



## Women in the Headlines:



Sentinel Photos by Andrew Schnitzer

# Judge Shook Adds Color and Controversy to Courthouse

By Vera Newman  
Sentinel Woman's Editor

"Non-controversial is a nonentity," says Judge Kathryn Lawler Shook, looking one squarely in the eye as she summarizes her philosophy.

Her statement perhaps best explains why she has been a judicial storm center -- a woman who unflinchingly evokes emotional response, both pro and con.

"Never to be controversial," she maintains, "is never to make anyone happy...or angry."

And Judge Shook, the first woman in the state to be first appointed then elected a circuit court judge, later becoming administrative judge -- must assuredly does both. On that score county opinion is unanimous.

Last April, the ripples she stirred within the courthouse walls may have been a factor in her being toppled from the top judicial post here after a two year stint. She was replaced as the county's top Circuit Court judge by Joseph M. Mathias, fifth down the list of seniority. Frederick County Judge Robert Clapp, who was empowered to make the change, lost little time in ousting her.

**Points of Criticism**

The reaction that swirled around her centered on these points: the frequency and duration of her holidays; an expensive decoration to her now-sumptuous office; courthouse nepotism in appointing relatives to office posts and a lack of sensitivity, evidenced by her stepping on official toes.

Her response to press criticism: "I would like to answer it, but feel it would serve no useful purpose, and would sound like sour grapes."

But the judge does defend her holidays from court, "all of which were taken during legal holiday periods, like Christmas

claims, followed the practice of taking 30 court days for vacation in any one year.

**Rared Smart**

None other refutes the fact that Judge Shook is astute, able and hardworking. Even her critics admit that she can get more done while on the bench, in spite of holiday breaks, than many other judges who don't take time off. She is rated, "able, smart, efficient," by critics as well as supporters.

In assessing her achievements, she is most proud of securing more efficiency in the office. "Almost single-handedly, through my efforts, we got additions such as law clerks, an improved assignment office and vitally needed facilities."

In those two years she also got rid of the backlog of cases, bringing scheduling up to its current clean status.

"I was most proud," she says, "of having, in 1968, one of the most efficiently run courts in the state of Maryland."

**Judicial Record**

Judge Shook has taken many strong innovative positions on the bench. She has a creditable record as a civil libertarian on many issues, such as speedy trial, warnings against wiretap as invasion of privacy.

She refuses to impose capital punishment and is credited with being the first judge with the power to administer the death sentence to take such a controversial stand.

"My decision followed lots of soul searching, trying to determine whether it is an effective means of stopping crime," she said. "When my study indicated it was not a deterrent to crime, the whole case for the death penalty fell."

She was advised that because she was a woman, she would be a less effective advocate of abolishing the death penalty than a man. She discounted this advice.

"I have never been afraid to make unpopular decisions," she declared.

preparing to do some writing comparing the method of administrative justice in the United States to that of France, where the presumption of innocence does not exist. In criminal cases in France, the entire background of the criminal is open during proceedings--and may go before the jury. His family life, background, the influences bearing on his life are all admissible in court.

"Perhaps if our juries had some of this information, and could participate in sentencing, the results might prove different," said the judge.

She finds the greatest need in

the county is for adequate facilities for detention. "We simply don't have them."

Her attitude on cases involving marijuana users is to give them probation on condition they don't use the drug, a requirement that they read information about its ill effects and help others by spreading facts about it. She claims that this has proved very successful in helping youngsters in high school.

*Twice-Widowed OUT*

What of Katherine Lawler Shook -- woman? *DeFool*

She has suffered the bereavement of widowhood

twice. Her first husband died in 1957, and she married Donald Shook, a Silver Spring planning consultant, in 1961. He died last year, and it was the unbearability of his loss that occasioned her frequent vacations, she has said. Both marriages were "real love matches, which proves that it can happen twice in a lifetime."

"It was a sudden and terrible blow when my second husband died," she said. She reacted by cautioning herself not to make a "radical decision about moving for a year. I stayed where I was, and didn't move from the Washingtonian Towers."

She has since remodelled her daughter's house, and created totally private living quarters there for herself. Her grandchildren are around, and she is most pleased with the solution of how -- and where --

to live.

Among her many hobbies are fishing, golf, photography (she is good enough to have sold pictures taken on her South Pacific trip to the National Geographic) -- gardening and cooking.

One can imagine Kathryn Shook as a keen professionalist at any endeavor she chooses. She passes along this story that illustrates how keenly she enjoys her profession as judge:

"When I was in the Legislature in 1953," she relates, "I offered a bill to create the post of lieutenant governor. And I was subsequently accused of trying to get in by the back door. It was Blair Lee, now secretary of state, who told me then 'whichever door you get in by -- how sweet it is when you get there!'"

(Comparison with France