

Montgomery County's First Woman Judge



HESSLER STUDIO PHOTO

Judge Kathryn J. Lawlor of the Maryland Sixth Judicial Circuit.

KATHRYN J. LAWLOR, the quiet, dignified woman who is the first of her sex to become a Maryland Circuit Court judge, is also among the first in another respect—she gave up a promising career as a Hollywood screen actress for the more prosaic profession of the law.

Judge Lawlor, who was elected in 1956 to a 15-year term as judge of the Maryland Sixth Judicial Circuit, serving Montgomery and Frederick Counties, serves with four other judges. Four are elected from Montgomery, and one from Frederick.

Previously, she had served an interim term, having been appointed April 25, 1955, by Gov. McKeldin to fill the vacancy created by the resignation of Judge Charles W. Woodward.

Who is Kathryn Lawlor, and how did she become the first woman Circuit Court judge in Maryland?

First of all, her entry into politics—which eventually led to her judgeship appointment—was fortuitous. A telephone call from the Montgomery County Democratic Committee in 1950 informed her she had been appointed a precinct chairman. Being a registered Republican, she declined.

This singling out by the opposing party caused the Republicans to take a closer look at someone they had been overlooking. She was ~~elected to~~ the County Council while practicing law in Silver Spring, where she was active in both the County and the State Bar Associations. She later served as a member of the Committee on Continuing Legal Education and was treasurer of the board of directors of the Montgomery Bar Association.

Her law school training did not begin until after she married a lawyer.

"I got tired of waiting for my husband while he was trying Federal cases and went to law school myself," she says.

She was graduated from the Washington College of Law in 1936, passed the bar, and then served as attorney for the District Legal Aid Bureau. She was admitted to the Maryland bar in 1942 and to the Supreme Court in 1948.

The legal profession is a great contrast to her career in Hollywood. After she and her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas J. Condon, and sister Mary Natalie moved there from Lawrence, Mass., she was spotted by a movie scout while appearing in the lead of a high-school play and was given a contract. Her mother persuaded her to abandon the movies, however, and finish her education.

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She did, but marriage soon followed, and she and her husband, Lawrence Lawlor, set out for Washington, where he accepted a legal position in the government. And until his death in 1958, he served as director of legislation for the Veterans Administration.

Judge Lawlor has combined an official life with a happy personal one. She is the mother of two children, Joan, 20, and Lawrence, 18. The Lawlor home is headquarters for the young set. As a family unit, the Lawlors enjoy one another and the same types of entertainment. Every spring, they vacation in Florida.

According to some of the lawyers with whom Judge Lawlor deals, "She administers justice with a heart."

My hardest decisions are those involving custody cases," she admits. "Often, the parents are bitter toward each other, yet both are worthwhile parents and love their children. Most divorce cases involve men and women who will not face the responsibility of marriage and have never matured in facing the real problems of life."

She says the most gratifying part of being on the bench is getting to know the individual lawyers and their practice before the court and to realize the fine caliber of bar members in Montgomery and Frederick Counties.



PHOTO BY JO STEPHENS

She has a greeting for Mrs. Hazel King, secretary to Judge James H. Pugh of same circuit.



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Hollywood beckoned, but Kathryn went on to graduate from the Washington College of Law.