

HONORABLE J. EARL MAJOR

January 5, 1887 - January 4, 1972

THE HONORABLE J. EARL MAJOR, passed away in Hillsboro, Illinois, on January 4, 1972, the day before his 85th birthday. The Bar Association of the Seventh Federal Circuit records by this memorial resolution its deep affection for this highly esteemed and able jurist and its gratitude for the cooperation he gave to our Association and for the devoted service he rendered to the lawyers and judiciary of the Seventh Federal Circuit.

Judge Major's long and distinguished career began on a farm near Donnellson, Illinois on January 5, 1887. He was one of seven children of Charles and Emma Major, attended the Donnellson schools, and was graduated from Brown's Business College in Decatur in 1907 and from the Illinois College of Law, now DePaul University College of Law, in Chicago in 1909. He was admitted to the Bar in that same year and began his practice in Hillsboro in a firm which included Judge Amos Miller and Judge Major's brother, Joe, under the name of Miller, Major and Major. His ability to inspire the affection and confidence of those around him was early reflected in the fact that at the age of 25 he was

elected State's Attorney of Montgomery County in 1912. He served in that position for eight years, gaining a reputation as a vigorous prosecutor which stood him in good stead when he was elected, in November, 1922, as Congressman for the old 21st district, which included Montgomery, Macoupin, Christian and Sangamon counties. He served four terms in Congress, although his terms were interrupted by periodic Republican presidential landslides. His political successes were not accidental. He was a genuinely warm person with a homespun personality who loved people and who was remarkably devoted to his family and friends.

He resigned his Congressional seat when he was commissioned a District Judge for the Southern District of Illinois on June 17, 1933 and was elevated to the Court of Appeals in Chicago on March 23, 1937 where he served with distinction for almost 35 years. In November 1948, Judge Major was designated Chief Judge, a position he held until 1954 when, at his own request, he was relieved of the duties involved in that post. He was Chief Judge when our Association was founded, and his interest, guidance and cooperation were invaluable particularly in those formative years.

He went on Senior Status in March 1956, but continued with ability and devotion to serve the Court of

Appeals as well as various District Courts throughout the nation in which he sat by special assignment, preparing opinions until the very day of his death. His assuming of Senior Status reflected his view, often expressed, that a Federal Judge, by virtue of his unique position, should retire when he was eligible to do so, relinquishing his position to a younger man. Another one of his staunch beliefs, set forth in published articles, was that the selection of Federal judges should be removed from the area of partisan politics.

Judge Major's written opinions span almost 400 volumes of West's Federal Reporter and Federal Supplement. Each opinion, commencing with his first reported decision In re Claudon, 6 F.Supp. 349, a bankruptcy case, confirms the care and consideration which he accorded each case he heard and wrote. Since he believed that litigants, particularly on the appellate level, had invested a great deal of time and effort in presenting each case, he felt that they should be accorded a conscientious evaluation of their respective positions. Consequently, he invariably read the entire record, and painstakingly studied the briefs and legal authorities before reaching his decision. His opinions were well-conceived and logical. Judge John S. Hastings has said that Judge Major never tried to impress anybody with his own

importance but yet he was as proud of being a Federal Judge as anyone whom Judge Hastings knows.

Judge Major had a marvelous sense of humor. Perhaps the story most remembered was the one related at our annual meeting in May 1956, when Chief Justice Earl Warren came from Washington to share the speaker's table in the evening. As part of his remarks on that occasion, Judge Major, in his true tradition, related that when in his youth he applied for employment and gave the name "J. Earl Major" his prospective employer told him that he never knew of anybody by the name of Earl who ever amounted to anything!

Judge Major, known affectionately as "Daddy Jim" to the members of his close-knit family, was extremely devoted to them through 58 years of marriage. They include his widow, Mrs. Ruth Major, two daughters, Jean Musgrove of Peoria and Mildred "Midge" Joy of Hillsboro, two grandchildren and two great grandchildren. He was especially fond of his brother Joe who died in 1947. The tombstone at the head of the family plot in the cemetery on the outskirts of Hillsboro, where Judge Major and Joe rest, bears the inscription on the first line in large block letters "MAJOR and MAJOR" and immediately below, the word "Lawyers."

To his family this Association expresses its heartfelt sorrow and also its deep appreciation and respect

for this beloved jurist. Judge Major's charm, kindness, brilliance, gentleness, integrity and compassion will be sorely missed but long remembered. He was an original; there will never be another.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED, by THE BAR ASSOCIATION OF THE SEVENTH FEDERAL CIRCUIT, that the above memorial be adopted this 9th day of May, 1972, be entered of record in the minutes of this meeting, and certified copies thereof be delivered to the members of Judge Major's family.

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL JUDICIAL CONFERENCE OF THE SEVENTH
CIRCUIT HELD AT INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA ON MAY 9 AND 10, 1972

The Annual Judicial Conference of the Seventh Circuit convened, pursuant to Section 333 of Title 28 of the United States Code and Rule 15 of the Rules of the United States Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit, at 9:30 A.M. Tuesday, May 9, 1972, in the Royal Ballroom (East) of the Indianapolis Hilton, Indianapolis, Indiana.

Present were:

- Hon. William H. Rehnquist, Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States and Circuit Justice for the Seventh Circuit
- Hon. Thurgood Marshall, Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States
- Hon. Tom C. Clark, Senior Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States
- Hon. Luther M. Swygert, Chief Judge
- Hon. John S. Hastings, Senior Circuit Judge
- Hon. Win G. Knoch, Senior Circuit Judge
- Hon. Roger J. Kiley, Circuit Judge
- Hon. Thomas E. Fairchild, Circuit Judge
- Hon. Walter J. Cummings, Circuit Judge
- Hon. Wilbur F. Pell, Jr., Circuit Judge
- Hon. John Paul Stevens, Circuit Judge
- Hon. Robert A. Sprecher, Circuit Judge
- Hon. William A. Steckler, District Judge
- Hon. Julius J. Hoffman, Senior District Judge
- Hon. Cale J. Holder, District Judge
- Hon. William G. Juergens, Senior District Judge
- Hon. Robert A. Grant, District Judge
- Hon. Omer Poos, District Judge
- Hon. Edwin A. Robson, District Judge
- Hon. Richard B. Austin, District Judge
- Hon. James B. Parsons, District Judge
- Hon. S. Hugh Dillin, District Judge
- Hon. Hubert L. Will, District Judge
- Hon. George N. Beamer, District Judge
- Hon. Jesse E. Eschbach, District Judge
- Hon. Bernard M. Decker, District Judge
- Hon. Abraham L. Marovitz, District Judge
- Hon. John W. Reynolds, District Judge
- Hon. James E. Doyle, District Judge
- Hon. William J. Lynch, District Judge
- Hon. Henry S. Wise, District Judge
- Hon. James E. Noland, District Judge
- Hon. Myron L. Gordon, District Judge
- Hon. Robert D. Morgan, District Judge
- Hon. Frank J. McGarr, District Judge
- Hon. Thomas R. McMillen, District Judge
- Hon. William J. Bauer, District Judge
- Hon. Richard W. McLaren, District Judge
- Hon. Phillip W. Tone, District Judge
- Hon. James L. Foreman, District Judge