



Honorable John Grady Sowder

August 23, 2010

PROVIDENCE FORGE-Sowder, The Honorable Judge John Grady “Johnny”, Chief Judge of the 9th District Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court of Virginia, died peacefully Monday, August 23, 2010. Born November 17, 1918 in Calloway, Virginia, he is the last surviving sibling of 13 children born to John H. “Brud” and Mary Sowder. Besides his parents and siblings, he was preceded in death by his wife of 21 years, Anne Orange Sowder and his wife of 40 years, Mabel Redd Sowder. He is survived by his beloved daughters, Susan Bates (Frank) of Providence Forge, and Catherine C. Sowder (Brian Willoughby) of Nashville, TN; his devoted grandchildren, Anne Thompson (Grant) of Perth, Australia; John L. Gregory (Kelly) of Knoxville, TN; R. Allen Gregory (Lynneah Young) of Kansas City, MO; Maria C. Bates of Providence Forge; and three great-grandchildren, Leigha, Allie and Alec. Mr. Sowder was a stand-out athlete competing in football, basketball and baseball at Calloway High School. Upon graduation, he served in the merchant marines and then entered Virginia Tech. He walked onto the Tech football team, and served as Captain of the State Championship boxing team prior to his 1940 graduation with a degree in Agricultural Education, Forestry and Wildlife. In 1941 he accepted a position with the Game and Inland Fisheries in Providence Forge, which became his lifelong home. Johnny was called to service and joined the Aviation Cadets during WWII. In 1943 he was sent to Yale for radio communications and received a commission as 2nd LT in the U.S. Army Air Corp. He was selected to study radar and electronics at Harvard’s

Engineering program; learned radar countermeasures at Eglin Field and was awarded wings as a flying officer. He was separated from service in 1946, but was briefly recalled during the Korean Conflict. Johnny enrolled in Law classes in a special program for returning war veterans. During this period he worked as a real estate appraiser for the State Dept. of Taxation, Henrico County, and formed and managed Chickahominy Motors, a local, family owned Ford Dealership. After passing the Bar in Feb. 1954, he practiced general law in Providence Forge, and served as New Kent's Commonwealth Attorney from 1958 until being appointed County Judge for New Kent and Charles City counties in 1961. He became Chief Judge of the Ninth District Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court in 1973 where he presided until his retirement in 1986. He then became an active Substitute Judge in the Virginia Judicial System until 2008. Judge Sowder served professionally as a member of the Williamsburg, Richmond and Colonial Bar Associations; the Judicial Council of the Virginia State Bar; president of the Association of County and Municipal Court Judges (1965-1970) and as Vice President (1964-1965); and Secretary-Treasurer of the Association of District Court Judges (1970-1981). Within the community, he was on the governing board and taught Sunday school at Memorial Methodist Church; was active in the Ruritan Club and was commander of the American Legion Post. He was instrumental in the formation of the Providence Forge Fire Department and served as a volunteer fireman. He served on the Board of Directors of The Bank of West Point from its inception until 1973. Currently, Johnny held memberships in the Mann Page Masonic Lodge #157, and at St. Peter's Episcopal Church in New Kent. He was a proud American, devoted to his children, grandchildren, extended family and all things VA Tech. He loved life, people, travel, discovering and learning new skills. At his death, he was working on a novel. He had an amazing sense of humor and never forgot a joke, or passed up an opportunity to tell one. As his resume indicates, he was truly a jack of all trades and a master of many. His remains rest at Vincent Funeral Home in Providence Forge, Va. Family will receive friends from 5-8 p.m., Friday, August 27th at the

funeral home, with a Masonic Service at 7 p.m. A celebration of his life begins 11 a.m., Saturday, also at the funeral home, with interment following in Washington Memorial Park and a reception at Wallace Manor in Providence Forge. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Providence Forge Volunteer Rescue Squad, P.O. Box 177, Providence Forge, VA, 23140.