

Presentation of the Portrait of  
**GEORGE L. WAINWRIGHT, JR.**

Associate Justice  
Supreme Court of North Carolina  
1999-2006

March 29, 2016

**OPENING REMARKS**  
**and**  
**RECOGNITION of**  
**MICHAEL PHILLIPS**  
**by**  
**CHIEF JUSTICE MARK MARTIN**

The Chief Justice welcomed the guests with the following remarks:

Good afternoon, Ladies and Gentlemen, and thank you Ms. McFarland for the Invocation.

I am pleased to welcome each of you to your Supreme Court on this very special occasion in which we honor the service on this Court of Associate Justice George L. Wainwright, Jr.

The presentation of portraits has a long tradition at the Court, beginning 128 years ago. The first portrait to be presented was that of Chief Justice Thomas Ruffin on March 5, 1888. Today the Court takes great pride in continuing this tradition into the 21st century. For those of you who are not familiar with the Court, the portraits in the courtroom are those of former Chief Justices, and those in the hall here on the third floor are of former Associate Justices.

The presentation of Justice Wainwright's portrait today will make a significant contribution to our portrait collection. This addition allows us not only to appropriately remember an important part of our history but also to honor the service of a valued member of our Court family.

We will hear more about Justice Wainwright in the coming moments, but I would like to share from a personal and Court perspective how very special and admired this man has been as both a "brother" on the Court and as a friend. Justice Wainwright did not take the direct road into law as many of us have. He spent six years as either active military or in the US Coast Guard reserve unit. He received high honors, and he commanded a Coastal Forces Unit of specially selected reservists with the purpose of warding off the threat of coast sabotage along our beaches.

Upon completion of active duty, Justice Wainwright served for fourteen years as the managing director of a major corporation engaged in agribusiness, tobacco, insurance, and real estate. He served on the

Board of Directors of a Bank, and upon completion of law school, he was in the private practice of law for five years. He then served as a District Court Judge, before being elected as a Resident Superior Court Judge. Each of these experiences brought perspective and a wealth of knowledge to the Supreme Court when George Wainwright arrived as an Associate Justice after the 1998 election.

During Justice Wainwright's eight years on the Supreme Court, he wrote significant opinions dealing with a wide range of issues: the reach of homeowners' associations, the public duty doctrine, involuntary annexation, comprehensive storm water management, and utilities rate-making cases, among others. His intelligence and ability to comprehend the variety of complex issues that came across his desk was shown in the conference room and in the final written product. He was a voice of common sense in the Conference Room with his trial, judicial, corporate, and military experience. George was the ultimate "low maintenance" associate justice. He did all his work, and he did it well. He volunteered freely to assist with matters at the Court, and he continually exemplified the highest standards of civility and professionalism.

Justice Wainwright was a half voice for the Demon Deacons with Chief Justice Lake, having gone to law school at Wake Forest, but he kept his allegiance to UNC having been a Morehead Scholar.

Since leaving the Court, Justice Wainwright has continued his public service. Having received yet another degree as a graduate of the National Judicial College in Special Jurisdiction Courts from the University of Nevada at Reno, he chaired a committee to research and report on the feasibility of implementation of a National Judicial College located in the School of Government in Chapel Hill, which has now been established with Jim Drennan as the Acting Director. Justice Wainwright is currently serving as the Chairman of the North Carolina State Ethics Commission.

At this time, it is my pleasure to recognize Justice Wainwright's former research assistant and attorney with Bell Davis Pitt in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, Michael Phillips, and invite him to the podium for remarks and to present the portrait.

Thank you, Mr. Phillips, for those excellent remarks. They were a fitting tribute to our former colleague.

**ACCEPTANCE of JUSTICE WAINWRIGHT'S PORTRAIT**  
**by**  
**CHIEF JUSTICE MARK MARTIN**

Now, I am delighted to ask Kennon and Ashton Wainwright to unveil the portrait of their father.

On behalf of the Supreme Court, we accept this portrait of Justice Wainwright as a part of our collection. We are pleased to have this fine work of art, and we sincerely appreciate the efforts of all who helped to make this presentation possible.

Justice Wainwright's portrait will be hung in this building and will be a continuous reminder to us and our successors of the great history and traditions of this Court. Additionally, these proceedings will be printed in the North Carolina reports.

Your participation today makes this ceremony special, and we are honored that all of you could be with us. At the close of this ceremony, Justice Wainwright and his family will move to the History Center on the first floor of this building, and the Court will follow. On behalf of the Wainwright family, I invite all of you to a reception in the History Center.

