

# **Presentation of Portrait**

of

**THE HONORABLE BURNITA SHELTON MATTHEWS**

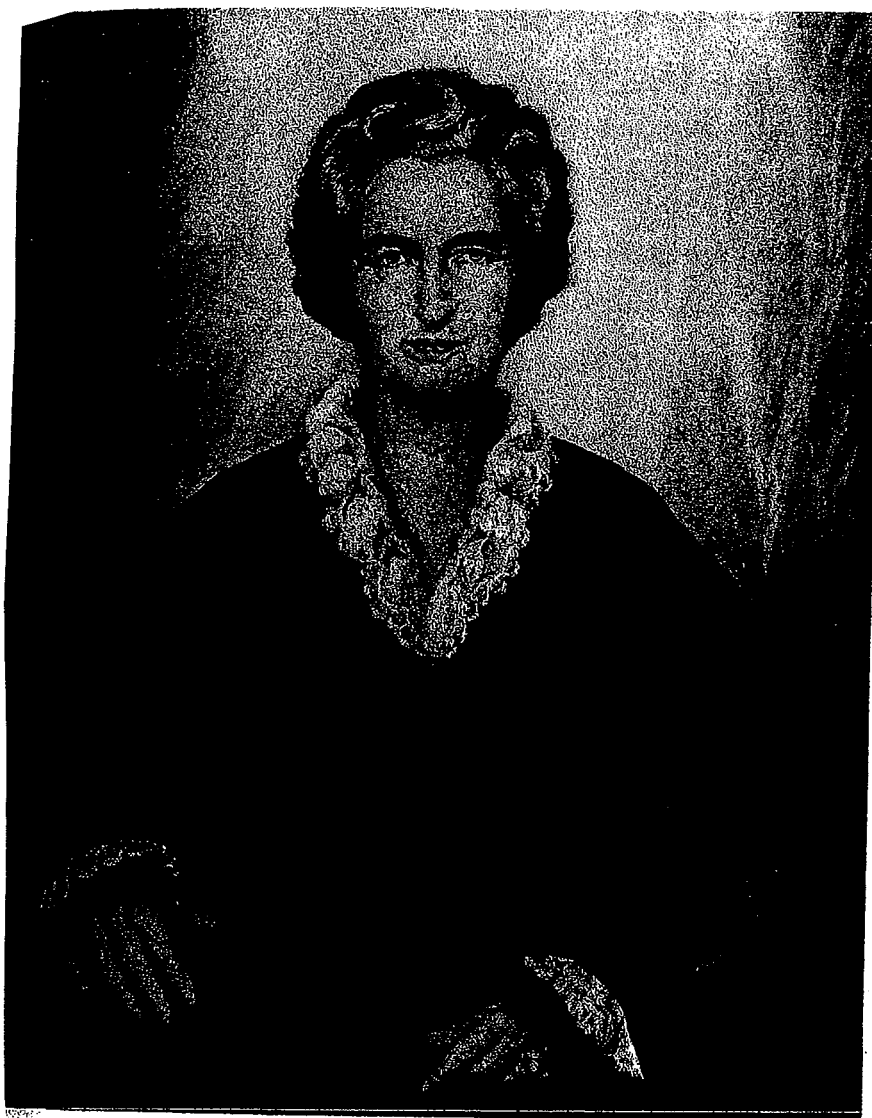
to

**THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

**Thursday, February 1, 1973**

**4:15 p. m.**

**Ceremonial Courtroom**



HONORABLE BURNITA SHELTON MATTHEWS

BEFORE:

CHIEF JUDGE JOHN J. SIRICA  
CIRCUIT JUDGE EDWARD A. TAMM  
CIRCUIT JUDGE SPOTSWOOD W. ROBINSON III  
SENIOR JUDGE MATTHEW F. MCGUIRE  
SENIOR JUDGE RICHMOND B. KEECH  
SENIOR JUDGE EDWARD M. CURRAN  
SENIOR JUDGE CHARLES F. MCLAUGHLIN  
SENIOR JUDGE LUTHER W. YOUNGDAHL  
SENIOR JUDGE JOSEPH C. MCGARRAGHY  
SENIOR JUDGE LEONARD P. WALSH  
JUDGE GEORGE L. HART  
JUDGE WILLIAM B. JONES  
JUDGE HOWARD F. CORCORAN  
JUDGE OLIVER GASCH  
JUDGE WILLIAM B. BRYANT  
JUDGE JOHN LEWIS SMITH  
JUDGE AUBREY E. ROBINSON, JR.  
JUDGE JOSEPH C. WADDY  
JUDGE GERHARD A. GESELL  
JUDGE JOHN H. PRATT  
JUDGE JUNE L. GREEN  
JUDGE BARRINGTON D. PARKER  
JUDGE CHARLES R. RICHEY  
JUDGE THOMAS A. FLANNERY

**CEREMONY**

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# Proceedings

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CHIEF JUDGE SIRICA: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.

