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## **JOHN LUKE HILL 1923 - 2007 / Former state chief justice dies at 83**

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Staff

John Luke Hill - who was one of the state's leading lawyers, a former state attorney general and chief justice of the Texas Supreme Court - died Monday of a heart condition at the age of 83.

Hill wooed juries with a soft East Texas twang accented by a lisp. He joined the ranks of the strongest of Democratic politicians, luring voters with honesty, sincerity and folksy humor.

Hill twice won statewide election as attorney general, was victorious in a race for Supreme Court chief justice and in 1978 defeated sitting Gov. Dolph Briscoe in the Democratic primary for governor. But Hill's dream of becoming Texas' chief executive was dashed by Republican Bill Clements.

When Hill retired from the Supreme Court in 1988, he said he was leaving elective office but not public service.

"I don't think of it in terms of a swan song," Hill said. "I will always, as long as God gives me breath, be interested in this state and the public policy of this state."

Until a month before his death, Hill practiced law at the Winstead firm in Houston, working on appeals and teaching courtroom skills to young lawyers, said managing shareholder Ross Margraves. Hill also headed a committee to raise private funds to help pay for the restoration of the 96-year-old Harris County Civil Courts building.

Hill entered St. Luke's Episcopal Hospital in early June for a pacemaker in an unsuccessful attempt to resolve a heart condition.

Hill is survived by his wife of more than 60 years, Elizabeth Ann "Bitsy" Hill; three children, Melinda Elizabeth Hill Perrin, John Graham Hill and District Judge Martha Hill Jamison, all of Houston; 10 grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren.

The funeral is 1 p.m. Friday at St. Luke's United Methodist Church in Houston. The family will receive friends from 5-7 p.m. Thursday at the George H. Lewis and Sons funeral home.

In lieu of flowers, the family is requesting a donation to St. Luke's United Methodist Church, Young Life or the John L. Hill, Jr. Trial Advocacy Center at the University of Texas Law School in Austin be considered.

Early aspirations

Born Oct. 9, 1923, in Breckenridge, Hill grew up in Kilgore as part of a family that followed oil-field booms. He began dreaming of a career as a lawyer and public servant at age 15 when he served as city attorney during a youth-in-government day.

Hill graduated in 1947 from the University of Texas Law School, which today hosts the John L. Hill Trial Advocacy Center.

Hill first emerged on the public scene as a trial lawyer in Houston. He was known as an effective advocate for his clients and a formidable legal opponent who could master the intricacies of a case.

Opponents have recalled that Hill would learn the names of all prospective jurors in a case so he could address them personally from the outset. And his down-to-earth speaking style had a way of swaying them to his side.

In one case, lawyers for an insurance company tried to minimize the injuries of a woman Hill was representing.

"They say she wasn't badly injured," Hill told the jury. "But they Demeroled her at 9 o'clock, Nembuted her at 10 and Thorazened her at 11. Now, is that serious?"

The jury thought it was.

Moving up the ladder

He made a name for himself in the early 1960s when he won \$3.5 million from Lockheed Corp. and \$8 million from Braniff in a pair of aircraft crash lawsuits. In one of the cases, he brought the carcass of a destroyed aircraft into a Houston courtroom to explain in detail about a structural flaw that had caused the deaths of 39 people.

The 1964 gubernatorial campaign of John Connally drew Hill into politics. He ran Connally's Harris County campaign and won appointment as secretary of state as a reward.

Hill replaced Crawford Martin in the job. Several years earlier, Hill had represented Martin in a lawsuit and won him a \$250,000 award.

In 1972, Hill would trounce Martin by 100,000 votes in a battle for attorney general.

As attorney general, Hill took an active role on behalf of consumers and over environmental issues.

He persuaded a reluctant Legislature to adopt the state's deceptive trade practices act, a law that provides triple damages for people who are cheated in the marketplace.

