

HENRY L. PITTS, 94 Led state bar association, panel that probed justices

Henry L. Pitts believed that integrity and honesty are the foundations of the legal profession and that belief drove him throughout his career.

It was also the reason he became co-chairman of a special commission in 1969 that investigated bribery allegations of two Illinois Supreme Court Justices, Chief Justice Roy J. Solfisburg Jr. and Associate Justice Ray I. Klingbiel.

Mr. Pitts, who at the time was incoming president of the Illinois Bar Association, was asked to serve as co-chairman of the commission with Frank Greenberg, head of the Chicago Bar Association. The two appointed John Paul Stevens, who became a U.S. Supreme Court justice, to act as special prosecutor in the case of *People vs. Isaacs*.

Mr. Pitts, 94, of Roswell, N.M., and formerly of Wheaton, died of a suspected ruptured aneurysm Thursday, July 7, in Eastern New Mexico Medical Center in Roswell.

The allegations that the justices allegedly received bank stock in return for a favorable ruling were investigated during a whirlwind six-week session.

"It was a very courageous thing for these people to do," said Kenneth A. Manaster, one of the volunteer attorneys in the session and author of *"Illinois Justice: The Scandal of 1969 and the Rise of John Paul Stevens."* "It was very hard fought and the judges' careers and reputations were on the line."

The Greenberg Commission recommended that the justices resign in the interest of restoring public confidence in the justice system. They eventually did.

"Mr. Pitts was really an admirable figure and a man of great integrity," Manaster said.

In a statement, U.S. Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens said: "Henry Pitts was a fine lawyer, a leader of the Chicago Bar, and distinguished himself as co-chair of the special commission appointed by the Supreme Court to investigate the judgment in *People vs. Isaacs*. I shall miss him."

"What drove him was his love of the profession and the legal profession needed to be absolutely impeccable and honest for the entire system to work and for people to have confidence in the legal system," said his son, Albert. "It is one of the cornerstones of effectiveness in our political system. There was a right and a wrong and he was going to get to the bottom of whatever it was."

Born and raised on a farm in McLean, Ill., Mr. Pitts had dreams of being a lawyer. After he finished two years at Illinois State Normal University, he received a teacher's certificate and taught school to pay for his education at the University of Illinois. He went to the University of Michigan Law School and graduated in 1939.

He joined the Chicago law firm Knapp, Allen and Cushing, now known as Dykema Gossett Rooks Pitts and eventually became managing partner of the firm.

Mr. Pitts was a pioneer in environmental law and represented U.S. Steel, Youngstown and Republic Steel, said Michael Borders, managing partner Dykema Gossett.

"But he was a gentlemen's gentleman," Borders said. "He was very gracious and humble."

In 1981, Mr. Pitts was lead counsel of the Illinois Bar Association, which with other service organizations and institutions, sued the City of Chicago after it implemented a tax on all services such as legal, banking and accounting fees. The Illinois Supreme Court ruled the tax unconstitutional in 1982.

"He stood by his guns," said Mark Weisbard, an attorney with Mr. Pitts' firm. "He was a very honorable person and was willing to stick up for what he believed in. If you asked his opinion he would give it to you honestly."

"The most impressive thing about him was that with all his intellectual capability and the prestige he earned over the years as an attorney he was, deep down, a very humble person," Weisbard said. "Lawyers often get a bad reputation because of ego issues, but you couldn't accuse Henry of that."

Mr. Pitts served as a lieutenant in the Navy in World War II. He was also a board member and past president of the Union League, vice president of the Chicago Crime Commission, president of Adams Memorial Library Board in Wheaton and on the board of the Forest Foundation of DuPage County.

His wife, Alberta, whom he married in 1941, died in 2004.

Other survivors include daughters Sarah Pitts and Emily Dixon; sisters Caroline Moberly and Alice Wright; seven grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren.

A memorial service will be held at 2 p.m. Tuesday in Trinity Episcopal Church, 130 Northwest St., Wheaton.



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