Supreme Court Building is Designated a National Landmark

As part of National Historic Preservation Week, the Supreme Court Building was officially designated an historic landmark by Donald P. Hodel, Secretary of the Interior, on May 12, 1987, joining more than 1,700 places which have previously been designated as historic landmarks. The theme for this year’s Preservation Week was “Landmarks of Democracy” to coordinate with the request of the Bicentennial Commission that 1987 be “dedicated to the memory of the Founders and the document they drafted in Philadelphia.”

A ceremony commemorating the event was held in the East Conference Room. Participants included Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist, the members of the Supreme Court, Retired Chief Justice Warren E. Burger, Secretary Hodel and invited guests.

In his remarks, Mr. Hodel told the audience that the primary purpose of the historic landmark law is to “mark and set aside for permanent honor and protection ... those buildings and places which have unusual historic significance to this Nation.” Secretary Hodel further stated that there are several goals associated with the designation of a landmark. “One of those statutory objectives is to assure the physical preservation of those special places associated with people or events which have made a difference in the land in which we live. I have every confidence that this and succeeding memberships of the Supreme Court, and its sister branches of government, will see to it that this magnificent building is quite adequately maintained and preserved for generations to come.”

Secretary Hodel also noted that the Supreme Court Building had already filled another objective of the preservation program — that of becoming a symbol of national significance. “This structure needs no special designations because, in the hearts and minds of most Americans, it already is a shrine. Just walk the imposing corridors of this building. Enter the great courtroom itself. You will see what I mean... Those who come here do so with an almost reverential silence, for they know the special role played by the institution which is housed here.”

“Why, then, have we chosen to designate this building a National Historic Landmark? And why now? Because, within these marble walls sits more than the highest of the courts of the land, the court beyond which there is no judicial appeal. Here dwells the ultimate institutional protection for the Constitution of the United States, whose bicentennial we celebrate this year. I, for one, am glad this Nation is going out of its way to celebrate the 200th birthday of the Constitution. It is fitting and proper that, now as a part of that celebration this generation of Americans marks symbolically for the ages our recognition of the importance of the United States Supreme Court to our constitutional form of government.”

The Secretary remarked that in commemorating the Supreme Court building, we are, of course, also honoring the Constitution which called for its creation. He pointed out that the delegates to the convention in Philadelphia were very mindful of their responsibility to their fellow citizens and to the
Powell Resigns from Supreme Court

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Judge Bork has served on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit since his appointment by President Nixon in 1974. He was confirmed by the Senate, and Justice Powell took his seat on the bench January 7, 1972.

Justice Powell’s work on the Court, of course, reflects his judicial philosophy. His constructionist approach has been to focus on the narrow facts of each case, to identify the competing interests, and, whenever possible, to create a middle of the road solution that satisfied the central concerns of each party. Only when there is irreconcilable conflict does he balance one set of interests against the other and determine which should take precedence. POWELL Hybrid inducts votes have often been pivotal to the decisions of the Court.

During his years on the Court Justice Powell made many important contributions. Perhaps one of the most noteworthy, was his plan to expedite the workload of the Court by pooling the efforts of the Justices' law clerks. By the early 70s the growing caseload made the screening of cases a serious problem. Under the old system, each Justice's law clerks researched and wrote memoranda on appeals and petitions for writs of certiorari filed. Justice Powell suggested the creation of a "court, pooled" system in which the clerks pool their research and eliminate duplication of effort. This idea was implemented, with Justices participating on a voluntary basis. Justice Powell was also one of the first proponents of the use of word processing and computer equipment in the Court.

Justice Powell has earned a reputation for having a gifted legal mind, an astute sense of political realities, and the respect of his colleagues and other associates. According to the statistics, during his time on the Burger Court he disagreed less with his colleagues than any other member of the Court. He also has a reputation as an indefatigable worker and a southern gentleman. The impact of Justice Powell will continue to be felt in the Supreme Court for many years.

Court Vacancy Is Focus of National Attention

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Governor Linwood Holton resigned his Presidency after seven years of service to devote more time to his other commitments.

The final events of the day were the Annual Reception and Dinner, held in the Court's East and West Conference Rooms and the Great Hall. During the reception guests were entertained by chamber music provided by the String Ensemble of the Army Band. Dinner was served in the Great Hall where he and his colleagues work. After dinner, the Strolling Strings captivated the guests with their performance, bringing the evening to a happy conclusion.
On Sunday, May 17, 1987, Elizabeth Seay Black, widow of Justice Hugo L. Black, died at Sibley Memorial Hospital. Mrs. Black was one of the founding members of the Society, and served as its first Secretary.

Elizabeth Seay Black was the daughter of Dr. Jim and Elna Atkins Seay. Dr. Seay attended Bellevue Medical School in New York and initially returned to his home in Lamar County, Alabama to join his father in the practice of medicine. Less than a year later, the Seays moved to Pratt City, a small mining community near Birmingham where all three of their children were born: Erskine, James and Elizabeth.

When Elizabeth was about three years old, the family moved to Tuscaloosa where Elizabeth's brother James was studying premedicine at the University of Alabama. Elizabeth's older brother, Erskine, was a cadet at the Naval Academy at Annapolis. While the Seays were living in Tuscaloosa, James introduced Elizabeth to one of his classmates, Fred DeMeritt, whom Elizabeth subsequently married. This marriage lasted until Elizabeth's twelfth birthday. Elizabeth attended boarding school in Birmingham while her mother settled the estate. Two years later, Mrs. Seay and Elizabeth moved to the Southside of Birmingham to an area which was then called a "slum Stocking Row." Dr. Seay developed a successful practice and was a surgeon on the staffs of two hospitals when he suddenly died at the age of 41, just three days after Elizabeth's twelfth birthday.

