

ROANOKE BAR ASSOCIATION

MEMORIAL

JOHN LAWRENCE HART *(1919-1999)*

Uncle Jack.

For me he was an uncle, a good friend and a valued colleague. In memory and influence, he still is.

To many members of the Roanoke area bar, he was like an uncle; he readily answered questions and helped any in the intricate world of real estate law and title examination.

John Lawrence Hart was born in Roanoke on September 24, 1919, the youngest of three children. His mother was Emily Davis Hart; his father was lawyer James P. Hart, Sr., sister Anne Hart Gooch and brother James P. Hart, Jr. Jack's uncle was the Hon. John M. Hart, Judge of the Hustings Court for the City of Roanoke from 1922 to 1933, and who then served as Commissioner of the Revenue for the City of Roanoke.

Jack attended the Roanoke schools, then Virginia Military Institute, graduating in 1940 and going to work for General Electric Company. During World War II, he served in Europe with the 3186th Signal Battalion, as well as in Natal, Brazil and in the office of the Chief Signal Officer, Washington DC. Jack attained the rank of Lieutenant Colonel before leaving the military.

After World War II, Jack returned to GE briefly, then studied Law and obtained his degree from the University of Virginia School of Law in 1949. He entered the practice of law joining the family firm of Hart & Hart Attorneys, which was founded by his father and uncle in 1896, and practiced with his brother until 1966, when he opened his own office. At the Virginia State Bar meeting scheduled for June 18, 1999, Jack was to be awarded his 50-year certificate.

In every Bar such as Roanoke's, there are those lawyers who are flamboyant. There are those are active in the leadership of the bar and the community. There are those who are technicians of the

areas of law they know well and Jack was one of these. Since his death April 29th, I have had numerous calls from judges, lawyers, and title paralegals who have recited a situation about a title problem, and how Jack resolved it or pointed them in the direction to untangle it. In this area, alone, we have lost a tremendous resource. Jack's abilities were recognized by the Judges of the 23rd Circuit who named him as a Commissioner in Chancery for the Court.

Jack participated in the community mostly by being a "sounding board" for its leaders such as members of the General Assembly, the Board of Supervisors, City Council, and so forth. His advice was sought and given consideration as those bodies performed their duties. He took on a public role in the early 1980's when he perceived that the growth of local government was about to explode, chaired a citizens watchdog group in Roanoke County and spurred debate on the need for an expanded bureaucracy.

His biggest impact on the Roanoke Valley was in his work for the private, financial sector. Jack was first elected to the Board of directors of Southwest Virginia Savings and Loan Association in 1960 and served through the industry's financial struggles of the early 1980's. He was always a proponent of the Bank doing only "what it knew how to do", and resisted the impulse to expand into the riskier lending that others exploited. As Chairman of the Board of Directors, Jack presided over the conversion of Southwest from a mutual association to a stockholder owned Federally Chartered Bank, and retired from the Board and as Chairman just a few months before his death. His legacy is that Southwest Virginia Savings Bank remains a community bank, serving the people of the Roanoke Valley, and is the only remaining bank in this area with substantially the same name it began with over 75 years ago.

Uncle Jack leaves his wife, Sue Garst Hart; eldest son John, who works for the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality in Staunton; son Ronald who works for the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, Ga., and daughter Amy, a lawyer who is court administrator for the Circuit Court of Virginia Beach. Also surviving is his brother, Colonel James P. Hart, Jr., and numerous nieces, nephews and their families.

Ross C. Hart June 8, 1999

ADOPTED BY THE ROANOKE BAR ASSOCIATION JUNE 8, 1999.