

Joseph Beal Steere

9 February 1842 - 7 December 1940

By Samuel Stephenson

(Edited by Douglas Fix)

Joseph Beal Steere was born in Lenawee County, Michigan on 9 February 1842 to William Millhouse and Elizabeth (Beal) Steere. Joseph was educated in Michigan and received his BA from the University of Michigan in 1868 and his Bachelor of Laws in 1870.(1)

From 1870 till 1875, he undertook a scientific journey around the world (most likely funded, in part, by the State Museum of Michigan, for whom he was serving as a Collector in Natural History).(2) Steere first went to Brazil and traveled far up the Amazon by boat. He then crossed the Andes and boarded a ship for China.(3) Steere was drawn to Formosa by both anthropological and botanical interests. As early as 1871, Steere made an initial visit to the south of the island, collecting botanical specimens. In October and November 1873 he accompanied British consul Thomas Lowden Bullock and Reverend William Campbell, assisted by a number of porters and servants, on an anthropological venture into the interior of southern Formosa. In March 1874, Steere again set out with Mr. Bullock and a man by the name of "Mr. Budd" from Takao. Steere spent time developing connections with plains aborigine villagers in order to establish contact with the more remote natives, whom he eventually visited before returning to the United States in 1875.(4) During 1874 and 1875, Steere also found time to travel in mainland China, the Moluccas, and the Philippines.(5)

Upon his return to Michigan in 1876, Steere took up a position as instructor and assistant professor at the University of Michigan. He was subsequently promoted to full professor in 1879 and served in this capacity until 1893. Steere led groups of students on multiple excursions to the Amazon and the Philippines in the course of his professorship at the University of Michigan.(6)

Steere married Helen Buzzard on 30 September 1879. It is not known whether or not they had any children.

After he stopped working at the University of Michigan in 1893, Steere primarily engaged in farming and study, although he took one final trip with a group of students to the Amazon in 1901 to collect specimens for the Smithsonian Institution and the Buffalo Expedition. Although little can be said about the latter half of Steere's life, he

most likely continued farming at his residence in Ann Arbor, Michigan until his eventual death on 7 December 1940 at the age of 98.(7)

Selected Publications:

"The aborigines of Formosa." *The China Review, or Notes and Queries on the Far East* 3 (1875): 181-184.

"Formosa." *Journal of the American Geographical Society of New York* 6 (1876): 302-334.

With Mark W. Harrington: "The tropical ferns collected by Professor Steere in the years 1870-75." *Journal of the Linnean Society (Botany)* 16 (1878): 25-37.

A list of the birds and mammals collected by the Steere expedition to the Philippines. Ann Arbor: Courier Office, Printers, 1890.

Numerous articles on natural history published in the *American Naturalist* and the *Scientific American*.

Honors and Memberships:

Awarded an honorary PhD by the University of Michigan (1875).(8)

Notes:

1. *Who was who in America*, Special Library Edition (Chicago: Marquis Who's Who, 1943), p. 1175; *Who's who in America, A biographical dictionary of notable living men and women of the United States*, A.N. Marquis, ed. (Chicago: A.N. Marquis and Co., 1918), Vol 10, p. 2574; D. Shavit, *The United States in Asia* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), p. 466.

2. This proposition is based on the title of an article subsequently written by Thomas Lowden Bullock identifying Steere as such. See T. Bullock, "Report of a journey into the interior of Formosa made by Acting Assistant Bullock, in company with Rev. W. Campbell, of the English Presbyterian Mission, and Mr. J.B. Steere, Collector in Natural History for the State Museum of Michigan, United States, October and November, 1873,"; enclosure to "Report on foreign trade at the port of Tamsuy and Kelung for the year 1873"; reprinted as pp. 171-177, "China, No. 6 (1874)," in *British Parliamentary Papers. China*, Vol. 11, *Embassy and Consular Commercial Reports, 1874-77* (Shannon: Irish University Press, 1971-).

3. *Who was who in America*, p. 1175; *Who's who in America* 1918, Vol 10, p. 2574.

4. Carrington, George Williams, *Foreigners in Formosa 1841-1874* (San Francisco: Chinese Materials Center, 1978), pp. 107, 128-31, 252, 262; Otness, Harold M., *One thousand westerners in Taiwan, to 1945: A biographical and bibliographical dictionary* ([Taipei]:

Institute of Taiwan History, Preparatory Office, Academia Sinica, 1999), pp. 149-50; *Who's who in America* 1918, Vol 10, p. 2574; *Who was who in America*, 1943, p. 1175.

5. Shavit 1990, p. 466.

6. Ibid., p. 466; *Who's who in America* 1918, Vol 10, p. 2574; *Who was who in America* 1943, p. 1175.

7. *Who's who in America* 1918, Vol 10, p. 2574; *Who was who in America* 1943, p. 1175; Shavit 1990, p. 466.

8. *Who's who in America* 1918, Vol 10, p. 2574; *Who was who in America* 1943, p. 1175.