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Museletter: March 2005

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Museletter

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JUDGE ROBERT R. MERHIGE, JR.

1919-2005

by John R. Barden,
Head, Reference & Research Services

Many of us who picked up the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* on Saturday, February 19, knew at a glance that the Law School had lost a distinguished alumnus and a good friend. Judge Robert R. Merhige, Jr., LL.B. 1942, LL.D. Hon. 1976, died on Friday, February 18, due to complications from open heart surgery. He had just passed his 86th birthday.

In the days that followed, the local newspaper and television stations paid tribute to a judge whose rulings during thirty-one years on the Federal bench had a significant impact on this city and region. Judge Merhige, never one to shy away from controversy, plunged into the school desegregation cases in Richmond and surrounding communities almost as soon as he took his seat in 1967. For years he sought to bring about local compliance with the Supreme Court mandates of *Brown v. Board of Education* and related cases. His tactics including widespread busing to achieve a greater racial mix in the Richmond schools, and a forced consolidation of Richmond's schools with those of neighboring counties (the latter plan was overturned by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit). Merhige's decisions bought him much enmity from elements within the local community, including the editors and cartoonists of the local newspaper. He received death threats, a guest house on his property was torched, and a pet dog was killed in his yard. Federal marshals provided protection for the judge and his family.

Eventually, the tensions of desegregation subsided, but the judge's workload increased. Many complex cases came his way, including the trial of a chemical company for dumping the pesticide Kepone in the James River; a uranium price-fixing case that took the judge to London on the Concorde to gather evidence (a move that caused him to butt heads with both Chief Justice Burger and the British House of Lords); and the combined bankruptcy and products liability cases involving Richmond pharmaceutical firm A. H. Robins and their

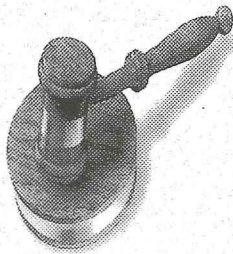
Spring 2005 Regular Library Hours

Sunday
10:00 a.m. - Midnight

Mon.-Thurs.
7:30 a.m. - Midnight

Friday
7:30 a.m. - 9:00 p.m.

Saturday
9:00 a.m. - 9:00 p.m.



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Dalkon shield contraceptive. Judge Merhige developed a knack for dealing with detailed cases and not letting them get bogged down in his courtroom, something that won praise from both the winners and the losers who appeared before him.

Judge Merhige finally left the bench in 1998 to join the firm of Hunton & Williams as special counsel. That same year he donated over eighty boxes of his office files to the Muse Law Library. In the years that followed both the judge and his former administrative assistant at the court, Brenda "Twiggy" Munford, were generous in assisting the library staff in identifying and arranging the materials.

During that period I had a number of conversations with Judge Merhige about events in his career. I asked him particularly about the trial of Dr. George Thurmond, an obstetrician from my South Carolina hometown, who was convicted in the judge's courtroom for billing Medicaid for delivery of babies that he in fact had not touched. Due to the fact that the doctor's brother was Senator Strom Thurmond, every Federal judge in South Carolina had recused himself. Judge Merhige, sitting by designation, presided over the trial, in which the jury found Dr. Thurmond guilty. "I could have sentenced him to prison," the judge told me, "but I decided to make him pay back twice as much as what he'd taken." His eyes twinkled as he said, "I hit him where it hurt the most!"

Judge Merhige was proud of his long association with the University of Richmond School of Law. His arrival here was an accident--he moved to Richmond expecting to attend law school at William and Mary and only discovered after he got here that he couldn't do it on a commuting basis. However, he adopted the Law School here with no regrets, and his anecdotes of life under Dean Doubles reveal him as an engaged and energetic student. To help Merhige pay his tuition, Dean Doubles gave him small jobs, including the position of night librarian. The judge proudly told me on several occasions, "I used to be the law librarian here, you know."