His office also pressed forward with 78 pollution lawsuits that had been lingering in the previous administration. He settled 44 pollution suits and brought 35 new ones.

`A lawyer's lawyer'

Ernest Stromberger once served as Hill's press secretary and had been collaborating with Hill on a history of his service as attorney general. He said Hill's success as attorney general was built on his ability to get highly talented young lawyers to leave profitable private practices to work for the state.

"He was most proud of the integrity he brought to the office and the quality of the staff," Stromberger said.

One of those lawyers, John Odam of Houston, said Hill "first and foremost was a lawyer's lawyer."

Former Gov. Mark White won election as attorney general in 1978, the year Hill gave up the office to run for governor.

"It was a daunting task to follow John Hill as attorney general," White said.

Hill's long-held dream had been to become Texas governor. He came in a dismal sixth place in a 1968 race for the Democratic nomination. Then in 1978 he decided to take on Briscoe.

Government affairs consultant Jack Martin of Austin worked on Hill's second run. Martin said Hill knew it would be an uphill battle to defeat Briscoe in the primary, but he said no one expected Clements to become the first Republican to win the governor's office since Reconstruction.

"We were stunned that we won the primary and even more stunned that we lost the general," Martin said.

Hill's dedication to public service was demonstrated in 1997 when then-Gov. George W. Bush, citing Hill's integrity, appointed him to the Texas Lottery Commission during a scandal.

President Bush called Hill's family to offer condolences on Monday, said former U.S. Secretary of Commerce Don Evans. Evans said Bush called on Hill as one of the "most trusted Texans" to help him at the lottery and in his presidential campaigns.

'An eternal optimist'

After losing the gubernatorial race to Clements, Hill ran for office again in 1984, winning election as chief justice of the Texas Supreme Court.

A legislative committee investigated ethics on the court, and the State Commission on Judicial Conduct publicly chastised two associate justices. Then CBS television's 60 Minutes focused on the large amounts of money that lawyers who practice before the court pour into judicial campaigns.

That prompted Hill to resign in 1988 to seek judicial selection reform to end the election of judges. That push proved unsuccessful.

Republican Tom Phillips replaced Hill as chief justice and worked closely with him in the judicial reform movement.

"He was an eternal optimist, a devoted friend and an inspiring leader whose love for Texas and for the law made a real and lasting difference to our state," Phillips said. "John Hill was an incomparable mentor to two generations of young lawyers, including me."

Obit

## **John L. Hill, Jr.**

John L. Hill Jr. was born October 9, 1923 in Breckenridge, Texas.

His childhood was spent in Kilgore, Texas, where he received his early education.

He was National Debate Champion while at Kilgore University.

He attended the University of Texas as an undergraduate, where he was active in campus politics, Sigma Alpha Epsilon social fraternity, and was a member of the Texas Cowboys honorary service organization, where he served as Foreman (the president of that group.) He was also elected to the Friar Society, the oldest honorary society at the University of Texas.

He served in the United States Navy during World War II, serving in the Pacific. His rank was First Lieutenant.

After the War, he returned to the University Of Texas School Of Law, where he graduated in 1947. He received many awards during law school.

Judge Hill practiced law for over 60 years. He was an associate with the firm Helm and Jones, and then was a founding partner of Hill Brown Kronzer and Abraham, where he practiced for approximately 15 years. He was then a solo practitioner for several years.

Always active in politics, he was appointed Secretary of State of the State of Texas by Governor John Connally. He served in that office from March 12, 1966 until January 1968. While in that office, he instituted many reforms, including installing the Uniform Commercial Code and the many recording and informational policies and procedures which accompanied that code in its day to day application and use by lenders, borrowers, and others.

He returned to the private practice of law from 1968 until the end of 1972. In November of 1972 he was elected Attorney General of Texas, taking office on January 1, 1973. He served thereafter until January 1979. He revolutionized that office, particularly with the institutionalization of the opinion process, open records, and open meetings law.