Please allow Justice Wainwright and his family, as well as the Court, a few moments to get to the History Center prior to your leaving the Courtroom. The Research Assistants will help guide you. We ask that you remain at your seats until your row is called. Again, thank you for being with us today.

**REMARKS by MICHAEL PHILLIPS**

Chief Justice Martin, distinguished Associate Justices: May it please the Court.

Good afternoon. It is a great privilege to present to the Supreme Court of North Carolina this portrait of Justice George L. Wainwright, Jr., honoring his service to the citizens and judiciary of the State of North Carolina.

When I was first asked to speak about Justice Wainwright at this portrait presentation, I initially thought there must have been a mistake. Justice Wainwright certainly could have had any number of far more prominent members of the Bar do so—distinguished lawyers with titles such as “Chief Justice,” “Associate Justice,” and “Judge.” But as I worked through the process of assembling the input of Justice Wainwright’s colleagues, friends, and family, it became apparent that his selection of one of his former law clerks made perfect sense for a man who, as I shall try my best to capture, is grounded by humility, team-mindedness, and family. For those of you who worked with Justice Wainwright, it will come as no surprise that he was adamant that my remarks be brief.

George Lindeman Wainwright, Jr., was born on December 10, 1943 in Wilson County, North Carolina, the son of George and Susan Wainwright. “Bucky,” as he was called in his childhood, proudly attended Fike High School in Wilson, where, according to lifelong friends, he knew almost everyone and excelled in almost everything he did. Academics and education were an essential part of Bucky’s upbringing for the simple reason that he had to make good grades in order to play sports, which were at the heart of his youth in Wilson County. He was a starter on the high school football, basketball, and baseball teams, but his greatest passion was on the gridiron, where he was an all-state running back, a most valuable player, and a member of a conference championship team. George Wainwright graduated from Fike High School in 1962.

Although he could have pursued college football elsewhere, George was awarded the prestigious Morehead Scholarship to attend the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. George majored in political science and was a well-rounded student who epitomized a Morehead scholar. He was an active member of the Phi Delta Theta fraternity, where he formed many lifelong friendships.

George graduated from the University of North Carolina in 1966, following which he served in the United States Coast Guard and Coast Guard Reserve until 1972. He then returned to his hometown of Wilson, where he became a successful farmer and agricultural businessman.

In 1980, George Wainwright married Carol McChesney of Rocky Mount, North Carolina. They were married in August, which in the life of a farmer meant tobacco season, market time, and regrettably no honeymoon. It was the beginning of an extraordinary partnership that George promised Carol on their wedding day “would not be dull.” And it most definitely was not.

This was also a time when great change was beginning to emerge in North Carolina agriculture. George had the foresight to recognize the turbulent future that the tobacco industry would soon confront and the impact such change would have on his farm and livelihood.

And so in 1981, George and Carol made the decision to leave the farm in Wilson and head to Winston-Salem, where George entered law school at Wake Forest University. At the time, George was thirty-eight years old, married, and tackled the challenge with the same resounding determination and work ethic that had propelled him to success since his youth.

In 1984, George Wainwright earned his juris doctor degree from Wake Forest University. Following graduation, George spent the summer of 1984 immersed in preparation for two big events, both of which incredibly were scheduled to take place on the exact same day—the bar exam and the birth of George and Carol’s son, Kennon. Mercifully, Kennon was late.

With a new legal career and a growing family, George and Carol were eager to return to Eastern North Carolina. George was fortunate to be hired at the law firm of Wheatly, Wheatly, Nobles and Weeks in Beaufort, North Carolina. Under the mentorship of the late Claud Wheatly, Jr., George quickly found his stride as a lawyer and developed an active practice in Carteret and surrounding counties. He was eager and ambitious. And, not surprisingly, he was already looking to new horizons.

In 1991, Governor Jim Martin appointed George Wainwright as a district court judge in Carteret County. The same year as this important

milestone in his legal career, Judge Wainwright and Carol celebrated the arrival of their daughter, Ashton.

It did not take long for Judge Wainwright to earn an excellent reputation within the Bar and local community, and he was elected to a full term on the district court bench in 1992. There he remained until 1994, when Governor Jim Hunt appointed Judge Wainwright as a superior court judge for North Carolina judicial district 3B, serving Carteret, Craven, and Pamlico counties.