I last spoke to Judge Merhige just prior to the scholarship luncheon in January. He asked me whether we had received his Gates Litigation Award certificate (see last month's Museletter). I assured him we had. "Put it up next to my Powell Award," he requested. "I believe I'm the only person ever to receive both of them." A slight exaggeration, as it turns out, but I don't think he would mind being in the same company as the late Justice William J. Brennan. "You wouldn't believe it, John," he went on to say, his eyes lighting up like a small boy's at Christmas, "they flew me out to Colorado in a private jet to pick up the award." I will never forget how this distinguished man, whose commitment to the principles of justice touched the lives of hundreds of thousands of people, could still be pleased and excited and amazed to receive such accolades just for doing his job.



BRIDGE THE GAP

Between Law School and the Real World

If you have forgotten how to find that all important case, statute, regulation or are somewhat fuzzy on your basic legal research skills and feel a refresher is needed to make the best impression as a summer associate, we have the answer for you! Join the legal research instructors, Terri Stimis and Allison Konur, recruitment coordinators for Williams Mullen and Buddy Omohundro, class of 2002 and an associate at McGuireWoods, who will provide inside tips on making your summer employment enjoyable and successful.

The session will include a review of research strategies and sources necessary to complete research projects typically assigned to summer associates. John Barden, Gail Zwirner and Caroline Osborne will walk you through several research scenarios to provide a variety of examples of research techniques. Also discussed will be the dos and don'ts of law firm research and options available in a firm environment such as brief banks, form files and guidelines for online searching. Joyce Janto will give a brief refresher on professional ethics with particular attention to conflicts of interests and issues of confidentiality. Finally our guest speakers will provide insight and guidance as to dress, conduct and the reality of life in a law firm.

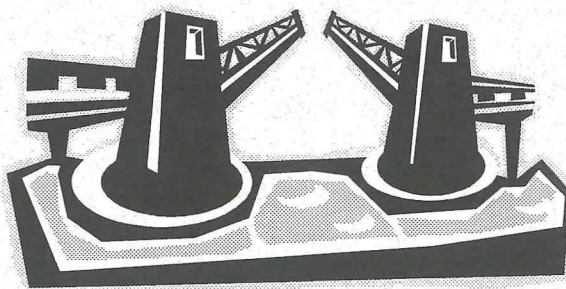
DATE: Friday, April 1, 2005

WHEN: 2:45 p.m. — 6:45 p.m.

Beer and Pizza to follow

WHERE: Room 101

REGISTRATION: Reference Desk



Spring Carrel Swap

April 4–6 is the Spring Carrel Swap. Students have the option of remaining in their carrel for all three years of law school, with the exception of students enrolled in a clinic. Students registered for a clinic are assigned a carrel in the clinic for that semester and must relinquish their carrel until the next semester.

Vacant carrels and carrels of December and May graduates are included in the swap. On Friday, April 1, the list of available carrels will be posted on the front doors of the Library. The list will be updated daily during the swap process. If you would like to switch carrels, the following are the dates and times when you may request a new carrel:

Monday, April 4—Current clinic students only;
Tuesday, April 5, - Rising third year students;
Wednesday, April 6—Rising second year students.

In order to sign up for a new carrel you must go to the Administrative Office in the Library (L17). The times of the swaps are 9:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Contact Ms. Barlett at dbarlett@richmond.edu if you require any additional information.

Carrel Information for Graduates,

Graduating students not studying for the Virginia Bar, students registered for Fall clinics and students swapping carrels, transferring or visiting away next year must empty their carrel and turn in the key to Ms. Barlett in the Library Administrative Office (L17) prior to leaving town.

All students should clean their carrel before leaving for the summer. Personal belongings may be left only in the locked portion of the carrel. Nothing should be left on the carrel surface, the sides, the top or the floor underneath. Housekeeping will clean the carrels during summer break. The Library is not responsible for damage to personal items left in the carrel. We especially request that students check the locked portion of the carrel and remove any left over food or food wrappers. Your co-operation is appreciated.

If you are not planning to use your carrel next year, please consider turning your carrel key into Ms. Barlett. There are other law students who may be able to use the carrel. Even if you do this, you will be able to obtain a carrel for exam purposes during the year.

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The **Museletter** is the official newsletter of the William Taylor Muse Law Library at the School of Law of the University of Richmond, Richmond, VA 23173.