



## William Bryan Hamel Jr.

March 27, 1930 - February 18, 2024

William Bryan Hamel Jr., age 93, former publisher of the Mattoon, Illinois Journal Gazette and Charleston Times-Courier newspapers and lifelong Mattoon booster, died last evening, February 18, 2024.

A funeral service in his honor will be held at noon, Saturday, March 2, 2024, at First Presbyterian Church, 10 Charleston Avenue, Mattoon, Illinois 61938; Reverend Matthew Froeschle will officiate. A private committal service will immediately follow in Dodge Grove Cemetery in Mattoon, Illinois with Military Rites conducted by Mattoon VFW Post 4325. The visitation will be held from 10:00 AM until the time of service at the church. Mitchell-Jerdan Funeral Home, located at 1200 Wabash Avenue, Mattoon, Illinois 61938, is in charge of services.

He was known by countless friends, was born March 27, 1930, in Mattoon, Illinois, the son of William Bryan and Katherine Andrews Hamel. He married Mary Ellis Hulbert in 1956 and together they raised three children, William B. Hamel III (Belinda) of Oak Park, IL, Mary Katherine Harrington (Craig Walter) of West Des Moines, IA, and the late John Robert Hamel. He later married Glennadene "Glennie" Armantrout, who preceded him in death on February 3, 2015.

He is survived by six grandchildren: William B. Hamel IV (Claire) of Evergreen Park, Illinois, Philip J. Hamel (Josephine) of Arlington Heights, Illinois, Anna R. Hamel (Eric Wroble) of Chicago, Illinois, Alexandra Harrington of Chicago, Illinois, Nicholas Harrington of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Kaitlyn Harrington of

Minneapolis, Minnesota; two step-grandchildren, Terra Zenteno (Patrick Lutker) of Libertyville, Illinois, and Blake Zenteno (Jacquie) of Richmond, Virginia; and three great grandchildren, Philip J. II, Gavin, Lucas Hamel; one step great grandchild, Eloise Lutker; two step-sons, Mark Armantrout of Chicago, Illinois, Jeff Armantrout of Owasso, Oklahoma; and daughter-in-law, Susie Hamel of Tampa, Florida.

A member of the Mattoon High School Lettermen's Club Athletic Hall of Fame, Hamel was an outstanding high school sprinter, specializing in the 100- and 220-yard dashes and played halfback on Green Wave football teams of the mid-1940s. While at the University of Illinois, he was a part of the freshman track squad and was a proud Kappa Sigma Fraternity member.

As a youngster listening to recordings by Gene Krupa, he became interested in the drums. His tutor was future Illinois State Senator Paul "Red" Graham, a family friend. Hamel's strong skills were strong led him to play in dance bands while a student at Illinois and later at various locations in Mattoon where he'd join impromptu jam sessions, having, he recalled, "a lot of fun."

The smell of newsprint got into his blood early. At age 12, he was delivering advertisement proofs for his father, who was publisher of the Journal Gazette. After receiving his journalism degree at Illinois in 1953, Hamel served two years in the U.S. Army before returning to his hometown in 1955. "I'd never really thought about anything except coming back to the newspaper to work," Hamel recalled. Yet, his father had a challenge for his new ad salesman—60-page special supplement for Mattoon's Centennial celebration. After selling his first ad—a quarter-page spot to a local oilman for \$65--, Hamel was inspired, more ads poured in, doubling the section to 120 pages.

Four years after the elder Hamel's death from a sudden heart attack in 1961, Bill was named publisher. Recognition and awards came under his leadership. Over the years, the Journal Gazette earned numerous honors. In 1999, Hamel was named a Master Editor and inducted into the Southern Illinois University Journalism Hall of Fame. Eastern Illinois University's Department of Community Journalism honored him as its first Journalist of the Year in 2001.

Those who interacted with him at the newspaper share a common memory—Hamel’s cheerfulness and upbeat demeanor. It began on his first day at work in 1955 when he whistled while going about his duties. The next day, the paper’s business manager posted a long list of office rules. “The very first one was ‘No whistling in the office,’ “he recalled later.

Not only did he love the work, he loved his town. Community organizations ranging from the American Cancer Society to the United Way to the Mattoon Chamber of Commerce honored him for his contributions. Less well-known are his private efforts to help individuals ranging from a troubled youth who turned his life around after Hamel bought him a set of drums or “seed” money for rewards to help solve local crimes. He was an early supporter of Baglefest and when he became interested in bicycling in the 1990s, started “Bikes and Buggies,” an annual ride to Arthur. Any idea for a community improvement project usually came across his desk—and received a positive response.

In 1966, his first wife Mary entered into the Mrs. Illinois beauty pageant and ended up in first place. She then competed in the Mrs. America pageant and placed second runner up. Bill Hamel's beaming personality also won him an award during this time as 'Mr. Congeniality'.

