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U.S. District Judge Barbara Kloka Hackett 1928-2018

Prominent Detroit federal judge dead at 90

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Barbara Kloka Hackett, who served more than two decades on the federal bench in Detroit as a magistrate judge and district judge, died peacefully early Sunday at her Brighton home, surrounded by her family. She was 90.

ORIGINAL STORY: Retired Detroit U.S. District Judge Barbara Hackett dies
[<https://www.clickondetroit.com/news/retired-detroit-us-district-judge-dies>]

Her family said she had been in declining health for some time.

"Judge Hackett was a beautiful and strong woman," said Chief U.S. District Judge Denise Page Hood of the Eastern District of Michigan. '

Former Michigan Supreme Court Chief Justice Maura Corrigan also commented on Hackett's passing.

"Being strong included being savvy and smart and yet 'gentle womanly.' She was tough when necessary. The court will miss her spirit and drive. My thoughts go out to the family," said Corrigan.

Hackett was born March 17, 1928, in Detroit, the daughter of successful parents who lost their jobs and nearly all they had in the Great Depression.

Her father designed cars for the Ford Motor Co. and, later, for Waters Manufacturing Corp. of Detroit, which built taxicabs for the New York City market. Her mother was an executive secretary for Michigan Bell.

They kept the family going by opening a fruit market in Detroit and returned to their jobs after the economy improved. Hackett, the oldest of two daughters, said their parents insisted that both girls get a college education.

“My parents decided we were going to college because they had lost everything in the Depression and an education was something that people couldn’t take from you,” Hackett said in an interview with the Court in August. “I had parents, especially my dad, who felt women couldn’t go to college because their parents would only educate the boys. We were generations ahead of that.”

Hackett attended St. Gregory School in northwest Detroit from the 1st through the 12th grade. She was an A-student.

After receiving her high school diploma in 1945, she enrolled at the University of Detroit. She received a philosophy degree in 1948 and a law degree from U of D Law School in 1950.

Hackett, a talented pianist, considered a career in music, but opted for the law partly because of the influence of a seventh-grade teacher.

On the first day of law school, Hackett met her eventual husband, Patrick E. Hackett, when he insisted that she give him her locker. She refused, but they eventually dated and married in 1952. They had seven daughters.

Patrick Hackett, a prominent railroad lawyer in Detroit, died in December 2017 after 65 years of marriage.

Hackett served in a variety of legal roles after getting her law degree – all while raising her children. She was a staff assistant in the Law Department for the Michigan-Wisconsin Pipeline Company in 1950-51; law clerk for U.S. District Judge Frank Picard of the Eastern District of Michigan in 1951-52; and in private practice from 1952-65.

She served as chief law clerk of the newly-created Michigan Court of Appeals in 1965- 66; assistant Wayne County prosecutor in 1967-72; and resumed private practice in 1972-73. In 1973, she was appointed federal magistrate judge in the Eastern District, the first woman to hold that position.

She left in 1984 to be of counsel to her husband’s law firm and founded the Republican Women’s Forum. She served as president of the Women’s Economic Club, was a member of the Board of Directors of the Economic Club of Detroit, and the Board of Trustees for the University of Detroit.

In addition, she founded and served as the first chair of the Criminal Law Section of the Michigan Bar Association. On April 7, 1986, President Ronald Reagan appointed her to the U.S. District Court bench in Detroit. Hackett handled several high-profile cases.

In 1987, she stripped Johann Leprich, then 62, of Clinton Township, of his U.S. citizenship for concealing that he had served as a Nazi concentration camp guard when he applied to enter the U.S. after World War II.

The same year, she sentenced John McCann, then 44, a Pittsburgh lawyer and former New Jersey mayor, to life in prison without parole for operating a high-volume international cocaine smuggling scheme with a Birmingham lawyer.

You, John McCann, could have been a tremendous leader, a positive force for good,” she told McCann, adding that he showed no remorse for his victims. “But for reasons known to yourself, you threw away the opportunity to pursue your own selfish ventures.”

In 1994, she fined Clarence Ditlow, director of the Washington-based Center for Auto Safety, \$54,205 for violating a court order by leaking confidential information about General Motors’ pickup trucks to a lawyer who was suing the company. In 1999, Hackett ruled that, because of the First Amendment, rap duo OutKast was not obligated to pay civil rights icon Rosa Parks for using her name in the title of a Grammywinning song.

“Everyone who appeared before Judge Barbara Hackett knew they were coming before a no-nonsense, well-prepared, and highly dignified judge who would listen to all sides and render a fair and carefully considered ruling – in a timely fashion,” said U.S. District Judge Terrence Berg, who tried cases before her as an assistant U.S. attorney.

Hackett said the thing she enjoyed most about being a federal district judge was the ability “to make good things happen”, such as making sentencing recommendations about where prisoners would be incarcerated so they could complete their education and find honest work after their release.

She said she put an emphasis on listening to the plaintiffs and defendants who appeared before her. “I felt very strongly, from the time I went on as a magistrate, that what I had before me were people, not cases or numbers,” Hackett said.

Hackett transferred to the U.S. Courthouse in Ann Arbor in 1997. She went on senior status on April 8, 1997 but continued with a full caseload until 1999. She retired for health reasons on March 1, 2000 and never looked back.

“Once I left that building and hung up the robes, that was it,” Hackett said in the 2018 interview. “I was not Judge Hackett on the street. I was Barbara Hackett.”

Asked how she would like to be remembered as a judge, Hackett said: “As someone who cared about people.”

Judge Hackett is survived by daughters Sue Delonis (the late Bob Delonis), Carol Hackett Garagiola (Steve), Lynn Hackett, Meg Hackett, M. Patricia Hackett (Rita Koehler), Elizabeth Hackett (Richard Parry), and Sarah Hackett (Greg Cascione); 11 grandchildren, and eight great-grandchildren.

Funeral arrangements are pending.

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