TALLAHASSEE -- Former Florida Supreme Court Chief Justice Parker Lee McDonald died at his Tallahassee home Saturday, June 24, with his wife Ruth and family at his side. He was 93 and was Florida's 68th Justice since statehood.

"Justice McDonald was a major influence in shaping the future of the Court after the sweeping reforms of the 1970s," said current Chief Justice Jorge Labarga. "He and the group of Justices placed on the Court during that era helped transform it into the respected tribunal it is today."

In the mid to late 1970s, McDonald was one of several newly appointed Justices who elevated the reputation of the Court after it earlier had become involved in scandal. He was well known for his groundbreaking opinions restricting the ability of prosecutors to remove jurors from a case solely because of their race – a view later adopted by the U.S. Supreme Court.

From his appointment on October 26, 1979, until his retirement on May 31, 1994, McDonald was a key figure in a vast series of reforms that made the Court one of the most respected and accessible in the nation. He served as Chief Justice from 1986-1988 and was well known for his down-to-earth manners, dim view of pomp, and a habit of whistling in the Court hallways that earned him the nickname of the “Whistling Justice.”

In the year 2000 when the presidential election controversy of Bush v. Gore swirled through Tallahassee, McDonald steadfastly refused scores of media requests that he comment on legal cases embroiling the Florida Supreme Court. He told those who asked that retired Justices should simply remain silent about controversies that came after their time.
Born in Sebring, Florida, McDonald attended the University of Florida and later received his degree from its law school in 1950 after service in the U.S. Army interrupted his studies. He later went into private practice in Orlando with a firm that eventually became Gurney McDonald & Handley.

McDonald was appointed to the Ninth Judicial Circuit bench in 1961 and served there until his appointment to the Florida Supreme Court in 1979 by then-Gov. Bob Graham.

McDonald is survived by his wife Ruth; his children Becky Morcom (Tom Morcom), Bruce McDonald (Paula), Robert McDonald (Patty), Ruth Ann High (Bob High); his brother Howard McDonald and his sister Martha Vail Pownall (Mark); and grandchildren David Morcom, Daniel Morcom (Sharon), Mac McDonald (Alisha), Mitch McDonald (Megan), Laura Dennis ((Brett Dennis), Bryan McDonald, Jenny Cottingham (Craig Cottingham), Bob High III (Niki); and great-grandchildren Marisa Morcom, Maria Morcom, and Matilda Dennis.

A formal lying in state will occur in the rotunda of the Florida Supreme Court Building in Tallahassee from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. on Thursday, June 29, 2017. The event is open to the public to pay their respects to the family.

Interment will follow with Bevis Funeral Home of Tallahassee officiating.

A separate memorial service will be held Saturday, July 1, 2017, at Trinity United Methodist Church in Tallahassee starting at 11:00 a.m., with a reception following in Moor Hall.

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