

## William G. Clark 1976-1992

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William G. Clark was born July 16, 1924 in Chicago. His forebears were early settlers in the city and over the years became wealthy through real estate. His father John S. Clark was an



alderman for Chicago and served a lengthy tenure as Cook County Assessor. His grandfather, also named John S. Clark, was a state legislator and alderman as well. He was born to John S. and Ita Kennedy Clark and had two brothers, John S. Clark and Don D. Clark.<sup>1</sup> During his career of public service, which spanned nearly a half-century, he rose to positions of leadership in all three branches of state government.

He attended Resurrection Grammar School in his west-side Austin neighborhood, and Campion High School in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin. He attended Loyola University and the University of Michigan. Following service in the United States Army during World War II, he received a law degree from DePaul University Law School in Chicago and was admitted to the bar in 1947.<sup>2</sup>

In 1952, after five years of private practice, Governor Adlai Stevenson appointed Clark attorney for the Public Administrator of Cook County. That same year he was elected to the Illinois House of Representatives where he held the seat occupied by his grandfather fifty years earlier. He was elected to the state senate in 1954, where he was chairman of a tax commission

and played a leading role in passing legislation revising the state's tax laws.<sup>3</sup> At the request of Mayor Richard J. Daley, however, he returned to the House in 1956 and was reelected in 1958. Clark had become close to the mayor when he was the head of "Citizens for Daley" in Daley's first mayoral campaign in 1955.<sup>4</sup> In a tense contest facing powerful downstate Democrat Paul M. Powell, Clark was elected House Majority Leader for the Seventy-first General Assembly. He was thirty-four years old.<sup>5</sup> Back in the House he opposed personal property taxes on automobiles and household furnishings, reformed probate laws to lower costs, and co-sponsored the bill annexing O'Hare Field to the City of Chicago.<sup>6</sup>

Early in 1960, he considered running against Cook County State's Attorney Benjamin Adamowski, a popular Republican. Instead, Democratic slatemakers put him up for Illinois Attorney General after briefly considering him for a gubernatorial candidacy.<sup>7</sup> He was elected Attorney General in November 1960 and reelected in 1964. He drafted legislation that became the state's first consumer fraud act and one of the first things he undertook in office was establishing the consumer fraud office to enforce the new law. He also accelerated water and air pollution control enforcement and supported legislation favorable to charities.<sup>8</sup>

After two terms as Attorney General, he decided that he would run for the United States Senate against incumbent Everett M. Dirksen after giving serious consideration to running for governor. The election of 1968 occurred during the peak years of the Vietnam era, and Chicago's Democratic national convention was the center of the controversy. Clark made national headlines when he, a nominee for the Senate, spoke out against the president's Vietnam policy and worked to have a "peace plank" included in the party's platform that year. Mayor Daley supported the president and saw Clark's position as disloyal. Clark lost the election. In the eighteen elections in which he ran during his lifetime, this was the only one he lost.<sup>9</sup> He would

never again have the support of Daley's political organization. Years later Clark remarked, typically, "I just have never been a rubber stamp."<sup>10</sup>

After losing to Dirksen he considered running to unseat Senator Ralph Smith, who had been appointed to the Senate following Dirksen's death in 1969. Clark withdrew from consideration when Adlai Stevenson III, son of the governor who first appointed Clark to public office, expressed his desire to run for the seat. Clark then turned his attention to the United States House of Representatives when a vacancy occurred in his old west side neighborhood after the death of Congressman Daniel Ronan. In the face of a crowded field and no certain support, he withdrew to private practice.<sup>11</sup>

Out of public office for the first time in over a decade, Clark returned to private practice in the prestigious and politically active Chicago firm of Arvey, Hodes, Costello, & Burman. He remained there until he ran for the Supreme Court bench in 1976 to occupy the seat vacated by the retirement of Thomas E. Kluczynski. Although he did not obtain Mayor Daley's support he won the election to the astonishment of many observers.<sup>12</sup>

He was the author of more than four hundred majority opinions while on the Supreme Court bench. Notably among them were *People v. Coslet* and *People v. Spreitzer*, both homicide cases dealing with attorney's conflict of interest involving representation of clients.<sup>13</sup> In *Ostendorf v. International Harvester* [89 Ill 2<sup>d</sup> 273 (1982)], a product liability suit, he chastised the industrial giant for withholding evidence and obfuscating discovery procedures. "Discovery," he wrote, "is intended to be a mechanism for the ascertainment of truth, for the purpose of promoting either a fair settlement or a fair trial. It is not a tactical game to be used to obstruct or harass the opposing litigant."<sup>14</sup>

