Former Florida Supreme Court Clerk Sid White Dies at 85 in Monticello, Courtroom Memorial Service Planned for Later this Summer

TALLAHASSEE – The Florida Supreme Court clerk who helped bring the state’s highest court through its most troubled days during scandals in the 1970s, Sid J. White, died at his home in Monticello, Florida, Saturday morning. He was 85 and served as clerk of court for more than 34 years from Oct. 1, 1964, to April 15, 1999.

“Sid White’s impact cannot be overstated,” said Chief Justice Jorge Labarga. “In the worst of times he held our staff and our day-to-day operations together with a grace and dignity that commanded everyone’s respect. He did this even as he himself was summoned before legislative panels investigating several Justices for potential impeachment.

“Through it all he never faltered in his respect for the Florida Supreme Court as an enduring institution of state government.”

White first took office on October 1, 1964, after serving for three years as a staff attorney to Justice Elwyn Thomas. A native of Clearwater, White served as a Sergeant in the U.S. Marine Corps before receiving his undergraduate degree from the University of Virginia in 1955. He took his law degree in 1960 from Stetson University College of Law.

His career spanned two generations in a rapidly changing state. On the day White was sworn as clerk, the Court still lived in the shadow of a string of rulings issued in the 1950s enforcing segregation in the state’s education and legal systems. The Supreme Court itself still operated under a Constitution drafted in 1885 that was proving unwieldy for the bustling modern state Florida was becoming.
Justices at the time ran for office in contested elections that drew large donations from special interests with cases before the court. These donations ultimately led to the 1970s scandal that toppled several Justices – and then to a series of reforms in the state courts system spearheaded by former Gov. Reubin Askew and several colleagues.

White’s tenure saw many other changes. He began work as clerk when court records were created with technology largely based on typewriters and carbon paper and people had to come in person to watch oral arguments. By the time he left office, the Florida Supreme Court was placing its filings and broadcasting its arguments on the World-Wide Web – and a new concept called eFiling already was on the horizon.

Funeral services for White are pending and will be arranged by Beggs Funeral Home. The Florida Supreme Court will host a separate memorial service in its courtroom in the weeks ahead and will announce details at a later date.

White is survived by his son Sid J. White, Jr., of Atlanta, and two grandchildren Jesse Paul Lee and Mary Elizabeth Lee.

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