

'Mitchell Courthouse' called fitting memorial

By DARLENE WRIGHT POWELL
Special to The Daily Record

There weren't many limos or long political speeches as the famous and not so famous poured into what until Friday had been called Courthouse West. Dignitaries from near and far filled the 85 year-old building but no one tried to, nor would have been able to, upstage the memory of Clarence M. Mitchell, Jr., which was prevalent in its every corridor. Even U.S. Supreme Court Justices William Brennan and Thurgood Marshall were barely noticed as they quietly blended into the rows of judges seated at the front of Judge Greenfeld's chambers.

The governor and mayor were seated at the bench, but they weren't really noticed either. Speeches were limited to several minutes and even the keynote speaker didn't exceed ten minutes. Everyone was there to celebrate and pay tribute to the memory of a great man, who would have been 74 that Friday.

Just about anyone who grew up in Baltimore knew of Clarence Mitchell, Jr. Baltimore City Police Commissioner Bishop Robinson is no exception. Friday, before the ceremony, he spoke to *The Daily Record* about his contacts with Mitchell. "I remember his warm smile and that he was the best listener

I've ever met. Even though I didn't meet him personally until 1970 or 1980, I knew about him all my life."

Baltimore City State's Attorney Kurt Schmoke also says he knew of Clarence Mitchell, Jr. for quite a long time. "When I was in elementary school, I heard him speak about civil rights matters at a local church. Years later, after I was elected to my present position, I had a chance to have a private conversation with him."

The occasion, Schmoke remembers, was a Monumental City Bar meeting at the Lillie Carroll Jackson Museum. "It was hot, so I stepped out in the hallway to get a breath of fresh air," he recalls. "Clarence was in the hallway waiting for his wife, who was speaking at the meeting. We ended up talking about various things for nearly an hour."

Every judge, it seems, respected Clarence Mitchell, Jr. Chief Judge Robert C. Murphy of the Maryland Court of Appeals recalls that five years ago, Mitchell appeared before the Court of Appeals to move the admission of young lawyers. (Only leading lawyers and public officials are selected for the honor.) "On that occasion," says Murphy, "I had a picture taken with him. I still treasure it. He was a marvelous man."

"I met Clarence Mitchell years ago at the Sharp Street Memorial United Methodist Church," says Murphy's colleague, Court of Appeals Judge Harry Cole. "Years later, when I became a

member of the state Senate, I sought out Clarence's advice and counsel. What I most remember about him is that he was always available."

Lisa Mitchell, Clarence Mitchell's granddaughter, has always admired him and been inspired by him. (Both he

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CLARENCE M. MITCHELL, JR.

Darlene Wright Powell, a Cornell graduate, is in her last semester at the University of Maryland Law School.

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and her grandmother had an impact on her decision to attend law school following graduation from college in 1986, she says.) She told *The Daily Record*, before Friday's ceremony, that "in spite of all the great things he did and all the important people he worked with, he was very humble. When I was in high school," she continues, "I worked at Mitchell, Mitchell & Mitchell, P.A. (the family's law firm in Baltimore). It was strange because, for the first time in my life, I was kind of intimidated by my grandfather. I had read columns he had written for the *Sun* and heard many great things about him. I was afraid that by my working in the same office with him, he'd realize that I wasn't as smart as he may have thought."

She goes on to explain that he soon alleviated her fears. "I then discovered that he was a simple, soft-spoken and strong man. He gave me a great sense of pride in my family. He showed me that anything is possible if you work hard enough."

Congressman Parren J. Mitchell briefly spoke on Friday at the courtroom dedication. He told the audience that he was still somewhat bitter and had scars about some things that were done to his brother Clarence, but he acknowledged that those scars are made less painful by recent changes in society. Today, he said, we can look around and see black lawyers, black judges, black court clerks, and blacks working at jobs throughout the court system. "This was partially due to my brother's efforts," the Congressman proudly remarked.

The dedication of a courthouse to the memory of a man who used the law to win battles for mankind is a fitting memorial. Clarence M. Mitchell, Jr. was a great warrior. But there are still battles to be fought. The recurrent theme Friday was that the true tribute to Clarence M. Mitchell, Jr. will be to continue his work.