

New Life for Old News

A Campaign in Honor of Mary Kay Harper



“Journalism,” as the saying goes, “is the first rough draft of history.” Local newspapers are invaluable sources of information about our communities, but they are in danger of being lost forever. That is why Montgomery History is acting now to preserve two of Montgomery County’s most important local papers—our history’s own “first rough draft.”

In the second half of the 20th century, the Montgomery County *Gazette* and the *Montgomery County Sentinel* were the best sources of local news that affected Montgomery County—everything from politics and education to entertainment and community events. It was also

the best place to follow the rapid pace of suburbanization during those decades, the legacy of which continues to define the county today.

You can be part of saving these priceless historical records by donating to Montgomery History’s ***New Life for Old News*** campaign! Montgomery History is digitizing part of its physical collection of local *Gazette* papers (1960 onwards) and microfilm collection of the *Sentinel* (1964-69). Digitizing the papers will make them available through the research library to anyone who wants to access them, allow researchers to search by keyword, and preserve them for posterity.

This campaign celebrates the memory of former Executive Director Mary Kay Harper (1990-2008), who passed away in March. Acquiring all the extant hard copies of the *Gazette* was one of the last initiatives Mary Kay undertook before she retired. Not only did she recognize the value of these papers to the historical record, she understood that in many cases it was the only place that development issues—the focus of Montgomery History’s Center for Suburban Studies, which was named in her honor—were publicly scrutinized.



Mary Kay’s family has generously pledged a \$20,000 dollar for dollar match of your gifts in support of this campaign. Please make a tax-deductible donation today to preserve this vital part of local history.

The benefits of digitizing these shuttered papers—pillars of community news—are substantial:

- **Accessibility:** For over a decade the *Gazette* papers have been sitting in storage, inaccessible to everyone. On microfilm using the *Sentinel* papers to conduct research is a laborious process, flipping through page by page, but digitally both papers will be entirely

word-searchable. **Once digitized, these collections will be open to the entire public through our research library**, from MCPS students to elected officials.

- **Unique content:** These two papers represent a unique view into life in the county. The *Sentinel*, which began in 1855, was, until its closure in 2020, the longest-running local countywide publication. The *Gazette* provided coverage of news around the county from 1959 until its closure in 2015. **These primary sources provide some of the very best coverage of events in the county from the 20th century** and give a window into the people and events that molded the county's progress during those pivotal decades.
- **Preservation:** While in storage, the quality and legibility of the papers is deteriorating rapidly. Newspapers from the mid-to-late 20th century are some of the most endangered, because they were made on low-quality paper. They are literally falling apart. **If the papers are not digitized now they will continue to degrade**, which will eventually render them useless to future researchers.
- **Matching funds:** Thanks to the generosity of Mary Kay's family, your donations will be doubled! Please make a tax-deductible gift before June 30 so that **you can double your impact**.



Local journalists recognize the urgency and necessity of digitizing these papers. **Acclaimed writer and journalist Steve Roberts says of the campaign:**

*I started my journalism career at age 14 on my local newspaper in Bayonne, N.J., and ever since I have cherished the way these papers chronicle the lives of our people and our communities. **The Gazette papers are a priceless resource for anyone who cares about the history and culture of Montgomery County and the people who have made this home.** From professional researchers documenting events to school children doing assignments—and just about anyone who wants to know more about their family history—putting the Gazette papers online will make our past more accessible and more meaningful.*

Local journalism creates a common sense of belonging and encourages residents to be invested in the issues that affect the place they live. Preserving these papers and making them accessible is a vital part of telling the story of Montgomery County, Maryland.

Your support is essential to the success of this campaign! You can ensure local journalism is protected while honoring the legacy of Mary Kay Harper's work by visiting MontgomeryHistory.org and clicking on "Donate Now." If you donate online, make sure to select the New Life for Old News campaign as your gift designation.

If you would like more information about the campaign and ways to donate, please contact Sarah Marsteller at SMarsteller@MontgomeryHistory.org.

Thank you!