

Obituary

John Rufus Topham, son of Orson John and Mary Jane Burns Topham, was born in Clarksdale, Missouri, on October 29, 1905, and passed away on July 23, 2001. He was 95 years of age. After moving to Shenandoah in 1919, he started his love affair with Alta Royer, by buying her box at the Mt. Vernon country school box supper. They were sweethearts for 79 years. He attended Graceland College in Lamoni, Iowa. After his marriage to Alta on September 4, 1932, they made their home in Shenandoah. John showed his love for people with his incomparable storytelling, singing and laughter. He was also a determined man, committed to his family and friend's well-being. John had two careers: seedsman and farmer/cattleman. He worked for the Earl May Seed Company, becoming manager of the Garden Seed Department. In this capacity he created the company's trial grounds and its annual Open House which drew thousands of visitors. He was also active in the American Seed Trade Association. He achieved his goal of owning a farm at 50, managing it and starting his cattle operation as a sideline. After 45 years as a seedsman, he retired to devote full-time to his farm and cattle operation. For the next 29 years, he kept the sunflowers out of the beans; battled the thistles; built his herd of pure bred black angus cattle to 100; organized the Long Branch Breakfast and Happy Birthday Glee Club; regaled friends with old and new yarns; and paired with Alta to give a thousand pony rides to children of all ages at "the ranch." He was a member of the Saddle Club and traveled several times to the Ozarks to spend a week trailriding and telling yarns around the campfire. He continued to exercise his horsemanship--at 90 he was still able to use his quarterhorse Hawk to stop a bullfight!

John was a lifelong member of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latterday Saints (now Community of Christ.) He served as a member of the Priesthood for many years and as Pastor of the congregation. The concerns and hopes of the church community were always close to his heart. Prior to moving to the family farm in Essex, he was active in the Shenandoah community. He was a member of the Kiwanis Club; he was a member of the Shenandoah School Board and served as its President.

John was preceded in death by his parents, sisters and brothers-in-law, Beulah Logsdon-Bisel and husbands Bob and Kenneth, Eunice Martin and her husband C. O., Luella Fish and her husband Ben; Mildred Moffett and her husband Cole; and a brother-in-law Donald Jones. He is survived by his daughter, Anne Topham of Ridgeway, Wisconsin; a son Lee Topham and his wife Yunny of New York City; sister, Clara Jones of Sac City, Iowa; nieces and nephews, David Jones and his wife Donna, Mary Rhopa-la-Ciera, Kathy Jones, Carroll Martin, Wayne Martin and his wife Janet, Mike Moffett and his wife Eileen, and O. C. Moffett. Also surviving are Judy Borree, his church family, former pony riders of all ages and many treasured friends.