

# Portraits of four historic Supreme Court Justices unveiled

September 1, 2011

The Mississippi Supreme Court unveiled portraits Sept. 1 of four historic former justices.

Portraits are of former Chief Justice Lenore L. Prather of Columbus, 1982-2000; former Justice Reuben V. Anderson of Jackson, 1985-1991; former Presiding Justice Fred L. Banks Jr. of Jackson, 1991-2001; and the late former Justice William Campbell McLean of Grenada, 1911-1912.

Families of the justices presented the portraits during an unveiling ceremony. The portraits are on display at the Carroll Gartin Justice Building, which houses the Mississippi Supreme Court and the Mississippi Court of Appeals. The portraits were added to the Supreme Court's historic collection, which includes many of the justices who served from the early years of the court up to modern day.

Clarksdale native and Oxford portrait artist Jason Bouldin, who painted the portrait of Justice Prather, told the crowd gathered for the ceremony, "We are visual creatures by nature." Displaying the portraits "of our predecessors and our leaders, people we look up to, reminds us of who we are and what our business is about today."

Mississippi Bar President-Elect Lem G. Adams of Brandon said the portraits will inspire lawyers, school children and the general public. "These lawyer judges that are honored here today have demonstrated their public servant spirit by the contributions they have made to their communities and the state of Mississippi, well beyond their service to our profession," Adams said. "May the portraits that are displayed here today serve as an example to our lawyers, and to all who view them, that these are some of our very best, and may they also serve as a challenge."

Mississippi Supreme Court Chief Justice Bill Waller Jr. of Jackson said that former Chief Justice Prather, the Supreme Court's first woman justice and its first woman chief justice, worked to improve the integrity of the judiciary. She led planning for the construction of the new Gartin Justice Building, which was dedicated this past May. "She probably more than anyone else is responsible for the design and funding of this structure," Chief Justice Waller said.

Malinda Prather, Justice Prather's daughter, told the crowd, "Today is such a special day for our family."

Justice Prather said afterwards, "We are very honored. I enjoyed being here with other former justices. I was especially happy to share this event with Justice Anderson and Justice Banks, with whom I served on the Supreme Court."

Justice Anderson was the first African-American justice appointed to the Mississippi Supreme Court. Justice Banks was the second. They have been friends since childhood, practiced law together in their early careers, and are law partners now at the Jackson office of Phelps Dunbar LLP.

Justice Anderson said of Justice Banks: “He has been my counsel since the fifth grade.”

Justice Leslie D. King of Greenville has known Justice Anderson since both were students at the University of Mississippi School of Law. “He had an engaging and very affable personality. He was focused and had a good sense of where he was going,” Justice King said. “He was a quiet but steady proponent of justice and fair play. Those characteristics served him well as he became the first African-American graduate of the University of Mississippi School of Law.”

It was the beginning of a series of firsts for Justice Anderson, who went on to be the first African-American Jackson Municipal judge, Hinds County Court judge, and Seventh District Circuit judge. He was also the first African-American president of the Mississippi Bar.

“I consider it an honor and a privilege to accept the seat he once held on the court,” said Justice King, who began serving March 1.

Justice Banks followed Justice Anderson on the Seventh Circuit bench, and on the Supreme Court. He previously served in the Mississippi House of Representatives for nine years, chairing the House Ethics Committee, a Judiciary Committee and the Legislative Black Caucus.

Justice Jim Kitchens of Crystal Springs described Justice Banks as a brilliant jurist of incredible intellect. “Justice Banks’ portrait will stand here as a memorial to the great work that he did, and that he continues to do as a member of the bar.”

Justice Kitchens said that Justice Banks “was, and always has been, and always will be at the forefront of the civil rights movement, which is still an important movement. He has always been a proponent of equal justice for all.”

Justice McLean’s portrait was presented on the 100-year anniversary of his service on the court. He served for seven months in 1911 and 1912, having been appointed to an unexpired term.

Justice George C. Carlson Jr. of Batesville said that several of the justice’s letters showed that while his brief service on the court increase the already high esteem in which he held the institution, McLean longed to return to his family and his private law practice in Grenada. In 1890, he was a delegate to the Mississippi Constitutional Convention. He died in 1928.

Five grandchildren of Justice McLean and a host of other relatives, down through a great great great great grandchild, came to the court to celebrate the installation of his portrait. Former Mississippi Bar President W.C. “Cham” Trotter III of Belzoni, the great-grandson of the former justice, gave the portrait to the court.

Trotter said, “This portrait which will now hang in this beautiful new Carroll Gartin Justice Building keeps unbroken William Campbell McLean’s ties to the Supreme Court of Mississippi. The prayer of his family is God save this honorable court, and God bless all those who have the honor and the privilege and the responsibility to sit behind this bench.”

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