

Crawford newspaper owner Martha Jane Flanigan dies

Chris Adams

write the author

January 05, 2005 | 04:21 PM

Longtime newspaperwoman Martha Jane Flanigan of English died Tuesday, Dec. 28, 2004, at Medco Health and Rehab in French Lick. She was 87.

Flanigan took over the family-owned newspaper, The Crawford County Democrat, in 1942, after her brothers, Maurice, Paul and Karl Flanigan, went off to World War II. With the former two involved in the business, Flanigan's father, Arthur H., asked her to delay her plans to help with the newspaper.

Flanigan's niece, Sara Combs of English, worked for her aunt at the newspaper. Combs said Flanigan, who later became editor, publisher and owner, "somewhat reluctantly" agreed to her father's request. "And then she just ended up staying there until she sold (the newspaper) to the O'Bannons."

That was in 1981. By then, Flanigan's English Publishing Co. also owned The News-Messenger. Both were included in the sale to O'Bannon Publishing Co. Inc. of Corydon.

(The Crawford County Democrat and The News-Messenger merged with another O'Bannon newspaper, The Clarion, in 1992 to form the Clarion News.)

Combs said she believes Flanigan's decision to sell the company was influenced, at least in part, by the 1979 flood in English. Besides hurting advertising revenue — since some businesses did not reopen — the flood also affected the newspaper directly. Located on Main Street, near Camp Fork Creek, the office didn't escape the high waters.

The situation, Combs said, exemplified Flanigan's dedication. Even though nearly all of the newspaper's equipment was ruined, the newspaper was still published that week.

"That's something she was pretty proud of," Combs said. "We didn't miss a single issue."

Combs, who later became editor of The Crawford County Democrat and then Clarion News, said Flanigan had a strong work ethic.

"I really admire her for the hours she put in and doing what it took to keep things going," she said.

Besides being committed to publishing a quality newspaper, Flanigan also cared deeply for her community, said Combs, who cared for her aunt in recent years as her health began to deteriorate.

"She pretty much dedicated her life to her newspaper and her church," Combs said. Flanigan never married.



Martha Jane Flanigan

Even after health problems prevented Flanigan from attending Lincoln Hills United Methodist Church, where she was a youth leader, Sunday school teacher and treasurer, as well as being involved in the music, she continued a card ministry, Combs said.

"She just really never lost her sense of caring for the community," she said.

Flanigan lived in the house she was born in until she moved into a nursing home in February 2003. She was a member of the English Civic Club, the Fine Arts Club and the Crawford County Democratic Women's Club. She was a former board member of Blue River Services and a district officer for the United Methodist Women.

Combs said she will miss Flanigan's sense of humor, and she remembers fondly the Sunday afternoon family gatherings at Flanigan's home when she, Combs, was a child.

Lois Blevins of English, who met Flanigan in 1937, said she, too, will miss the dry wit of her lifelong friend, adding that she also enjoyed spending time at the Flanigan home.

"I felt just as much at home in their home as I did my own," she said.

Blevins helped at the newspaper on occasion. She said Flanigan was a stickler for proofreading, wanting the newspaper to be error-free.

She said Flanigan was extremely compassionate and loved children.

Flanigan was a native of English, born Jan. 8, 1917, to the late Arthur H. and Nell Tower Flanigan.

She was a graduate of English High School.

Besides her parents, she was preceded in death by a sister, Anita Batman; three brothers, Paul, Karl and Maurice Flanigan; a niece, and two great-nephews.

Survivors include a sister, Edna Neimeyer of Pensacola, Fla., seven nieces and six nephews.

The funeral was Sunday at Denbo Funeral Home in English. The body was cremated. The Rev. Joan Richie officiated, assisted by the Rev. Ed Mead. Music was by Lois Blevins and Paula and Robert Ferguson.

The family suggests memorial gifts to Redbird Mission, HC69 Box 700, Beverly, KY 40913