

JOSEPH S. WHITE
May 2007



From the time of his appointment as Circuit Judge by Governor Spessard Holland in 1943 to his retirement in 1966, 23 years later, JOSEPH S. WHITE was a model of what everyone hopes their community's judges will be: Totally honest in all respects, a highly competent and experienced jurist who was realistic about his fellow man and life.

Judge White was born in 1900 in Live Oak, Florida, in rural Suwannee County. He came from a family of lawyers, including his father and two grandfathers and a great grandfather who was a judge in Hamilton County before the Civil War. Judge White was himself a 1923 graduate of the University of Florida's College of Law.

A lawyer-uncle C.D. Blackwell, practicing in West Palm Beach, provided inspiration for the young new lawyer to start his professional life here. At that particular moment in time prosperity was missing from the area, and a local lawyer fable exists that White's initial host, a young lawyer not yet having succeeded, had home water service via a garden hose connected to a neighboring lawyer's house.

For the next twenty years he engaged in the general practice of law, variously as a sole practitioner and as a partner. Those days included both the late twenties real estate boom and the dark depression of the thirties. During that time period he served as the tenth President of the Palm Beach County Bar Association.

Unfortunately along with the financial depression tuberculosis was much too common. Judge White was a victim of both disasters. Hospitalized in North Carolina and with a wife and two young children to support his situation was most difficult. Because there was only one resident circuit judge, C.E. Chillingworth, management of the caseload was assisted by the appointment of lawyer-special masters. A number of these lawyers simply directed their fees to the assistance of their fellow lawyer- "Joe White"-, until he was improved and able to return to his practice.

In 1943 Governor Holland offered him an appointment to become the second resident Circuit Judge for Palm Beach County. Urged to accept by Judge Chillingworth, White did so; albeit with some hesitation as he felt that he had just built up a satisfactory law practice of some value.

Twenty-three years later upon retirement and being interviewed Judge White said that he was glad that he had made that decision. In a judgeship, he said: "There's a certain satisfaction that you've done the best that you could with your life. There's a sort of altruistic feeling."

In retirement he fell full force into the “ham-radio” operators’ world, enjoying it immensely.

Judge White passed away in 1981, survived by his wife of 54 years, Lillian White, his daughter- Quillian White Ditto, a son- Jos. S. White, Jr. and two grandsons.