As a trial court judge in the district and superior court divisions of our General Court of Justice, Judge Wainwright presided over the broadest array of civil and criminal cases. He was widely regarded as a judge who was intelligent, measured, and tough but fair. Judge Wainwright also developed tremendous respect for the lawyers who appeared before him and the often daunting legal challenges of trial work. These experiences as a trial court judge proved to be an invaluable, if not defining, component of the skillset he later brought to the appellate bench.

Although most would have been quite content with such remarkable achievement, Judge Wainwright was never one to rest on his laurels. He once again set his sights on new goals in public service—this time, the highest court in the State of North Carolina.

In the 1998 general election, Judge Wainwright was elected as an Associate Justice on the Supreme Court of North Carolina. Here in this courtroom, Justice Wainwright had the honor of serving under four distinguished Chief Justices: Burley Mitchell, Henry Frye, Beverly Lake, Jr., and Sarah Parker; and alongside current Chief Justice Mark Martin, Associate Justice Robert Edmunds, and Associate Justice Paul Newby.

According to former colleagues, Justice Wainwright brought a calm and level-headed presence to the Court. He was resolute in his beliefs of what was right and wrong, but was never strident or dogmatic. “The perfect judicial temperament” is how he was described by one former Chief Justice. Another Chief Justice noted that Justice Wainwright had a unique ability to concisely crystalize the issues and, because of his experience as a trial court judge, was often a sounding board for testing legal theory against pragmatism.

In this regard, Justice Wainwright’s opinions reflect a practical wisdom forged from decades of hard work on the farm, in business, and on

the trial court bench. All of us who had the privilege of serving as one of his law clerks know that Justice Wainwright had little patience contemplating how many angels could dance on the head of a pin.

Instead, Justice Wainwright was a “cut to the chase” type of judge who strived for sound, pragmatic rulings that provided clear direction to practitioners—the trial court lawyers and judges who ultimately would have to apply the legal interpretations of this Court in county courthouses across the state, much as Justice Wainwright did as a practicing lawyer and judge in the earlier days of his legal career.

Teamwork was not just a characteristic of the Wainwright chambers, it was a requirement. Justice Wainwright understood that his contribution to the Court depended upon the collective effort of all his teammates—his fellow Justices, the Supreme Court staff, his law clerks, and his Executive Assistant—each of whom played an invaluable role essential to the overall success of the team.

Not surprisingly, Justice Wainwright was quick to give credit to everyone on that team, not the least of whom was his dedicated Executive Assistant, Susan Owens, whose knowledge, intelligence, and decades of experience at the Court were essential to the success of the Wainwright chambers. It did not go unnoticed that Justice Wainwright always said Susan worked *with* him, not *for* him. This simple choice of words reflects the effortless respect and collegiality that Justice Wainwright extended to everyone in his Court family.

With a collaborative and supportive approach, Justice Wainwright mentored many outstanding law clerks who have gone on to successful legal careers as lawyers in private practice, state government, and our court system. In particular, Justice Wainwright asked that we recognize the late Clyde Alexander Cheek, III (“Trey”) as representative of the distinguished service of all law clerks and the finest of our Court family.

Justice Wainwright served his eight-year term at the Supreme Court of North Carolina with purpose and dedication. Although he might well have enjoyed many more years with the Court, he did not seek re-election and left the bench at the end of his term in 2006 so he could spend more time in Morehead City with his wife and family. There, he returned to the trial court bench as an emergency superior court judge for several years, after which he developed a successful practice as a mediator. In the most recent (but certainly not the last) chapter of his



legal career, Governor Pat McCrory appointed Justice Wainwright to the State Ethics Commission in 2014, upon which he currently serves as the Chairman.

Of all his achievements, however, none shine brighter for Justice Wainwright than his family. He has been married to Carol McChesney Wainwright for more than thirty-five years. Their two children, Kennon and Ashton, are graduates of the University of North Carolina and successful young adults who have made their parents proud. While we are all here today to honor Justice Wainwright's remarkable legal career, Justice Wainwright is here today to honor his extraordinary family—Carol, Ashton, Kennon, and Kennon's wife, Katherine. Justice Wainwright will quickly tell you that his achievement in the legal profession would not have been possible without their enduring love and support. Indeed, it was a team effort of which the entire Wainwright family can be proud.

In keeping with Justice Wainwright's insistence that I be brief, I will close by saying to Justice Wainwright, thank you for your service to the citizens and judiciary of the State of North Carolina. And thank you for allowing us the privilege of honoring you today with the presentation of your portrait to the Supreme Court of North Carolina.