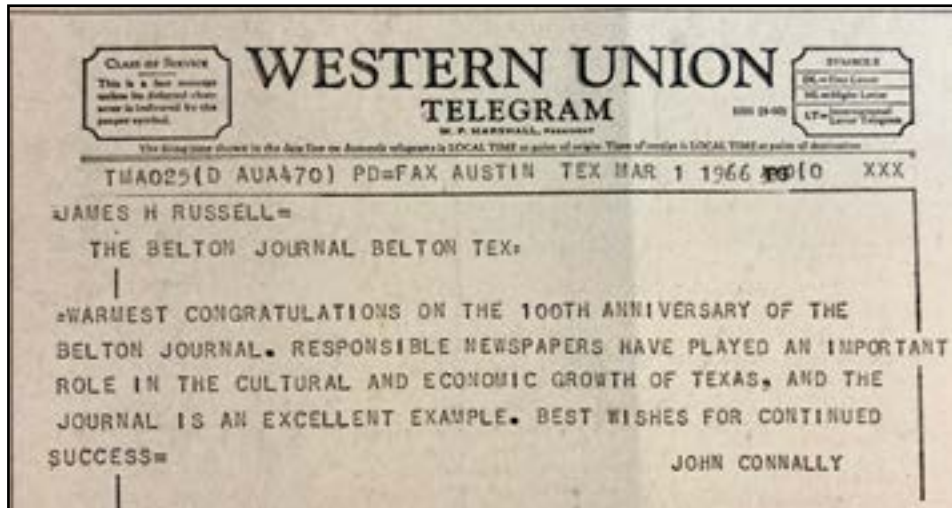


The oldest business in Bell County, The Belton Journal turns 159



File Photos

Above: Governor John Connally sent a telegram of warmest congratulations on the 100th Anniversary of The Belton Journal. Above Right: The Journal-Reporter building can be seen behind the firefighters. The publication began in 1866 by Jouett Harbert Davenport, who bought out Longino.

By **Susan Kolodziejczyk & Michelle Rodriguez**
The Belton Journal

On January 6, 1866, the first typeset and roll of ink was placed on paper and published for the residents of Belton and Bell County. The Belton Weekly Journal (1866), now The Belton Journal, is the oldest business on record in Belton and Bell County (established in 1850) and the second oldest continuously published weekly newspaper in Texas.

In the April 21, 1966 issue in an article titled Journal Observes 100 years of Continuous Publication, they recognized The Journal's 100th birthday and featured a warm congratulations Western Union Telegram from Texas Governor

John Connally.

The writer of the article said, "In the interest of honest reporting, the Journal must admit it was not the first newspaper in Belton - but it was the only surviving one, there having been, by the best count available, a total of 13 others, which gave this town an earned reputation as 'the graveyard of newspapers.'"

"The founder and first publisher of The Journal was James T. Longino, presumably of Italian extraction. His stepfather Major Jouett Harber Davenport joined him in the business. The major soon bought the son out," the writer of the article said.

There's a story about him being the founding father of The Journal in the sesquicentennial edition in the article

The Founding Father of the Journal.

"He was a livestock raiser, newspaper publisher, lawyer, state senator, and Confederate military officer," Writer Matthew K. Hamilton said.

In the July 28, 2016, award-winning gold edition, in an article titled Publisher's Note, they observed the sesquicentennial which means 150 years.

"No person or corporation owns The Belton Journal. You own it. With your 50 cents you paid this week, you are a part owner of the newspaper. In 10 years, we may only be found online. Either in print or on your phone our job and the job of future publishers is to report what is going on in the community," Publisher David Tuma said. "I am lucky as a businessman to have spent the best years of

my life serving this community."

There have been numerous locations the paper has been run out of but has always been in the downtown area. The first location was in the John Henry Building, which still exists and is currently being restored to its once former business of the 1895 Belton Opera House on the corner of Main and Water Street.

Most issues of the Belton Journal can be found on the City of Belton's Lena Armstrong's Public Library website at beltontexas.gov. It's a source for the history of Belton, obituaries, and genealogy.

The issues from 1866-1869 are not available online. There were fires in 1898 and 1914 that irretrievably destroyed any paper copies that existed.

Bell County officials take oaths of office

By **Lynette Sowell**
The Belton Journal

A number of Bell County officials rang in the new year just after midnight, January 1, 2025, as they took their oaths of office for new terms.

Bill Cooke took the oath of office as Bell County Sheriff. Cooke ran for office after Sheriff Eddy Lange announced his retirement. This is Cooke's first term as sheriff.

Judge Cliff Coleman administered the oath of office to Cooke.

Other officials sworn in last Thursday morning included County Precinct 1 Constable Pat Duffield, Precinct 3 County Commissioner Greg Reynolds, Precinct 1 County Commissioner Russell Schneider, Precinct 2 Constable Chris Bazar, Precinct 3 Constable Devon Rosenthal, Precinct 4 Constable Martha Dominguez, County Attorney Jim

Nichols, County Tax Assessor Shay Luedeke, Justice of the Peace Precinct 3 Place 1 Rosanne Fisher, Justice of the Peace Precinct 4 Place 1 Gregory Johnson, 426th Judicial District Court Judge Steve Duskie, and 146th Judicial District Court Judge Mike Russell. Also sworn in after the new year were County District Attorney Stephanie Newell and 27th Judicial District Court Judge Debbie Garrett.



Courtesy photo

Bill Cooke is sworn in as Bell County's newest sheriff just after midnight on January 1, 2025. He replaces former sheriff Eddy Lange, who served as the head of the sheriff's department for 12 years.



Courtesy Photo

Families enjoy the free skating in downtown Belton over the Christmas holidays.

Downtown ice skating sees turnout of thousands

By **David Tuma**
The Belton Journal

The ice skating rink downtown this year was expanded to a larger size for the holiday season.


A total of 6,500 unique skaters used the rink, with more than 500 returning. The ice rink was used a total of 7,000 times.

"I can't express how thankful we are for the work of our Belton Parks & Recreation staff providing the skating rink in downtown Belton for our community during the holidays. Despite some weather challenges, these

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