

Charles Harris dies at 76; retired judge

By J. S. Bainbridge, Jr.

Charles D. Harris, a retired Baltimore judge who began his career on the bench as a strict law-and-order advocate and ended his tenure as a supporter of inmate programs, has died in Houston at the age of 76.

Judge Harris, whose diverse talents included singing and writing music criticism, had gone to Texas for treatment of a heart ailment. He died late Thursday night after undergoing surgery.

A memorial service will be held at 11 a.m. Monday at Brown Memorial Church on Park avenue and Lafayette street.

Though Judge Harris retired from the Baltimore Supreme Bench (now the Circuit Court) in 1976, he remained active in legal circles.

Several times since his retirement, he helped the other judges manage overcrowded city court dockets. The last trial he presided over — a medical malpractice case — ended less than two weeks ago.

Shortly after he left the bench, he became chairman of the state's Advisory Board for Correction, Parole and Probation. He devoted considerable time to trying to improve conditions in prison.

This concern with inmate problems late in his life was greeted with surprise by many people who remembered Judge Harris as a man who handed out stiff prison terms.

"I started out as a strict law-and-order judge," he said in an interview with a reporter from *The Sun* a few months before his retirement.

"I would tend to give very severe sentences uniformly, particularly in crimes of violence, without reference to a defendant's age, prior record or chances for rehabilitation."

Eventually, Judge Harris added, he decided that meting out automatic maximum sentences was not "the intelligent way to handle" the problem.

In the interview, he found fault with the prison system, saying, for instance, that the state made little effort to find employment for released criminals.

"We are on a treadmill of warehousing people who are mainly going to get in more serious trouble in or out of prison," he said. "The corrective processes are simply not there."

Court of Special Appeals Judge Solomon Liss, who served on the Baltimore Supreme Bench with Judge Harris, called his former colleague a courageous pioneer in pro-



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grams to help prisoners.

"He was one of the firm believers in work-release before it became popular," Judge Liss said. "On many occasions he would stick his neck out and give someone an opportunity."

Judge Harris was born in Baltimore in 1906 and graduated from City College. He was a graduate of the Johns Hopkins University and the University of Maryland School of Law.

Law was not his only interest as a young man. He studied voice at the Peabody Conservatory of Music for a while, and his first job was as an *Evening Sun* reporter and music critic. Later, he also reviewed music for *The Sun*.

His work in journalism helped him pay his way through law school.

Before being appointed to the bench in 1962, Judge Harris practiced law in Baltimore. He had also been counsel to the Maryland Classified Employees Association and general counsel to the state Public Service Commission.

Judge Harris was a member of the Barristers' Club and the Elkridge Club.

He is survived by his wife, the former Janet Jeffery; two daughters, Judith Proctor and Jayne Murphy; one son, C. David H. Harris; two sisters, Anne Caski and Katharine van Hogendorp, and six grandchildren. All are of Baltimore.

Two of Judge Harris's children, Suzanne Hansroth and Charles D. Harris, Jr., predeceased him.