Judicial Evolution
Magistrate judges are so much a part of the federal judicial system today that it is very likely that younger lawyers can’t remember a time when there were no magistrate judges in the Eastern District of Tennessee.

The evolution of the magistrate judge positions was brought to mind by the death in late May of retired U.S. Magistrate Judge Joe A. Tilson of Morristown, who was the first full-time magistrate judge in the Northeastern Division of the district. He was appointed in December 1985. Previously, there was only the post of part-time magistrate judge in that division, held by the late Thomas W. (Jack) Overall of Greeneville.

At the time of Judge Tilson’s appointment, there were two other full-time magistrate judges in the district, Robert P. Murrian in Knoxville and John Y. Powers in Chattanooga, both now retired, and a part-time magistrate judge in Sevierville, who handled violations in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. That position was held by attorney Ron Sharp of Sevierville. It was abolished in 1991, when a second full-time magistrate judge position was created for the Knoxville office.

Today, the district has five full-time magistrate judges: Dennis Inman, Greeneville, who succeeded Judge Tilson and who serves as chief magistrate judge; William B. Mitchell Carter and Susan K. Lee in Chattanooga; and C. Clifford Shirley and H. Bruce Guyton in Knoxville.

Historical Happenings
History was made and history was reviewed when judges and delegates met in Chattanooga for the Sixth Circuit Judicial Conference in May.

It was the first time the conference had been held in Chattanooga. And one of the city’s most notable federal court trials was reviewed by the delegates.

The trial was that of Teamsters President Jimmy Hoffa, who was convicted in 1964 and sentenced to prison. A panel discussion about the trial was a highlight of the conference.

Three of the trial participants were panelists: James Neal of Nashville, the lead prosecutor; Chattanooga lawyer Marvin Berke, who, with his father, Harry Berke, served as local defense counsel; and Chattanooga lawyer Charles Gearhiser, who was a law clerk for the trial judge, U.S. District Judge Frank W. Wilson.

continued on page 2
Historical Happenings continued from page 1

In addition, conference delegates were shown a documentary produced under the auspices of the Chattanooga Chapter of the Federal Bar Association titled “Balancing the Scales: The Chattanooga Trial of U.S. v. James R. Hoffa.”

The chapter produced the documentary to preserve the history of the trial and to promote discussion of the legal and ethical issues that were highlighted in the trial. An article below tells about the Historical Society’s role in the production of the documentary.

U.S. District Judge Harry S. Mattice, who presided at the panel discussion, said, “The Hoffa trial, for people like me, is arguably the most significant case that has ever been tried in federal court in Chattanooga. This national drama played out here in little Chattanooga, and the case gives local flavor to the conference.”

U.S. Magistrate Judge William B. Mitchell Carter said, “Several people have told me this is the best conference of the Sixth Circuit they’ve been to.”

The principal speaker was U.S. Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens, who is assigned to the Sixth Circuit.

Jarvis in Federal Supplement

Judge James H. Jarvis has become the district’s fifth judge to be memorialized in the Federal Supplement.

A reproduction of his portrait and the transcript of the portrait unveiling ceremony held last November are in 536 Federal Supplement 2nd just off the press. The volume also has his name imprinted in gold lettering on the spine of the book.


Because of the historical significance of the Hoffa trial to this district, the Court Historical Society contributed $1,500 toward the cost of producing the documentary and is acknowledged as a contributor in the liner notes accompanying all copies.

We have the copy in the Court Historical Society office, and it is available for loan to any member, law firm or organization that might wish to show it. As specified by the Chattanooga chapter of the Federal Bar Association, no profit may be derived from showing the documentary, however, and no group or individual may charge a fee to show it.

It’s worth noting here that the widow of Judge Frank Wilson, the presiding judge at the Hoffa trial, died on June 27, six weeks after the presentation of the Hoffa trial documentary at the Sixth Circuit Judicial Conference. Though the Wilsons had made their home on Signal Mountain since he was appointed to the federal bench in 1961, they formerly lived in Knoxville and in Oak Ridge, where he was practicing law at the time of his appointment. As a homemaker, Mrs. Wilson endured the around-the-clock security that the U.S. Marshals Service provided the Wilsons at their home during the trial. She is briefly shown in the documentary commenting on the security.