

George M. Warren Jr. A Remembrance

by the Honorable Wayne L. Bell



George M. Warren Jr., a highly respected Virginia attorney, a preeminent Virginia statesman, a conscientious citizen, and a dear friend, died on Tuesday, January 12, 2010, after a long illness. He was 87.

Mr. Warren practiced law for fifty-five years in Bristol, Virginia. He attended Emory and Henry College, graduating in 1943. He then enlisted in the U.S. Navy and served in World War II as a lieutenant junior grade in the South Pacific. After the war, he graduated from the University of Virginia School of Law in May 1948, and was then admitted to the bar. Mr. Warren returned to Bristol to practice with his father, George Sr., a highly regarded lawyer in his own right, who had served in the Virginia General Assembly as a delegate and senator.

Mr. Warren had a general practice with emphasis on trial work, and was considered one of the best trial lawyers to have ever practiced at the Bristol bar. In 1998 Mr. Warren received the Tradition of Excellence Award for distinguished service to the bar, devotion to community, and dedication to the ideals of justice. The award is bestowed by the Virginia State Bar General Practice Section.

Mr. Warren, following in his father's footsteps, was elected to the Virginia Senate in 1963, and served for twelve years. In 1976, he became the commonwealth's attorney for the City of Bristol, and served in that post until January 2002. In all, Mr. Warren served thirty-seven years in Virginia elected offices. In August 2002, he was appointed pro tempore as a judge of the general district court for the Twenty-eighth Judicial District, where he served until 2003.

Mr. Warren was one of the first lawyers I met when I first came to Bristol in the early '70s as a young lawyer fresh out of school, and we struck up a friendship that lasted almost forty years. He immediately took me under his wing and shared with

me his experience, his knowledge, and his wisdom in a way that always made me feel like a peer rather than a pupil. He was always there for me, and I don't ever remember making a career decision without first consulting with him. Later, as a circuit judge, I had the pleasure almost daily of having Mr. Warren in court as the commonwealth's attorney, and I can say that he brought a sense of justice, fairness, and equality to the business of prosecution that consistently earned him the respect of participants and onlookers alike. As a trial lawyer, he had some of the best courtroom instincts that I ever observed. He loved the study of the law and he loved being in the courtroom, and he was good at both.

Mr. Warren was in the senate when I first met him. In addition to his senate committee assignments, he served on the State Crime Commission, the Election Laws Study Commission, the Virginia State Council for Higher Education, and more than a dozen blue-ribbon commissions under three governors. Yet he was totally unpretentious, humble in every way, and always had time for his friends and colleagues. One of his greatest virtues was his delightful sense of humor, which he used well to defuse the anxieties of day-to-day law practice—not only his own, but others' as well.

Notwithstanding his enormously busy schedule, Mr. Warren devoted a sizeable amount of time to helping others through community service, including helping to establish the Children's Advocacy Center in Bristol and the new Bristol library, as well as serving on the boards of his local church, the former Sullins College, and Johnston Memorial Hospital. He was active in civic, fraternal, and social organizations.

Mr. Warren was a kind, gentle man. As Kipling wrote, he could walk with kings and not lose his common touch. He respected all, and he was a gentleman in all respects. I was honored to call him a friend. George Warren was a good lawyer. He was a good man. He will be missed.