First of all, I want to say how happy I am—and I know our other Judges are too—to have with us today two of our former colleagues, Judges Edward Tamm and Spotswood Robinson of the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia.

The Court at this time will recognize Mrs. Ellen Lee Park for presentation of the Portrait.

ASSISTANT UNITED STATES ATTORNEY ELLEN LEE PARK: May it please the Court.

On behalf of the Trustees of the Judge Burnita Shelton Matthews Portrait Trust, I have the honor to appear here today to present to the United States District Court for the District of Columbia a portrait of one of its Judges, the first woman ever to serve as a United States District Judge, Burnita Shelton Matthews.

The portrait represents a gift from many individuals, most of whom are either members of The Women's Bar Association or our courthouse personnel and from groups of individuals, all of whom share a desire to participate in the project designed to give recognition to Judge Matthews. Her family is included in this group. One of her brothers, John Shelton, gave generously of his time to provide transportation for Judge Matthews for the sittings which were necessary in order for us to have the portrait from life, which we desired to have for this Court. Another brother, the late Edwin Shelton, furnished the hand-carved gold-leaf frame of which we are extremely proud.

The presence of so many Judges and so many lawyers and friends of Judge Matthews here today in itself is a tribute to her.

## PROCEEDINGS

To Miss Roma C. Harlan, the artist, who is also with us today, goes the credit for having painted what we consider a truly great portrait and a fine likeness of a hard-working, conscientious Judge whom we love and admire. Miss Harlan studied at the Art Institute of Chicago and under several prominent portrait artists in that City. Her God-given talents and training have, we believe, enabled her to capture not only the beauty of Judge Matthews but also her femininity, her kindness, her courtesy, her dignity and, above all, her great strength of character.

For many months we have been waiting for this occasion, and it now gives me great pleasure to call upon Judge Sylvia Bacon and Miss Patricia Frohman who will unveil the portrait.

[Portrait Unveiled.]

CHIEF JUDGE SIRICA: The Court will now recognize Miss Roma C. Harlan, the artist. Would you stand, please.

Thank you, Miss Harlan.

I want to say at the outset that I am delighted, as Chief Judge, on behalf of this Court and on my own behalf, to accept for the Court this magnificent portrait of our distinguished, esteemed and, indeed I should say, beloved associate and colleague, Judge Burnita Shelton Matthews.

Judge Matthews came to this Bench in 1949. That was truly a distinction, apart from her personal qualities, because she thus became, in fact, the first woman ever to sit on a Federal Trial Court. Judge Florence Allen, it is true, had been appointed as a Judge but to membership on the Circuit Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit. Thus, it was that Judge Matthews became the first woman trial judge in the history of the whole Federal Judiciary.

It was a monumental departure and, for us on this Court, not only an unusual one but a happy and most beneficial one.

When she retired in 1968 she had fulfilled the promise thus foreshadowed, because her almost twenty years of service were most distinguished both in character and achievement.

## HONORABLE BURNITA SHELTON MATTHEWS

When she set out to be a lawyer—now many years ago—she entered a field then almost completely preempted by men but she persisted with the result we all know. Ever zealous in the protection of what she regarded as the place of women in the body politic, hers was an example of the persuasiveness of a splendidly acute and informed mind and of a delightful femininity as well.

She was a working Judge and in those days of the master calendar she took cases as they came, whether difficult or routine, asking no favors and offering no excuses.

She came out of the typical American home with a large family of brothers; and after her college days when she decided to study law she had to struggle for a legal education. For, as she herself once put it, she labored by day and went to school by night; and she treasured what she got.

I understand she might have become a musician if she had followed her earlier predilection, but providence decided otherwise. Yet nothing is lost, for it is no exaggeration to say she has brought music wherever she has gone.

The portrait is beautiful, as befits the subject. Therefore, Mrs. Park, I receive it graciously and officially on behalf of the Court. And when others in times yet to be occupy our places, they can see what we had and what they missed.

And to you, Judge Matthews, our colleague still sitting with us as a Senior Judge, I wish for you, on behalf of all of us, a long life and continued well being and happiness.

The Marshal will announce the adjournment of Court.

THE DEPUTY MARSHAL: Everyone please rise. This Honorable Court now stands adjourned.

[4:30 p. m.]

CERTIFIED The Official Transcript.

/s/ Jack Maher  
Court Reporter.

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