He organized the environmental protections division, the consumer protection division, and was the first Attorney General to open regional offices around the state so that the office was more accessible to the public.

He then joined a firm titled Hughes and Hill, with offices in Dallas and Austin.

He was a leading trial lawyer for the firm, with many interesting cases including assisting EDS with international issues concerning personnel and assets in Iran during times of international crises involving that country

In 1984, he was elected Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Texas, ably serving in that office until January 1988. He resigned to campaign for changes in the manner of electing or selecting judges to sit in the state judicial system.

He then practiced at the law firm which became Locke Liddell & Sapp. He retired from that firm in 2005. He then became a shareholder in the law firm known as Winstead, serving as a senior member of the Appellate Section.

Considered one of the best trial lawyers in the country, he was a member of the fellows of The American College of Trial Lawyers, the International Academy of Trial Lawyers, the International Society of Barristers, and the American Board of Trial Advocates. He was a member of the American Judicature Society, serving as president of the Texas Chapter. He was a member of the Order of the Coif Legal Society. He served as President of Texans for Judicial Excellence.

He received many awards throughout his distinguished legal career, including the Leon Green Award for Outstanding Service to the Legal Profession, the America Judicature Society Herbert Hawley Award, the Freedom of the Press Award, the Marc Gold Award for Outstanding Service to the Mentally Retarded, the Karen H. Susman Jurisprudence Award, and the Lola Wright Foundation Award for Legal Ethics.

In 1991, Judge Hill was being named Distinguished Alumnus of the University of Texas. In 1997 he received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the University Of Texas School Of Law.

Along with family and friends, he established the John L. Hill Trial Advocacy Center at the University of Texas School of Law. Dedicated on April 2, 2004, the Center oversees the practical training of UT Law students in trial and appellate advocacy. The Center houses the John L. Hill Teaching Courtroom, as well as three additional teaching courtrooms named in honor of other distinguished UT Law Alumni.

With his friend Ernest Stromberger, he recently completed a book about his service as Attorney General of Texas. That book is slated for publication in the fall of this year.

John Hill had many interests, including golf, hunting, and fishing. He was a great friend, who worked hard at being a friend. The stories and humorous things he has done through the years remain a source of delight to those who knew him.

He loved spending time with family and friends at the Double LL Ranch in Dripping Springs, Texas. He particularly enjoyed driving visitors around the ranch, pointing out interesting trees, creeks, hill-top views, animals, and other things he observed. His entertaining and pithy comments were legendary.

Judge Hill was a very active member of St. Luke's United Methodist Church in Houston. He served in many capacities, including service on the Board of Stewards and the St. Luke's United Methodist Church Foundation.

John L. Hill and Elizabeth Graham were married in Olney, Texas on April 4, 1946. They recently celebrated their 61st wedding anniversary. Their loving devotion to each other was beautiful to behold and experience.

Judge Hill was preceded in death by his parents, John L Hill Sr. and Jessie Hoover Hill. He was also preceded in death by his sister, Laverne Collum.

He is survived by his wife, Elizabeth Graham Hill of Houston. He is also survived by his children and their spouses, Melinda Hill Perrin and husband Michael W. Perrin, J. Graham Hill and wife Lindy M. Hill, Judge Martha Hill Jamison and her husband Bruce K. Jamison, all of Houston.

He is survived by one niece, Chris Collum Burkett and husband Harold of Grapevine, Texas.

He is survived by grandchildren, Elizabeth Perrin Eades and husband Jonathan, Carter Perrin and wife Elizabeth, Hunter Perrin and wife Mary Bonner, John Graham Hill, Jr. and fiancée Maria Alsen, Anne Taylor Hill, Peter Charles Hill, Randolph Bolton Hill, Matthew Thomas Clark, Meredith Virginia Clark, Samuel Luke Jamison. He is also survived by four great-grandchildren, Gracelin May Perrin, Eliza Eve Perrin, Oliver Michael Eades, and Elizabeth Graham Eades.