemorating Public Notaries)
(Notice the "clasp hands of friendship at the bottom & above it the Balance-Scales)

On April 5, 1801, Nicholas Adolphus Sterne was born in Cologne, Germany --- the eldest son of Emmanuel Sterne and his second wife, Helen Sterne. Adolphus Sterne's father was Orthodox Jewish and his mother was a Lutheran.

The boy was working in a passport-office when he noticed a list of men about to be drafted into the German army. To avoid conscription, he forged a passport and fled Germany and sailed to New Orleans, Louisiana in the



mid-1800's. There he engaged in various business enterprises. He joined the Masonic Lodge, became a Knight Templar in the York Rite, and a 32^o Mason in the Scottish Rite.

Bro.: Sterne moved later to Nacogdoches, Texas --- and is considered to be the first Scottish Rite Mason in the entire State of Texas. He selected Nacogdoches as a place to build a new life, operate a mercantile, operate a large farm and also to smuggle weapons as a colonist who eventually wanted to be liberated from Mexico. It could be said that Adolphus Sterne was born a Jew, converted to Catholicism to meet the requirement that all early-day Colonists in Texas had the mandatory obligation to become Roman Catholics themselves. It was at Adolphus Sterne's home that Bro.: Sam Houston was baptized into the Roman Catholic Church in the parlor of the Sterne home {which still stands and today is known as the Sterne-Hoya Memorial Library and Museum in Nacogdoches. At one time, Adolphus Stern owned several slaves and he was meticulous in his daily diary or journal in making notations as to how the soil and crops looked on any given day. I have visited his home which was complete with its own wine-cellar. Bro.: David Crockett spent two weeks at this home on his way to The Alamo. American Indian Chief Bowles (of the Cherokees) signed a peace treaty at the house. The "library" which was once extensive, is now more or less a token library in order to retain its heritage-status as a library and museum. Even so, it is impressive.

When I visited the Sterne home in November 2014, I could almost feel Sam Houston's presence in the parlor where he received his Catholic baptism. Oddly, Adolphus Sterne was slated to be Houston's "godfather," but declined since the baptismal date coincided with Yom Kippur ---somewhat indicating that Sterne was mostly Jewish, despite his varied leanings.

It is quite impressive to know that Adolphus Sterne worked as an interpreter and translator covering the English, French, Spanish, German, Yiddish, Portuguese and Latin languages.

While Texas was still a Mexican colony, Sterne grew restless. While Texas was still under Mexican-control, Sterne's efforts at smuggling weapons and gunpowder was discovered. He was severely disciplined, imprisoned and faced a death-sentence. Ironically, some of his Mexican captors were themselves Freemasons who felt either pity or fraternal sympathies and they eventually allowed him to walk free. Once a provisional Texas government of 'The Republic of Texas' was created: Stern personally financed the recruiting of an army nicknamed the New Orleans Grays.

In 1840, Sterne became Postmaster of the city of Nacogdoches, Texas. He served as a Notary Public, certifying documents. He later served as a deputy clerk and associate justice of the county court. The following year, Sterne became a 'Justice of the Peace'.

After Texas was annexed to the United States in 1845, Stern was elected to the Texas House of Representatives. He died March 27, 1852 in New Orleans...just less than a month before his 51st birthday. His grave at the cemetery is only a short distance (a few city blocks) from his home. On the day I visited his grave and looked down at his tombstone marked with the Masonic Square and Compasses with the letter "G" and his dates of birth and death ---I felt a spooky feeling within me, since when I saw he was 50 years and 11 months old....that was my exact age 50 years and 11 months when I gazed downward at Bro.: Stern's gravestone. It was nice to pay my respects, yet with at eerie coincidence: it did remind me 'how fleeting Life is.'

I am unclear as to what purpose of business Adolphus Stern was conducting at New Orleans at the time of his death. He was briefly interred in a cemetery in New Orleans; but later his remains were transferred to the cemetery at Nacogdoches, Texas, near his family farm which was then solely occupied by his wife, several children, and servants. His death dealt a severe blow to not just the town of Nacogdoches ---but to the region {due to his adept skill in the Mercantile-business as well as his holding prominent elective positions in vital offices. The post office, notary, and judgeship were all simultaneously 'vacant' upon his death. Similarly, the Grand Lodge of Texas lost one of its most energetic members when Bro.: Adolpus Sterne died.