Highlights of his work during his sixteen years on the Supreme Court included supporting merit selection of judges rather than the existing electoral system, inaugurating mandatory arbitration for smaller civil suits, starting a study of state funding for trial courts, establishing committees to evaluate judges' performance and the attorney disciplinary system, and working to improve the process for post-conviction review of death sentences. Most of these efforts were undertaken during his three years as Chief Justice from 1985 to 1988.<sup>15</sup>

After retiring from the Supreme Court in 1992 he served of counsel to the Chicago law firm of his son, William G. Clark Jr.<sup>16</sup> He was subsequently inducted as an Honorary Fellow in the Illinois Bar Foundation and received an honorary degree from The John Marshall Law School. For many years he held memberships in national, state, and local bar associations. He was also a Moose, an Elk, and belonged to the American Legion, Catholic War Veterans, Delta Theta Phi Law Fraternity, Ancient Order of Hibernians, the Chicago Athletic Association, the University Club of Loyola, and the Irish Fellowship Club of Chicago.<sup>17</sup>

He said that his reason for leaving the court was that chronic neck and leg problems prevented him from giving his work the attention it required.<sup>18</sup> In truth he suffered from diabetes. After nine years of the progressing illness he succumbed to its complications on August 17, 2001, one month after his seventy-seventh birthday. He was survived by his wife Rosalie Locatis Clark; a daughter Merrilee Redmond; four sons, William G., Jr., Donald, Robert, and John, and his two brothers. A mass was held in Holy Name cathedral at State and Superior Streets on the city's near north side.<sup>19</sup>

A few years before he died, Clark was the subject of a testimonial from Chicago newspaperman Steve Neal, who had a reputation for being hard on government officials. Clark

had, he wrote, “set standards for leadership in three branches of Illinois government.”<sup>20</sup> The law library in the Illinois Attorney General’s building in Springfield is named after him.

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<sup>1</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, January 7, 1960, p. 1; *Illinois Blue Book 1963-1964*, (Springfield, IL: Illinois Secretary of State), p. 86.

<sup>2</sup> *Chicago Sun-Times*, August 19, 2001, p. 66A.

<sup>3</sup> “Biography of Chief Justice Clark,” *Sullivan’s Review*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Spring, 1986), p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, January 7, 1960, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, January 13, 1959, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> *Illinois Blue Book 1963-1964*, (Springfield, IL: Illinois Secretary of State), p. 86.

<sup>7</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, January 5, 1960, p. 3; *Chicago Tribune*, January 16, 1906, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> “Biography of Chief Justice Clark,” *Sullivan’s Review*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Spring, 1986), p. 5; *Chicago Tribune*, November 21, 1981, p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> Illinois State Bar Association, *Bar News*, September 4, 2001, n.p.

<sup>10</sup> *Chicago Sun-Times*, August 19, 2001, p. 66A; *Chicago Tribune*, August 22, 1968, p. 1; “Biography of Chief Justice Clark,” *Sullivan’s Review*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Spring, 1986), p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, September 20, 1969, p. N7.

<sup>12</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, November 3, 1976, p. 10; *Chicago Tribune*, November 4, 1976, p. B6.

<sup>13</sup> *People v. Coslet* [67 Ill 2<sup>d</sup> 127 (1977)] and *People v. Spreitzer* [123 Ill 2<sup>d</sup> 1 (1988)]

<sup>14</sup> *Ostendorf v. International Harvester*, 89 Illinois Reports 2d Series 273.

<sup>15</sup> “Biography of Chief Justice Clark,” *Sullivan’s Review*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Spring, 1986), p. 5; *Chicago Sun-Times*, April 21, 1999, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> Illinois State Bar Association, *Bar News*, September 4, 2001, n.p.

<sup>17</sup> *Illinois Blue Book 1963-1964*, (Springfield, IL, Illinois Secretary of State), p. 86; Illinois State Bar Association, *Bar News*, September 4, 2001, n.p.

<sup>18</sup> *State Journal-Register* (Springfield, Illinois), December 5, 1991, p2.

<sup>19</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, August 18, 2001, p. 77.

<sup>20</sup> *Chicago Sun-Times*, April 21, 1999, p. 3.