Bill Hamel was friendly and also not afraid to take a strong stance. A lifelong interest in conservation issues led him to take editorial positions against a proposed nuclear waste dump in Clark County and expansion of the then-Coles County Landfill east of Mattoon. “I felt the newspaper should play a role in these questions,” explained. “If you shoot the environment, you are shooting your foot off.”

Bill and his second wife Glennie spent most of their time on a 200-acre farm site west of the city. There, the Hamels combined their shared loves for conserving natural resources and animals, including five dogs.

In an increasingly mobile and sometimes disconnected society, Bill Hamel was rooted in the place he loved: Mattoon, Illinois. After the sale of the newspaper in 1972, he might well have done what other local newspaper owners did in

similar circumstances—sell the paper and retire in comfort. Instead, he stayed on the job for nearly three decades. “It was in my blood,” he explained. “I never thought about retiring. I worked with a lot of good people. It was a great place to work. Every day was interesting and different.”

Hamel’s life encompassed great changes in both his chosen field and the city he loved. He was born and raised in a community dominated by railroads and factories. The Mattoon Journal Gazette he first knew was produced using hot type and clattering linotype machines, its news stories emerged from chattering typewriters, each day’s final product delivered by young boys and girls on bicycles. The constants during a remarkable life were his good cheer, his enthusiasm for his work and his love for his community.

Memorials in William’s honor may be made to Mattoon Public Library, 1600 Charleston Avenue, PO Box 809, Mattoon, Illinois 61938 or Coles County Animal Shelter, 6818 North County Road 1120E, Charleston, Illinois 61920. Please visit [www.mitchell-jerdan.com](http://www.mitchell-jerdan.com) or [www.facebook.com/mitchelljerdanfuneralhome](http://www.facebook.com/mitchelljerdanfuneralhome) to light a virtual candle in his honor or share a memory with the family.

# Cemetery Details

## Dodge Grove Cemetery

917 North 22nd Street  
Mattoon, IL 61938

# Previous Events

## Visitation

MAR 2. 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM (CT)

First Presbyterian Church  
10 Charleston Ave  
Mattoon, Illinois 61938

## Celebration of Life

MAR 2. 12:00 PM (CT)

First Presbyterian Church  
10 Charleston Ave  
Mattoon, Illinois 61938

# Tribute Wall



“ Bill was one of the finest people Mattoon ever produced. He was a true friend to all who were fortunate to have known him well. Bill’s kindness to our family and my dad, Jake, from his childhood through his struggle with cancer and loss of our mom and then, Dad’s untimely death, will never be forgotten.

Susan ONeal - March 02, 2024 at 09:31 AM



“ The WDM Chamber Team planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of William Bryan Hamel Jr..

The WDM Chamber Team - February 29, 2024 at 10:03 AM



“ Arrive in Style was purchased for the family of William Bryan Hamel Jr..



February 29, 2024 at 10:03 AM



“ Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of William Bryan Hamel Jr..



February 29, 2024 at 09:51 AM



“ 73 files added to the album LifeTributes



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**Mitchell-Jerdan Funeral Home** - February 27, 2024 at 06:11 PM

JG

“ *Bill and his dad are among my happiest memories of Mattoon. Good people, and wonderful citizens. I wish we had more folks like them today !*

*Jim Gover, Naples Florida*

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**James Gover** - February 23, 2024 at 07:48 AM

LH

“ *I got to know Bill during the 90's as we both worked out at JD's Health Club. Bill was easy to get to know and I had many stimulating conversations with him. Bill will be sorely missed by family and friends!*

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**Logan Hughes** - February 22, 2024 at 03:25 PM

TE

“ Working with Bill at the newspaper for 10 years was such a treat. Will miss his smile. Such a great legacy he left.



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**Terria** - February 21, 2024 at 07:10 PM

CS

“ Bill was one of the best! So supportive in so many ways in the community. May he rest in peace.

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**Clyde Self** - February 20, 2024 at 05:55 PM

DP

“ So sorry to hear about Bill's passing. His father was my first employer as a paper boy and later as the Circulation Supervisor. Bill always had a smile and a most pleasing personality whenever he came in the newspaper office. He will be missed by his family and all who were acquainted with him.

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**Donald A Parsons** - February 20, 2024 at 03:08 PM

RT

“ Reg Tate planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of William Bryan Hamel Jr..

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**Reg Tate** - February 20, 2024 at 01:04 PM

RT

“ *Reg Tate purchased the Country Basket Blooms for the family of William Bryan Hamel Jr..*



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**Reg Tate** - February 20, 2024 at 01:04 PM

SL

“ *We've known Bill and family for many years. We were neighbors to the Hamel's. He had the greatest smile.*

*Rest In Peace my friend.*

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**Sheila Littleton** - February 20, 2024 at 10:40 AM

SS

“ *Stacy Sewell lit a candle in memory of William Bryan Hamel Jr.*



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**Stacy Sewell** - February 20, 2024 at 07:23 AM