

A Guide to the Oral History of the Organization of the Court of Appeals of Virginia, 2013 Mar. 27

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Biographical/Historical Information

The Court of Appeals of Virginia was established January 1, 1985. It provides appellate review of final decisions of the circuit courts in domestic relations matters, appeals from decisions of an administrative agency, traffic infractions and criminal cases, except where a sentence of death has been imposed. It also hears appeals of final decisions of the Virginia Workers' Compensation Commission. Except in those cases where the decision of the Court of Appeals is final, any party aggrieved by a decision of the Court of Appeals may petition the Supreme Court for an appeal. The Court of Appeals consists of eleven judges. The court sits in panels of at least three judges, and the membership of the panels is rotated. The court sits at such locations as the chief judge designates, so as to provide convenient access to the various geographic areas of the Commonwealth.

The Court of Appeals began operations in January 1985 with ten judges: Chief Judge E. Ballard Baker, who died suddenly in March 1985; Bernard G. Barrow, James W. Benton, Charles H. Duff, William H. Hodges, Barbara M. Keenan, Lawrence L. Koontz, Jr. (Chief Judge, 1985-1992), Norman K. Moon (Chief Judge, 1992-1997), and Marvin F. Cole.

Judge Benton served on the court until he retired in 2007; Judge Coleman from 1985-2001, when he took senior status; Judge Keenan from 1985 to 1991, when she became a justice on the Supreme Court of Virginia; Justice Koontz from 1985 to 1995, when he joined Keenan on the Supreme Court of Virginia; and Norman K. Moon from 1985 to 1997, when he became a U.S. District Judge for the Western District of Virginia.

Cassandra Newby-Alexander is Professor of history at Norfolk State University.

Scope and Content

Oral history interview with five of the ten judges who sat on the Court of Appeals of Virginia when it was founded in 1985: James W. Benton, Jr., Sam W. Coleman, III, Barbara M. Keenan, Lawrence W. Koontz, and Norman K. Moon. Moderated by Cassandra Newby-Alexander, Professor of History at Norfolk State University. Recorded at the Community Idea Stations in Richmond. Transcript available.

The participants discuss the historical context in which the court was created, support and opposition for the court when it was created, the process of establishing procedures for the new court, and the experience of being on the new court, and the successes of the court. Toward the end of the discussion, Newby-Alexander asks each participant what led him or her to pursue a legal career.

