



Supreme Court of Kentucky

State Capitol, Room 231
700 Capitol Avenue
Frankfort, Kentucky 40601

John D. Minton, Jr.
Chief Justice of Kentucky

Frankfort 502-564-4162
Bowling Green 270-746-7867

Justice Walter A. Baker Portrait Dedication

Chief Justice John D. Minton Jr.
Remarks

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Kentucky Capitol

The venerable Dr. Thomas D. Clark described Walter A. Baker as Kentucky's consummate public man. "Walter Baker is a man who gets things done, a wonderful public servant, and one of Kentucky's really first-rate citizens. "[He] is a public man," Dr. Clark said, "who makes living in the commonwealth worthwhile."

Walter Baker was a native of Columbia in Adair County, Kentucky. He was born to public service. His father, Herschell T. Baker, served in the Kentucky legislature in 1924, 1936, and 1940, and his grandfather, Herschell Clay Baker, served in the Kentucky legislature in 1873 to 1874. Herschell Clay Baker also served as circuit judge, editor of the Adair County News and president of the Bank of Columbia.

After graduating from Adair County High School in 1954, Walter attended Harvard College where he was Phi Beta Kappa and graduated magna cum laude in 1958. He went on to graduate from Harvard Law in 1961.

From Harvard, Walter came to Glasgow to practice law in the early 60s. That is where he had his law office until his death in May of 2010. He prided himself in being a self-described country lawyer, and it was in his role as a practicing lawyer that I came to know and admire Walter Baker. I was privileged to be invited on my trips to court in Glasgow to join Walter and the regulars at the back table at George J's, where politics was always the bill of fare and Walter's legendary frugality was often the topic of jovial conversation.

Beyond his law practice, Walter Baker had a distinguished and remarkable career spanning more than 40 years of serving his state and his country in key elected, appointed and volunteer posts for which he received accolades for his work in each of them.

First elected to the General Assembly in 1968, Walter became an influential Republican legislator when the Democrats controlled both houses of the General Assembly. He served three years in the Kentucky House of Representatives and 16 years in the Kentucky state Senate, where he served as minority caucus chair. He was genuinely admired and respected on both sides of the aisle for his knowledge, wisdom and civility.

When interviewed by then-Glasgow Daily Times reporter Ronnie Ellis in 2003, Walter counted his participation in the passage of the Kentucky Education Reform Act and the Judicial Article as among his proudest accomplishments as a legislator.

In 1989, Walter's reputation made him a logical choice for inclusion on the Sixth Circuit Nominating Commission's short list of recommendations for appointment to the U. S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit. And following the death of Justice Charles Reynolds, Governor Paul Patton appointed Walter to fill the vacancy in the office of justice of the 2nd Supreme Court District of Kentucky on April 15, 1996. Although his membership on this court lasted a brief seven months, Walter's intellect and experience as a legislator made his contribution here memorable. At the time of his death, Walter was nearing completion of a history of the judges of the old Court of Appeals and Supreme Court.

After leaving the court, Walter served on the Board of the Council on Postsecondary Education and continued his longtime commitment to the Kentucky Historical Society and Leadership Kentucky.

On behalf of the Supreme Court of Kentucky, we accept with gratitude this portrait of Justice Walter A. Baker from the members of the Barren County Bar. This portrait will be displayed in the halls of this Capitol as a lasting memorial to "one of Kentucky's really first-rate citizens."

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