



Dick Stith dies, former Clayton mayor



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More than just about anything, Dick Stith, who died last week at age 93, wanted to become a lawyer. But his law school classes were interrupted by the eve of World War II, and he quit to join the Navy.

He never returned to law school, but his passion later inspired his four surviving children. All became lawyers.

One is a judge on the Missouri Supreme Court, two are law professors and another is a senior trial attorney for the government. Two others who he considered adopted members of his family also became lawyers.

Mr. Stith returned from the war a decorated combat pilot. He opened his own insurance and financial planning agency and went on to become mayor of Clayton. He married Ann

Carter See, the late advocate for clean government and prison reform.

Richard Taylor Stith Jr. died Feb. 10, 2013, at the St. Louis home of his longtime companion, Marie Morrison. In 1998, he and his wife had moved from Clayton to a condo in St. Louis. He was recently diagnosed with lung cancer, his family said.

As mayor, Mr. Stith promoted business development and tried to keep government from, as he described it, meddling in people's lives.

He voted against a proposed anti-smoking ordinance, saying the city should encourage businesses to adopt voluntary smoking restrictions.

For years, Clayton banned yard signs for political candidates. When the American Civil Liberties Union called the ban unconstitutional and sued, the mayor said he had no objection to candidates putting up signs.

But, "I don't know why they'd want to," he added, noting that all the city and school board candidates at the time were running unopposed.

That is not unusual for Clayton, the county seat. Mr. Stith ran eight times, six times for alderman and twice for mayor. He faced opposition only once, winning his first race for alderman against an incumbent.

He was mayor from 1983 to 1987.

Mr. Stith had a lifelong interest in helping those with mental illness. His late younger brother, Francis, was born with Down syndrome. Mr. Stith helped found the Independence Center, a rehabilitation center in the Central West End for the mentally ill.

Mr. Stith's grandfather came to St. Louis in 1852; his father owned an electric company that fell on hard times during the Depression.

By the time Dick Stith met his future wife in 1940, he was living with his grandmother and selling eggs to pay his way through law school. Ann Carter, a debutante, recalled that they met on a tennis court.

"I was a Democratic Methodist and Dick a Republican Catholic," she wrote in "Lucking Out," the story of their marriage. "But we found, as we talked, that we agreed on most everything."

They married in 1943.

After graduating from St. Louis University High School and St. Louis University, Mr. Stith studied at Washington University School of Law for a year.

He joined the Navy in 1941 and was admitted into the newly organized air arm of the Marines.

He piloted unarmed air transport planes under heavy fire to deliver emergency supplies and evacuate wounded at Guadalcanal and other sites in the Solomon Islands.

He was cited for "outstanding heroism" and earned three Distinguished Flying Crosses and 12 Air Medals. He left the service as a major.

He wanted to return to law school but needed to support a growing family. He and his brother-

in-law formed an insurance and financial planning agency.

His wife, a fearless advocate for education and prison reform, described him as “the real rebel in the family.”

He rebelled, she wrote, against the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. He became president of an organization urging the implementation of Vatican II. He and others were known as “The Dirty Thirty” for opposing an encyclical against birth control.

Mr. Stith was president of the St. Louis chapter of the United Nations Association and chairman of Confluence St. Louis, an organization that tries to solve the problems of St. Louis.

“Mostly, Dick and I live in the reflected glory of our children,” Ann Stith wrote in 2003, two years before her death.

Their son, Richard Stith, is a law professor at Valparaiso University Law School in Valparaiso, Ind. They have three daughters — Kate Stith-Cabranes is a law professor at Yale Law School in New Haven, Conn.; Laura Denvir Stith of Kansas City is a judge (and former chief justice) of the Missouri Supreme Court; and Rebecca S. Stith of Tacoma, Wash., is a senior trial attorney with the EEOC in Seattle. Another daughter, Carter Stith Spano, a federal courts reporter for the Post-Dispatch, died in 1979. An infant son, Frankie, died in 1949.

Two other young men came to be considered “adopted” sons of the family: Mohan Phansalkar, a native of India and now a lawyer in Newport Beach, Calif., and Yabo Lin, a native of China and now a lawyer in Palo Alto, Calif. Other survivors include 10 grandchildren and a great-granddaughter.

A memorial celebrating Mr. Stith’s life will be at 2:30 p.m. on Feb. 23 at St. Francis Xavier (College) Church at St. Louis University. His body will be cremated, and the burial will be private.