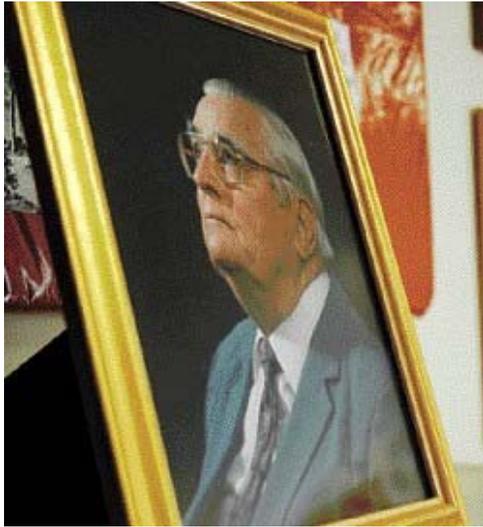


Remembering A Coats Cornerstone

By JASON BECK



J.D. Norris' picture is on display in the Coats town museum. Mr. Norris was a mayor, town commissioner and vital member of the community. He died Tuesday. -Daily Record Photo/Jason Beck

The Town of Coats has lost a legend. John David "J.D." Norris died Tuesday at the age of 94. As a part of the town for nearly all of its 100-year history, Mr. Norris was a former mayor, a town commissioner and the 1987 Coats Man of the Year. Despite all his many life achievements, those closest to him knew him best for his integrity and compassion.

"He was just a good man. I don't know what other way to describe J.D.," said former Coats mayor Darell Smith. "He was always thinking good thoughts about Coats."

Mr. Smith, who served as mayor from 1999-2003, met Mr. Norris while he was serving part of Mr. Norris' 30-year term on the board. When Mr. Smith first decided to run for mayor, he went to Mr. Norris for advice before anyone else. Mr. Smith recalled when Mr. Norris finally lost an election, by only one vote, after serving more than three decades on the board.

"When he lost by one vote, there was not a recount," he said. "I remember him saying that's not the way it's done in Coats."

The man who defeated Mr. Norris that day, Commissioner B.W. Holland, never forgot how gracious he was.

"He shook my hand — he congratulated me," Mr. Holland said. "He was the type of fellow who would do anything in the world for you."

According to the Coats Heritage Book, Mr. Norris was involved in nearly everything in the town. Along with his political career, Mr. Norris was partners for years in Johnson and Norris Realty and was an auctioneer. One of three founding members of the Coats United Methodist Church, he rang the bell every Sunday until 1980 and was an active member until 2002.

Mr. Norris' nephew, Delbert Lockamy, said Mr. Norris, who lived right across the street on East Washington Street, was always his favorite uncle.

"I just wanted to be on his heels when he would go anywhere," Mr. Lockamy said. "I just wanted to be right there with him."

Mr. Lockamy and his wife Edna sat on their couch Wednesday, looking at pictures and reminiscing the times they shared with Mr. Norris. In nearly every picture Mr. Lockamy stood smiling beside Mr. Norris. Mr. Lockamy remembered growing up on Mr. Norris' farm.

"Uncle David would go out there plowing in the summer time and (my dad) would take me up there and leave me for two or three days and I would ride the mule's back while he plowed," Mr. Lockamy said.

Mrs. Lockamy had just as many fond memories.

"He was his uncle, not mine, but he was my uncle too," Mrs. Lockamy said. "I thought a lot of him."

The Lockamys took trips to the mountains every year with Mr. Norris and his wife Mabel, who died in 1989.

"When Aunt Mabel was still living I went out there about every day that went by," she said. "'e used to say he'd give Delbert the shirt off of his back if he needed it."

Mr. Norris may have been best known for his integral role with the Coats chapter of the Junior Order. He served on the state board of directors for the organization's children's home and the Coats Junior Order Board.

"He was just a part of the community, part of the foundation," Mr. Smith said. "His absence will be missed."