

**United States District Court
For the District of Columbia**

IN MEMORIAM

FOR

THE HONORABLE LUTHER W. YOUNGDAHL

**Washington D. C.
June 23, 1978**

PROCEEDINGS

CHIEF JUDGE WILLIAM B. BRYANT: Mr. Chief Justice, distinguished members of the judiciary, Mrs. Youngdahl and members of the Youngdahl family, his faithful staff, members of the bar, ladies and gentlemen:

On yesterday morning we were all saddened by the news that our colleague and friend, Senior Judge Luther W. Youngdahl, had passed away on Wednesday evening.

We have come together to record that unhappy event and to memorialize his life's professional achievements and contributions to the quality of life for so many.

Our hearts are full, but not necessarily heavy, for though we mourn his passing, we are full of gratitude and appreciation for our exposure to the strength and friendship of this giant of a man for lo these many years. The life of Luther W. Youngdahl perhaps can best be described simply as 82 fantastic years—all committed to the service of mankind.

He was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota on May 29, 1896 of immigrant parents from the Scandinavian countries. He was brought up in a family whose motto was "religion, work, and education." Early on, young Luther displayed the industrious nature which apparently fueled his entire life. As a young boy, he delivered groceries in aid of the family business. He also had a newsstand, the proceeds from which helped defray his expenses in school. He was a product of the public schools of Minneapolis. His pursuit of higher education at Gustavus Adolphus College in Minnesota was interrupted by Army service during World War I. Upon his discharge, he returned to college and received his BA degree in 1919. His LLB from the Minneapolis College of Law came in 1921. After graduation from that school, he taught for about 12 years and served as one of the assistant deans of that school for some period of time.

In 1921 Judge Youngdahl's appointment as Assistant City Attorney for Minneapolis marked the beginning of a career which, except for the six years between 1924 and 1930, was devoted entirely to public service.

From 1930 to 1946, he served as a member of the Minnesota judiciary, first as a Municipal judge in Minneapolis for six years, then as a District Judge of Hennepin County for another six years, and in 1942 he was elected to the Minnesota Supreme Court, leading all candidates for that office. In 1947 the unusual career of this unusual man took a turn in another direction. After resigning from the State Supreme Court in 1946, he was elected as the 27th Governor of his great state [taking office] on January 8, 1947. In 1950 he was reelected by an overwhelming majority, thus becoming one of Minnesota's three-term governors.

Honesty and humanity in government was his theme. His administration was featured by vigorous and fair law enforcement programs and pioneering in activities designed to upgrade the education, physical and mental health of the young people of his state. He was sensitive to the importance of good public education and lent his support to that end. Under Judge Youngdahl, Minnesota became a pioneer among the states in providing better care and treatment for the mentally ill. He installed the officers of "Friends of the Mentally Retarded in Minneapolis." This group developed into what is known as the "National Association for the Mentally Retarded."

With determination, but without fanfare, as Governor he was ever mindful of any opportunity to improve human relations. By executive order, he desegregated the National Guard of his state, which until then had separate units based on race. He supported legislation barring discrimination in employment., He gave firm leadership and support to the Governors' Interstate Council on Indian Affairs, which was set up to develop plans for integrating Indians into the main stream his state's affairs.

Judge Youngdahl's reputation as one with great concern and respect for human dignity, as you might suspect, was not confined to his native state. In 1948 he and Mrs. Youngdahl made a goodwill visit to the Scandinavian countries and in 1950 he participated in the dedication of the Freedom Bell in Berlin, Germany, at the invitation of the General Lucius Clay.

Obviously these activities made great demands on his time, but not to the point of preventing him from making a long record of service to welfare, youth and religious activities. He was a national director of

The Big Brothers, and served on various YMCA boards for many years. He was the president of Minneapolis PTA organizations. He was one of the vice-presidents of the American Bible Society, and over the years had been very active in the affairs of the Lutheran Church in both its local and national activities. At the time of his death, he was a member of St. Luke's Lutheran Church at Colesville Road and Highland Drive in Silver Spring, Maryland, where a memorial service will be conducted next Wednesday evening at eight o'clock.

I suddenly realize that in pointing up the high points of an extraordinary career that I have yet to even mention what we here in this assembly are so very, very conscious of. That is, of course, his great contribution to the administration of justice here in the United States District Court for the Nation's Capitol.

Judge Youngdahl was appointed by President Truman on July 5, 1951, and from the day he was sworn in on October 1, 1951, he served our Court continuously until his death. All these years were distinguished by great dignity and courage and devotion to the cause of justice. Besides pulling his full weight on our Court during the years when we doubled as a full-fledged federal court, and also a court with general local jurisdiction, Judge Youngdahl served as the very effective Chairman of the National Judicial Conference Committee on the Administration of the Probation System in Federal Courts in 1963 to 1966. In 1964 he served on a Committee of the American Bar Association to study post-conviction remedies in connection with the Association's Project on Minimum Standards for Criminal Justice.

He was an official delegate at the United Nations' Third Congress on the Prevention of Crime and Treatment of Offenders held in Stockholm in August, 1965. Between August 1965 and January 1967, he served as a member of the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice, commonly known as the President's Crime Commission.

He was also a member of the Board of Directors of the Joint Commission on Correctional Manpower and Training, a presidential appointed position for the purpose of studying state and federal penal institutions.

In 1966, his 70th birthday, Judge Youngdahl became a Senior United States District Judge. He never broke stride, however, in his service to this Court and in addition he served on assignment in the district courts elsewhere in the country. I express the gratitude of all present here for that service.

