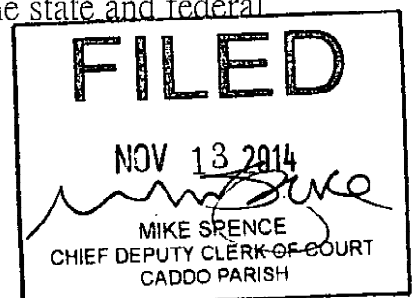


Memorial for
JOSEPH M. CLARK, SR.
Presented at the Memorial and Recognition Ceremony
Held by the First Judicial District Court
November 13, 2014
Under the Auspices of the Shreveport Bar Association

IN MEMORY OF JOSEPH M. CLARK, SR.

Joe Clark began practicing law in Northwest Louisiana the first month he was licensed as an attorney by the Louisiana Supreme Court in October of 1978. He began his legal career as an assistant Shreveport City Attorney working with James McCrery and Charles Grubb. Joe was responsible for overseeing the Department of Urban Development, the Fire Department, the Police Department, as well as drafting ordinances and resolutions for the City council. He particularly enjoyed working on legal issues which arose during the restoration of the Strand Theater and the Municipal Auditorium.

In 1983 Joe left government work behind and joined John Frederickson and Gerald Burnett in a general practice law firm focusing primarily on civil litigation. It was during the next four years that Joe came to realize his passion for law was not satisfied by appearances in civil or family law sections of court --and certainly not in sitting behind the desk in his office focusing on battles over money issues or liability issues or in extensive research on some complex question of law. No, it was during the hours he spent appearing in criminal sections of our various courts that Joe really felt he was practicing law in a way which brought him real satisfaction. And so, in 1987 he opened his own solo practice law firm in which he dabbled in family law cases, took an occasional personal injury case, but spent year after year defending the accused who were pitted against the full power and resources of the state and federal governments in criminal courts.




In 1991 Joe took part in his first capital murder trial as lead counsel during the penalty phase. The defendant was spared the death penalty and received life in prison. Many of us who have accepted a role in defending a capital murder case, quickly came to realize it was an area of the law we were not equipped to handle. It is not merely a question of intellect or competence. It is not a question of work ethic and willingness to put in long, hard hours of preparation on one case for months on end. It is not merely a willingness to take on the state or federal governments and the power they wield --knowing that you may be the only person in the world who even cares about your client. There is something much more involved in being a criminal defense lawyer, and in particular a criminal defense lawyer who takes on capital cases.

Without hesitation, Joe Clark put on that criminal defense lawyer hat and stood up for those charged with some of the most gruesome and frightening and reprehensible crimes in our communities. Joe came to realize that by accepting that role, it meant that some people had begun looking at him differently. They would ask him, "How can you do that work?---How can you be around those people? --- "How can you face the families of the victims?" - For some there was a sense that a criminal defense lawyer must enjoy being around his clients and somehow overlooked the evil deeds that some - if not most of them - had undoubtedly committed. But these people never dissuaded Joe from continuing to follow what he saw as his mission. Joe chose not only to actively seek out and accept criminal defense work through his private office, he also signed on as an indigent defense attorney for a number of jurisdictions in Northwest Louisiana. As anyone who has ever spent time in that demanding and exhausting role knows, there are few rewards as far as fame or

fortune for the public defender. The indigent client frequently makes no bones about letting his court-appointed lawyer know that he has no faith in his representation and if he had any money at all, he would certainly hire “a real lawyer.” But once again, that did not deter Joe Clark. For over 25 years Joe continued to follow his mission as he saw it. He believed that every individual was presumed to be innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law, and that each defendant deserved an advocate who was passionate about taking the case and making sure that the laws of the land were followed. The Constitution was alive and vital in Joe Clark’s mind and he let prosecutors know it. The vast majority of his many clients came to know and trust this public defender who did turn out to be “a real lawyer,” and who did keep their interest foremost in his mind for over 25 years of practice before he was taken from us much too early.

Joe Clark leaves behind a wife, Barbara, to whom he was married for 35 years, as well as a son and a daughter and grandchildren whom he cherished and kept close to his heart until his final days on this earth. Joe Clark, with his distinctive head of white hair and matching moustache, with his unique personality, with his dedication to those in need of a passionate advocate, left a mark on Northwest Louisiana. He made a difference. I am grateful that Joe Clark considered me both a colleague and a friend. He made a significant contribution to our legal community, and I for one, will miss him.

Most Sincerely,


Patricia A. Gilley, Esquire