Elizabeth DeMeritte was recommended for the position. On March 15, 1956, Elizabeth DeMeritte, described as "a little" Hugo's help in locating a new secretary to work in his chambers at the Supreme Court. He told Hugo, Jr. he wanted DeMeritte was recommended for the position.

In the summer of 1971, Hugo L. Black, Sr., became ill. He was at the Supreme Court of the United States. One of his Justice Black's clerks later said that she had been "installed by the Justice's matchmaking children with malice aforethought." Perhaps then it was not really a surprise when on September 11, 1967, Hugo L. Black, Sr. and Elizabeth Seay DeMeritte were married at Justice Black's residence in Alexandria.

Justice and Mrs. Black made their home in Alexandria in the historic home built in 1790 which the Justice had purchased in 1959. In his study which was lined with volume upon volume of his favorite works, Mrs. Black set up a desk and typewriter. There they worked together and independently.

Elizabeth Black had a back inscribed with the words "Here lies a good man placed by Hugo's grave."

Landmark (continued from page one)
generations that would follow them, and also very aware of their own inadequacies to create a perfect document. "As the delegates left Philadelphia and the ratification process began, one early supporter of the Constitution wrote: 'There is no spirit of arrogance in the new federal Constitution. When experience has taught us its mistakes, the people whom it preserves, absolutes all powerful, can reform and amend them.'" Also pointed out by Secretary Hodel was that while amendments to the Constitution had been necessary, that the Founders had created a system which could encompass corrections and changes within the framework of the existing organization. "The ideas expressed in the original document about limited government, about checks and balances, and about federalism — the essential role of the states — have withstand the test of time. . . . Today we dedicate as a National Historic Landmark the Nation's premier symbol of an independent judiciary. In doing so, what we really are saying is how grateful we are for the wisdom, foresight, and sense of justice exhibited by our Founders."

Chief Justice Rehnquist responded for the Court to Secretary Hodel's speech noting that when the federal government moved from Philadelphia to Washington in 1800, no provision for housing the Supreme Court was made. Just before the commencement of the Court's February 1801 Term, this oversight was noted and "the planners found a room in the basement of the Capitol building, measuring about twenty-four

from me the strength of his roots. The spark that flared between us almost at sight was our common background. I gave him back Alabama, which he was hungry for when I came on the scene. Hugo had missed the speech, the softened manner, the colloquialisms of his Southland."

In Memoriam to Elizabeth Seay Black

Chief Justice Rehnquist, Retired Chief Justice Burger, and Secretary of the Interior Hodel sign the proclamation marking the building as an official landmark.

Chief Justice Rehnquist addressed the gathering as the "premier symbol of an independent judiciary."
In Memoriam (continued from page six)

write a letter of resignation from the Court. It fell to Elizabeth to type the letter for his signature. He was admitted to the hospital on August 27. Mrs. Seay, Elizabeth's mother, who had been ill for some time, was hospitalized on September 15 where her illness was diagnosed as cancer. Justice Black decided to tender his resignation on September 17, 1971. A few days later, on September 25, Hugo L. Black, Sr. died.

Justice Black's funeral was held in the National Cathedral on September 28 and he was buried at Arlington Cemetery. Elizabeth's grief was compounded by her distress over her mother's situation, and on October 22, less than a month later, Mrs. Seay died.

Elizabeth pursued her activities and interests after her husband's death. In 1975, she became the first Secretary to the new organization, The Supreme Court Historical Society. She served in this capacity for six years, after which time she served as a member of the Board of Trustees and a member of the Executive Committee. She helped formulate policy for the Society and enthusiastically supported and participated in its activities.

During these years, one of Elizabeth's highest priorities was the publication of her book, *Mr. Justice and Mrs. Black: The Memoirs of Hugo L. Black and Elizabeth Black*, which was published in 1986. This work contains approximately 60 pages of memoirs which Justice Black himself completed prior to his death. The remainder of the book contains transitional material and quotations from Mrs. Black's own personal diaries during her marriage to Justice Black, providing a personal, loving account of their years together.

The publication of the book coincided with the Centennial of the birth of Hugo L. Black, Sr. on February 27, 1986. A presidential proclamation was issued honoring this occasion and a special commemorative stamp was issued by the U.S. Postal Service. A special ceremony was held in the Supreme Court Chamber celebrating these events to which relatives and close friends were invited. Mrs. Black spent a great deal of time in 1986 promoting her book, giving television and radio interviews throughout the country.

In the summer of 1986, Mrs. Black suffered a stroke. She was hospitalized for some time, but returned home to continue her recovery. She made great progress and was able to resume some of her activities. She made plans to attend the 12th Annual Dinner of the Society on May 18th where she would join many of Hugo's former colleagues and law clerks, Hugo, Jr. and his wife Graham, and many of her other friends in celebrating the growth of the Society. Tragically, she died on Sunday, May the 17th, just one day before the party. The funeral was held on Friday, May 22 in the Chapel at Ft. Meyer, after which she was buried in Arlington Cemetery alongside Justice Black.

At the direction of her family, a special Elizabeth Seay Black Memorial Fund has been established by the Society. This fund will be used to further the Society's goals to preserve and promote the heritage of the Supreme Court. Elizabeth's everyday activities contributed greatly to this goal and her book will also serve as a valuable contribution to future generations.

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