During all of Judge Youngdahl's great endeavors, he had the active support and warm admiration of a wonderful partner, Mrs. Irene Youngdahl, whom he married 55 years ago on this very day, and also a fine family. His son William is a pastor of the Lutheran church. David has an outstanding record in hospital administration, as does his son-in-law, Mr. John Peterson, who is married to daughter Margaret. There are nine grandchildren whom he cherished.

When Judge Youngdahl came to us in 1951, he had already made a mark in life that few men are privileged to make in all their years. Fully reflecting the great esteem enjoyed among his colleagues, peers and acquaintances is the fact that today our Chief Justice of the United States has been drawn to this occasion. He knew Luther Youngdahl, I suspect, twice as long as any of us here, except for Mrs. Youngdahl.

Despite the fact that this is perhaps the busiest period of the year for the Supreme Court business, the Chief Justice has come to pay his respects and reflect upon Judge Youngdahl as he knew him. Mr. Chief Justice:

CHIEF JUSTICE BURGER: Chief Judge Bryant, Mrs. Youngdahl, members of the Youngdahl family, my colleagues of the bench and bar:

Judge Bryant was indeed correct when he referred to the length of my friendship with Luther Youngdahl. It goes back literally a half century because it began while I was still in law school, and he was already a Municipal Judge from Minneapolis, who on occasion would come and talk to a law school group or club. Indeed, I have a special recollection that the first case I ever tried was before him when he was sitting as a Judge of the Municipal Court in Minneapolis. And throughout his entire life and our long friendship, we reminisced many times about the stumbling and fumbling efforts of the young lawyer trying his first case.

Judge Bryant has adequately covered this, splendid life of service to the public for more than a half century, all devoted to public good, when as we know, as an able lawyer, he could have enriched himself and enriched his family in a material sense.

As Judge Bryant said, an occasion of this kind is not one primarily of mourning, but to rejoice in the kind of life he led.

I was privileged to be a part of some of the things that Chief Judge Bryant has referred to.

He appointed me as a member and vice-chairman of the Interracial Commission in the state of Minnesota. And later, he being governor in the post-war period, I was privileged to participate as a member of an advisory committee in a program to upgrade the public institutions and particularly the, institutions dealing with the mentally retarded and mentally ill. Throughout the entire war period, there had been a moratorium on the capital investment, construction, planning and equipment. As we know, in those same periods of time, the demand for medical services meant that a great many of the professionals were drained off the public institutions, and it was a very large task to restore it.

As Chief Judge Bryant said, he brought Minnesota up to the level that certainly had no superiors in the country and few that were equal.

I might add another note that on a personal basis I was one of a committee of three or four, if we can call it a committee, that waited upon him and urged him to leave the Supreme Court of Minnesota and run for governor.

Enough has been said about the distinguished career as governor. His first love was the law and the administration of justice. And while he ranked as one of the great governors of the state, he was never so happy as when he was on the bench and when he returned to the bench where his great service has already been mentioned. His qualities of courage and his tremendous vigor and industry mark him as one of the fine Judges of any state or of the federal system.

I am proud that you asked me to take part today, Judge Bryant.

THE COURT: Thank you, Mr. Chief Justice.

Mrs. Youngdahl, I express the deep sympathy of all of us present to you and the family.

Let the record of these proceedings reflect that the Court adjourns today out of respect for the memory of the Honorable Luther W. Youngdahl. □

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On April 25, 1979, the following Memorial was presented at a special session of the Hennepin County District Court in Minneapolis, Minnesota:

IN MEMORIAM

HONORABLE LUTHER W. YOUNGDAHL

Federal Judge Luther W. Youngdahl passed away June 21, 1978, at the age of 82 years. He was buried in Arlington Cemetery, Washington, D.C. He was born into a family of illustrious members. From birth to his passing he had a most notable career.

Judge Youngdahl started his legal activities as a law practitioner upon graduation from Law School in 1921. He became a Minneapolis Municipal Court Judge in 1930 where he served for six years. Then he became a Hennepin County District Court Judge. In 1942 he became an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of Minnesota; and, after four years in that court, he was elected Governor of Minnesota.

In 1951 he was appointed a United States District Court Judge to serve in Washington, D.C. He retired in 1966 as a Senior Judge in the Federal District Court and thereafter served in retirement. His death closed this impressive career. There were landmark decisions made by him in his judicial career. He sponsored into law social legislation during his term as Governor.

Judge Youngdahl served with distinction in all of his positions and also was extremely active therein and in public affairs generally. He was a talented singer and was called on often to contribute his talent. As a public speaker he was in great demand.

He was active in many organizations including his church, the Masonic Order, National Council of Judges, religious affiliations, Gustavus Adolphus College, and cultural organizations such as Torske Klublen in Minneapolis where he found many occasions to take leading parts. He was a man faithful to his religious beliefs. His humane qualities were always apparent. He was highly respected in his work in the courts and Governorship where he served so faithfully.

He was married and is survived by his widow, Irene; one daughter, Margaret Peterson; and two sons, William and David Youngdahl.

Judge Youngdahl was admired for his accomplishments in the high positions in which he served. Buttressing these accomplishments was his character and personality, the man. It was from his family background and these qualities that he leaves the great contributions that he made to our country.

The Minnesota Bar, our State and our Judicial System were indeed enriched by his service and contributions. He will long hold remembrance as a great man.

JUDGE THOMAS TALLAKSON

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Posted MLHP: August 24, 2011;
Expanded, January 7, 2014.