

# John Wagoner

John Anthony Wagoner was born on June 24, 1914 to Arthur Lee and Kathryn (Langan) Wagoner at Wood River. He graduated from Wood River High School in 1932. He worked on the family farm with his brother Tom for a year. Tom said he was a good mechanic and kept the tractor running in the 30's, but farming wasn't his calling.

He received his Bachelor of Law degree in 1938 from Creighton Law School, and was a member of the Nebraska State Bar Association for more than 58 years.

He returned to Grand Island to practice law. He ran for state legislator as a nonpartisan candidate.

John entered the U.S. Army Air Corps and was assigned to the China-Burma-India Air Transport Detachment known as "The Hump." He also served as traffic warrant officer and, prior to his discharge in 1945, he successfully defended 50 court-martial cases.

He married Florence E. Garrard of Greenway Arkansas, on April 30, 1946, in Shanghai China. They lived in Shanghai where John was the China representative for a trading company. Their first two daughters (Joan and June) were born in China. The family left China just prior to the Communist takeover in 1949 and settled in Grand Island, where John resumed his practice of law.

In time John came to be known for befriending "the little guy" and as the "intense, angry attorney" who hated fiscal insanity in government. He was characterized by his tenacious work ethic and courage to take on the toughest opponent, even if his fight took him to the Nebraska Supreme Court. He also had a softer side as a "quiet philanthropist" who gave when he recognized a need.

A big believer in the First Amendment rights of free Speech John was not afraid to express his opinion about city, county, state or federal government. "We have to encourage people to speak out" he once said. "It's more your future than mine. We are given freedom and the individual, for that freedom, owes society a duty to participate in the government."

John was elected to the Nebraska Board of Education and the Hall County Airport Authority. He was member of numerous organizations, enjoyed flying and was active in education, fund raising and local politics.

He encouraged his family to set high goals, and was there to help them achieve. All of his children obtained at least a Master's Degree in their chosen professions. He inspired family to enter the legal profession including daughter June, sons Jim & Bob, nephew Tom & niece Judy.

John, joined by other Grand Island attorneys who had Wood River roots, was proud of that fact. He did have a soft spot for Wood River, and liked to reminisce with his brother Tom about the old Irish families.

John enjoyed his family, and was happy when the family would gather at his home to celebrate. He liked for the grandchildren to pay a visit to his office. They were encouraged early on to find the drawer where Grandpa kept his stash of candy.

John's family included Joan and Rich Kopf, June and Bob Tucker (Jake & Zac), Anne and Larry Grill (John & Alex), Dr. John & Patty Wagoner (Gail, Karen, Mary Ellen and Jill), Jim and Georgiene Wagoner (Nick, Tony, Luke & Will), Mary and Dr. Mark Mailliard (Jim & Andrew) and Bob & Kay Wagoner (Jackson, John & Margaret).

John died on November 9, 1996 and is buried at St. Mary's cemetery, Wood River.