

John Montgomery – Daily Union

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

“Terrorists attack U.S.” “Nixon to resign.” “Hope speeds search for Amelia Earhart.” “Fiery explosion claims shuttle crew.” “Eisenhower dies.” “Steamer Lusitania torpedoed.” These are actual headlines about pivotal moments of crisis in American history, as they appeared in the Junction City Daily Union newspaper through the decades. For four generations, John Montgomery and his family have been leaders in the newspaper industry in Junction City and beyond. This is today’s Kansas Profile.

John G. Montgomery is the retired publisher of the Junction City Daily Union and other community newspapers in the region. His family has deep roots in the newspaper business, beginning with great-grandfather John Montgomery who worked as an apprentice at a newspaper office in Iowa. One day in 1865, young John received word by telegraph that President Lincoln had been assassinated. He set the type to print the story in the newspaper and then delivered the papers himself.

After the Civil War, the young newspaperman came west to Kansas. In 1888, he bought the Weekly Union newspaper in Junction City. Four years later, it became a daily. The Daily Union is now believed to be the third oldest continuously published newspaper in Kansas.

John Montgomery was succeeded by his son Harry who served as publisher from 1936 to 1952, followed by John D. Montgomery. His son, John G. Montgomery, took over in 1973. John G. had spent much of his growing up years in Florida, where his parents also published a newspaper in Miami Beach. A classic black-and-white photo shows John as young boy, happily pecking at an old typewriter.

Young John G. Montgomery went to Stanford and Yale. He worked for newspapers in California before coming back to the Daily Union in Kansas. One of his first tasks was to help transition the newspaper from hot type to offset printing and ultimately to computerized layout and design. The lobby of the Daily Union building displays a case of the hot type from which the last front page of the paper was printed, before the transition to offset. Also displayed are actual historic headlines and news articles through the years.

In the 1980s, before the term “media convergence” came into fashion, John Montgomery ventured into low power television. He began a television station in Junction City which eventually became the Fox affiliate in Topeka.

He bought the newspapers in nearby rural communities such as Abilene and Wamego, population 4,220 people. Now, that’s rural. The Daily Union produces a monthly real estate magazine and the Fort Riley Post.

In 2012, John G. Montgomery was inducted into the Kansas Press Association Hall of Fame as had been his father before him. In 2016, his newspapers were sold to another Kansas publishing family in Emporia.

The words “leadership” and “service” come to mind when describing John G. Montgomery. When he came back into the family business, he got deeply involved in the community. He was appointed Civilian Aide to the Secretary of the Army for Kansas – a position which he still fills in an emeritus capacity. He ran for Lieutenant Governor of

Kansas in 1986. He served on the Board of the Associated Press, was appointed to the Kansas Board of Regents twice and served as its chairman.

The photos on his office wall display him with a veritable “who’s who” of notable people, such as Bill and Hillary Clinton, Ronald Reagan, Tip O’Neill, Nelson Mandela, and Pope John Paul. Wow.

John Montgomery notes the importance of local news coverage for rural communities. “The local newspaper is the only real local source of news,” John said.

"The local newspaper is such an important part of a community," said Gloria Freeland, director of the Huck Boyd National Center for Community Media in K-State’s School of Journalism. "The Montgomery family has been an integral part of Kansas newspapers for generations, and their legacy will live on," she said.

From 9-11 to the sinking of the Lusitania, The Junction City Daily Union has been there to chronicle the events of the day and to serve the community. We commend John G. Montgomery and his family for making a difference by sharing this news.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.