

A Guide to the oral history interview of Robert N. Baldwin, Executive Secretary (retired) of the Supreme Court of Virginia, May 14 and 21, 2010

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English

Abstract

Oral history interview of Robert N. Baldwin, Executive Secretary of the Supreme Court of Virginia from 1976 to 2005. The interview was conducted by Cassandra Newby-Alexander, Professor of History, Norfolk State University, for the Supreme Court of Virginia Historical Commission. The interview was conducted May 14, 2010, at the National Center for State Courts in Williamsburg, Va., and on May 21, 2010, at the Supreme Court of Virginia in Richmond. Transcript available.

Creator

Supreme Court of Virginia Historical Commission.

Extent

4 mini-DVs (5 hours 2 minutes, sound, color; 2 transcript (139 pages).

Repository

Supreme Court of Virginia Archives, Virginia State Law Library

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

Collection is open to research.

Use Restrictions

Because the library is not open to the general public, researchers should contact the library to arrange access to the collection.

Acquisition Information

The interview was created by the Supreme Court of Virginia Historical Commission and transferred to the State Law Library in 2010.

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Biographical/Historical Information

The Supreme Court of Virginia Historical Commission was established in 2006 to preserve and promote the history of the court. Oral history interviews of retired Supreme Court justices, Court of Appeals judges, other individuals associated with the court, and civil rights attorneys were begun in 2007. The project is ongoing.

Robert N. Baldwin was Executive Secretary of the Supreme Court of Virginia from January 1, 1976, until his retirement March 31, 2005. He was Assistant Executive Secretary from 1974 to 1975. Baldwin succeeded Hubert Bennett, the first person to hold the position of Executive Secretary, who served from 1952 to 1975. During his tenure, Baldwin oversaw the implementation of statewide administration of local courts in Virginia, the implementation of uniform practice and procedures, and technology automation. Baldwin joined the National Center for State Courts in Williamsburg, Virginia, as Executive Vice-President and General Counsel in April 2005.

Robert Baldwin was born and reared in Roanoke, Virginia. He earned an undergraduate degree from the University of Richmond and a law degree from the University of Richmond School of Law. He served two years in the army in northern Virginia and taught law at the University of Richmond for two years before he became Assistant Executive Secretary in 1974.

Scope and Content

In the May 14, 2010, interview of Robert N. Baldwin at the National Center for State Courts in Williamsburg, Baldwin talks about his parents, growing up in Roanoke Virginia, and attending college and law school at the University of Virginia. He discusses being in the ROTC program and working for the army in northern Virginia for two years, starting a family, and teaching on the faculty at the University of Richmond for two years, and being recruited for the position of Assistant Executive Secretary. Baldwin talks about the L'Anson Commission, which proposed a reorganization of the Virginia court system, the transition from Hubert Bennett, Executive Secretary from 1952 to 1975, to his appointment January 1, 1976. He discusses his working relationship with Chief Justice Harry L. Carrico, his management style, planning for administrative changes, the implementation of automation technology and uniform practice and procedures in courts across the state. In the second part of the first interview, Baldwin discusses working with the Committee on District Courts, the Courts of Justice Committee, and Speaker of the House of Delegates A.L. Philpott, on legislative

initiatives for the judiciary; in particular; the establishment of the Court of Appeals in 1985; working with the National Center for State Courts, the origins of the Virginia Criminal Sentencing Commission, and a study by the Commission on the Future of the Court System, 1987-1989.

In the May 21, 2010, interview of Robert N. Baldwin, Baldwin begins by talking about changes in the court system during his tenure, particularly increasing diversity and training to raise awareness among staff and judges of racial and gender biases. He talks about the creation of a gender bias taskforce, working on sentencing guidelines, and elaborates more on the Commission on the Future of the Courts System, chaired by University of Virginia president Robert O'Neill, and unsuccessful efforts to create a family court in Virginia. He discusses the growth of the field of mediation, development of Alternative Dispute Resolution services, Judicial Planning and research and planning for the court system, the Conference of State Court Administrators and the Conference of Chief Justices. In the second part of this interview, Baldwin talks more about his working relationships with Justice Carrico and Justice Leroy Hassell, who became Chief Justice in 2003. He reflects on Hassell's more hands-on administrative style and his approach to working with the legislature. Baldwin also talks about outreach and education initiatives during Chief Justice Hassell's tenure, including the Journey to Justice K-12 education program. Toward the end of the interview, Baldwin reflects on his decision to retire, and going to work at the National Center for State Courts, and his thoughts about his accomplishments and disappointments as Executive Secretary.