PROVENANCE

Molly Montgomery Griffin of St. Joseph, Missouri loaned these images and printed materials for reproduction on 20 October 2012, accession SHSMO-RA1571.

BIOGRAPHY

Lee Diehl Montgomery was a prominent businessman in Rolla from the 1930s through the 1990s. Born in Newburg, Missouri in 1910, Montgomery spent his youth there but attended high school in Rolla, graduating in 1928. He was fascinated with aviation and had aspirations to become a pilot, and, after leaving high school, enrolled in the newly-formed Parks Air College in St. Louis.

Founded in 1927 and located on the site of the current St. Louis Downtown Airport, Parks Air College was America's first federally certified school of aviation, holding the FAA Air Agency Certificate No. 1. When Montgomery attended the college, aviation was the “job of the future.” Parks Air College was very much a part of the emerging industry and aviation pioneers such as Jimmy Doolittle, Charles Lindbergh and Amelia Earhart were frequent visitors at the airport. In the early years at the college, students learned by designing, building and test-flying their own aircraft, a process shown in the Montgomery photographs. Other noteworthy images in the collection show Jimmy Doolittle’s airplane at the Parks College airfield, structures around the airfield, and several international students (including Japanese) who attended the College. In 1946, the Air College became part of St. Louis University. It operates today under the auspices of the university as Parks College of Engineering, Aviation and Technology.

After finishing aviation school, Montgomery worked for Parks Air College for two years and also did some barnstorming in the region. He then moved to Owensboro, Kentucky for two years, trying his hand at opening and owning an airport there. Ultimately he returned to Rolla to marry his long-time sweetheart, Mildred Bowen, in 1935.

Once settled in Rolla, Montgomery abandoned aviation and developed various business ventures. For eight years from the late 1930s to the mid-1940s, he managed a long-time Route 66 landmark, the Pennant Tavern and Restaurant. About 1946, he opened the Montgomery Café and the Rendezvous Lounge in downtown Rolla at 209 West 8th Street. In the early 1950s, he went to work for Klinefelter Ford, eventually purchasing the car dealership in 1958. He owned and operated Diehl Montgomery Ford for thirty-two years until he sold it in 1990.
During his time at the Pennant, Montgomery struck up a friendship with St. Louis Cardinal great, Stan Musial, who also ran his own restaurant in St. Louis. Musial became a regular visitor to Rolla, going quail hunting with Montgomery often enough that he was featured hunting with Diehl in a photograph from a 1955 brochure promoting tourism in the Rolla area.

Diehl Montgomery was active in many Rolla fraternal civic organizations throughout his life. In 1958, he was able to utilize his knowledge of aviation again through his appointment to the first airport commission that established and developed the Rolla National Airport at Vichy, Missouri. Diehl Montgomery passed away in 1997 at age 86.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

This collection consists of high quality scans of various paper and photographic materials of a former pilot and prominent businessman in Rolla, Missouri. The papers, circa 1929-1999, include a promotional brochure for Rolla and news clippings from the Rolla Daily News featuring Montgomery. There are thirty-nine images of the Montgomery family, businesses and buildings in Rolla, and 118 photographs of the Parks Air College in St. Louis, 1928-1932.

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IMAGE LIST

News items
  Rolla, Mo. – A Progressive City, A Clean City, A Friendly City, 1955  (promotional brochure)

Family & Business photographs
  01  Lee Diehl Montgomery, portrait, 1930s
  02-06  Diehl Montgomery Ford (Rolla, Mo.)
  07-09  Pennant Tavern and Restaurant (Rolla, Mo.)

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O01-118 Air College attendees, events and classes, ca. 1929-1930s
(Images 041 and 058 show Jimmy Doolittle’s airplane at the College)

INDEX TERMS

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