Later, his son, Charles Adolphus Sterne joined Masonry. He was born October 10, 1830, in Nacogdoches, Texas and somewhat followed in his father's Public Service footsteps by becoming City Secretary and County Clerk. In 1879, he was communicated the 4^o to 32^o of the Scottish Rite, by none other than Albert Pike, 33^o and a Knight Templar. Charles Sterne later went to live in Palestine, Texas {the town's name is pronounced like Palace-teen} and became a Hotel Keeper. He was invested with the Rank and Decoration of Knight Commander



of the Court of Honour (KCCH) in October 1925 under the direction of Illustrious Brother and Sir Knight Sam P. Cochran, 33^o and a Knight Templar, but Charles Sterne died soon afterward on June 6, 1926. Although, Charles Sterne was active in several areas of our fraternity, including being a Past Master of his Blue Lodge and Recorder of the York Rite Commandery at Palestine, Texas, and once believed to be the oldest living Shriner in the United States in the year 1926 --- it can safely be said that Charles Sterne was not quite the "all-around powerhouse" his father, Nicholas "Adolphus" Sterne, was. However, he came close: Charles Sterne was a member of the Palestine, Texas, School Board and a devoted member of the Methodist Church. Charles Sterne, was probably more fraternally diversified by holding memberships in the Independent Order of Odd Fellows Lodge (I.O.O.F. Lodge) and the Knights of Pythias Lodge.

Few men come along, as energetic as Adolphus Sterne and leave such a good, positive and profound mark upon the Fraternity in such a relatively short period of time. To say he was devoted to the causes of "Freedom," "Public Administration," "Accuracy in all types of Record-keeping," "cementing good Fraternal Relations" as well as conducting his own Business and supporting his wife and children and maintaining a farmis almost the equivalent of one man doing the work of 10 men. Adolphus Stern truly had Faith, Zeal, and an uncanny ability to successfully multi-task major operations. And, he did so before his untimely death at just prior to his 51st birthday. I am at that age right now and even I am astounded by his energy, ability and enthusiasm. His memory lives-on by his numerous Successes. Adolphus Stern's duties as a Notary should not be underestimated. A Notary receives a commission from the Governor of the State. The Notary is charged to administer oaths and affirmations, witness and authenticate a wide range of legal documents ranging from Real-Estate Deeds to Marriage Licenses to Sworn Testimonies to Powers-of-Attorney. Adolphus Sterne's wide ranging duties as a Notary undoubtedly helped him later as a Judge and as a member of the State Legislature. The honorable Masonic vows, promises, oaths, and obligations he assumed as a young man is certain to have molded his high ethical conduct which benefited literally thousands of people during his lifetime. It could also be conjectured that Bro.: Adolphus Sterne's actions indirectly shaped how the bulk of Texas live today. By living a good life, measured by good principles: the man obviously placed his Trust in God.

Sources / References / Exhibits /Recommended Readings:

- Mackey's Encyclopedia of Freemasonry by Dr. Albert G. Mackey, M.D., 33^o and a Knight Templar.
- Archives of The Supreme Council 33^o Southern Jurisdiction on the membership of Sterne's son, Charles Adolphus Sterne.
- Archives of The Grand Lodge of Texas Masons.
- A Centennial History of Anderson County, Texas.
- Archives of The Masonic Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon, Canada.
- Macoy's Masonic Manual by Robert Macoy, 33^o and a Knight Templar. Fifteenth Edition. New York. Published in New York, Year 1861 by Clark, Austin, Maynard & Company located at 3 Park Row & 3 Ann Street, New York, New York. "A Pocket Companion for the Initiated".

About the Author:

Frater James A. Marples, VIII^o is a Perpetual Life Member of Mulvane Masonic Lodge #201 A.F. & A.M. in Mulvane, Kansas. He is a Life Member of The International Peace Gardens Lodge of Freemasons (Canada-USA) and also an Honorary Member of Golden Rule Masonic Lodge #562 in Willard, Ohio; as well as an Honorary Member of Nelson Masonic Lodge #77, in Nelson, Nebraska, which has recently consolidated with the Superior Masonic Lodge at Superior, Nebraska. Companion and Sir Knight Jim is a Life Member of the Wichita York Rite Bodies (Wichita Chapter #33 R.A.M.; Wichita Council #12 R. & S.M.; and Mt. Olivet Commandery #12 K.T.). He is also a Life Member of the Lincoln Nebraska Scottish Rite Bodies; The Robert-the-Bruce Association (California); The George Washington Masonic Stamp Club; Masonic Order of the Gordian Knot (Indiana); Masonic Order of the Sword of Bunker Hill; Kentucky Chapter #134 of National Sojourners and Heroes of '76; South Dakota Lodge of Masonic Research; North Texas York Rite College #118 of Sherman, Texas; and Nebraska College S.R.I.C.F. He is a Regular Member of The Allied Masonic Degrees; Grand College of Rites; St. David Conclave of The Red Cross of Constantine; Shawnee County Kansas Square and Compass Club; and Holyrood Council #61 of Knight Masons (Nebraska).

