

Judicial Profile Judge Russell O. Morrow  
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Judge Morrow was born in 1907 in Waterloo, Iowa. His father had been a builder, and moved to Florida during the land boom in 1920. His father worked for a company that platted and developed Lake Worth. Russell was 13 when they moved, and went to Lake Worth Elementary and High School. He was born leader, and was president of his Junior and Senior classes. He played basketball, even though he was only 5'10". Russell's parents were college graduates, and he always expected to go to college. Enrolling in Washington and Lee, in Virginia, five years later, he had a BA and law degree. He was a member of the debating team. He came back to Lake Worth in 1932, in the depth of the Depression. He could find no work, but Lake Worth Attorney McGee let him sit in his office. Russell had to work as a substitute teacher to make ends meet.

In the meantime, his high school sweetheart, Victoria, had left for Florida State College for Woman, graduated, and came back to Lake Worth as a teacher. They dated several years, and were married in 1936.

Russell was admitted to The Florida Bar in 1933. Since he could find no work in two years, in 1935 he became the Chief Deputy Clerk of the Criminal Court working in the Courthouse. In this position, he got to know most everyone in the county. He ran for the House of Representatives in 1935. His widow, Victoria, said: "When he first campaigned for the House of Representatives, there wasn't even a radio station in Palm Beach County. We did it by going all around. We made our own placards. We didn't have any money." He won, because he was a natural campaigner.

Later, he was easily re-elected, and served in the Legislature in the 1937, 1939, and 1941 Sessions. He had a real skill as a politician, and was considered to be one of the best speakers in Palm Beach County, challenged only by his college roommate, Charles Fulton (our first local Federal Judge).

In 1936, Russell and Charlie Fulton established a firm in the Comeau Building, Morrow & Fulton. During this time, he served as Lake Worth City Attorney for fourteen years. In 1940, he was the President of the County Bar. One week after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, he enlisted in the Navy as a Lt. J.G. He was in the Pacific four years on a destroyer escort, and won five battle stars. He came back in 1946 as a Captain. (He had a great love for the Navy, and was the First Commandant of our Local Naval Reserve Unit). He ran for the House again, and was elected in 1947. State Senator John Beacham (father of Ted) died in 1950. This forced an election in which both Chairman of the Republican and Democrat Parties, who lived in Palm Beach County, entered the race. Russell gained international attention when he won this election as a writer-in candidate. Victoria said, "It was a miracle. He ran against the Chairman of the Democratic Party, and the Chairman of the Republican Party as a write-in candidate." He worked very closely in Tallahassee with Gov. Leroy Collins. In 1955, when our Circuit needed a fourth Circuit Court Judge (the Judges at that time were Chillingworth, Tedder, and White) Gov. Collins appointed Russell. He took the Bench in 1955, and retired 13 years later, in 1968.

Judge Morrow gained a reputation as a hard worker, who expected much from the lawyers who came to his Court. Judge James Downey said at the time of Judge Morrow's

death in 1984 “He was a very, very kind, hard working, and straight forward guy.” State Attorney Phil O’ Connell said “ He would require you to be prompt and ready at all times.” Judge Knott described Russell as “a man of very considerable virtue. He seemed to have no sins.” Judge Hewitt described him as a top-notch legislator. “ He was a good man.” Although the Judge retired in 1968, he consistently returned to try cases as a Senior Judge.

Off the Bench, he had two major passions. The first was as the Patriarch and elder lay minister of the First Presbyterian Church of Lake Worth. For 20 years, he spent a considerable amount of time preparing for the weekly Sunday school class he taught. The second was the outdoors that he shared with his wife, Victoria. Duck hunting, airboat frogging, and later fishing. As one of the great orators of Palm Beach County, and being very patriotic, he was called upon frequently to give speeches to various groups. One of his favorite topics was the danger of Communism during the Cold War.

After his death in 1984, at age 77, a nephew wrote to Victoria, which more or less sums it up: “I guess each of us looks at Uncle Russ a little differently. To me, he was the proof that a good man could be a successful man, that a man 5’10” could stand eight feet tall, that it’s possible for a man of great station to communicate directly with people of all ages and in all walks of life. I’d like to have Uncle Russ’ credentials when I stand face-to-face with my maker, and it’s some comfort to think that he’ll be there to plead my case.”