

GENERAL SESSIONS JUDGE DONALD L. WASHBURN

1921 - 1995

Donald L. Washburn was the dean of local judges, with 30 years of service on the bench at the time of his untimely death at the age of 74. Remembered as a "prince among men," he had a brilliant legal mind and an even-tempered disposition.

Donald Washburn was born to John C. and Helen Immagart Washburn in Marion, Ohio, on February 21, 1921. Because his family was transferred around the country due to his father's job for Swift & Co., the future judge lived in a number of different states. Between the ages of 10 and 13, the Washburn family lived in Nashville. Young Donald attended Ross School and spent one year at East High School. During those years, he became acquainted with a girl from his church named Tavie Breedlove. Then his father was transferred to Glasgow, Kentucky, where Don finished high school.

After attending Western Kentucky University for three years, Don transferred to Vanderbilt in 1941. Upon returning to Nashville -- now 20 years old -- he renewed his acquaintance with Miss Breedlove. His education and his romance were interrupted by World War II, during which he served in the U. S. Army - first as an infantryman, and then as a quartermaster. After the war, he returned to Nashville and Vanderbilt. He and Tavie Breedlove married in March 1946, and he received his A.B. and then his law degree from Vanderbilt in 1948.

Don and Harry Mittewede joined a law practice in the old Third National Bank Building that included three of the brightest stars in Nashville's post-war legal community: Dick Atkinson, Cornelius

Breedlove and Beverly Briley. When Mr. Briley was elected County Judge in those pre-Metro days, Don agreed to become his assistant. When Mr. Briley was elected the first mayor of metro Nashville, Don continued as his assistant until Mr. Briley appointed him to a vacancy on the traffic court (the forerunner of the present General Sessions courts) in 1965.

While being elected to four eight year terms, he served as Presiding Judge for more than two terms and at the time of his death had served longer than any of the other judges who were on the bench at that time. He is remembered as being a leader, a mentor to women, and instrumental in improving the lower court system in Davidson County.

In addition to his government service, Judge Washburn served as an Assistant Dean and Teacher at the old Tennessee Evening Law School for Blacks. He was a Mason and a Member of the Al Menah Temple of the Shrine. Through his service on the Middle Tennessee Council of the Boy Scouts of America as Wautauga District Chairman, he influenced many young men to become valued citizens of their communities. One of the men with whom he served in the scouts calls him "one of the greatest men I've ever known," who "believed in and gave his all to scouting." Though he was as generous with his monetary contributions as he was with his time, rumor had it that he also gave any leftover campaign funds to the Boy Scouts after each of his successful elections.

In addition to his contributions to scouting, he was actively involved in the Inglewood Civitan Club and served as its president.

He attended the Inglewood Baptist Church for many years and taught Sunday School, where he again was able to participate in the shaping of young lives.

Perhaps he had the greatest influence on the lives of his children, Donna and Louis. Don had the unique pleasure to work alongside his son Louis in General Sessions Court for 12 years, and was not only parent, but best friend, to this fine young man. Donna recalls many pleasant trips to Judges' conferences where Don was committed to learning all he could about the law and his fellow man. Seeing her father play with his granddaughter, Annie, recalls the times that she and her brother were able to play with their daddy and really know him as the kind, generous and loving man that he was.

Donald L. Washburn died March 15, 1995, in Nashville Memorial Hospital after a two-month struggle with cancer, at the age of 74. He is survived by his wife of almost 49 years, Tavie Breedlove Washburn, his children, Louis and Donna, and his grandchild Annie. The legacy he has left is visible every day throughout the lower court system of Davidson County. The community lost a leader, a man before his time, a truly warm, gracious and generous man.

Contributors:

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