

**Memorial to Judge
Phillip Rector Collett**

*Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Iowa Judges Association
June 19, 2017 in Des Moines, Iowa*

Phillip Rector Collett served Iowa's 8th Judicial District as a Chief Judge during a period of uncommon transformation of the state's judicial system. He is long remembered as a professional who took his courthouse responsibility very seriously—that is, until it was time for a tennis match. He was an avid player with his favorite partner, his wife Gayle.

Phil was born June 18, 1935 in Ottumwa, to Clarence and Belle Conley Collett. After graduating from the Ottumwa High School in 1952, he went to college, served in the U.S. Army, and eventually entered the Drake Law School. In 1961, freshly armed with a legal education and a license to practice law, Phil returned to his hometown and began a storied career--opening an office for himself. After several years of practice, in both private matters and as a public prosecutor, Phil was named an Associate District Court Judge in 1974. Soon thereafter, in 1976 Governor Robert D. Ray appointed him to the District Court Bench. Just two years later in 1978 when his colleague and good friend Art

McGiverin vacated his office as the 8th District's Chief Judge (to become an Associate Justice of the Iowa Supreme Court) Phil was named the new Chief-- Iowa's youngest.

During Phil's 20-year tenure as our District's Chief Judge, he would embrace much change in the way court services were delivered. Systemically, in the late 1980's administration was shifted into a centralized model, and district court administrators were hired to assist the Chiefs in business and organizational aspects of delivery. It was a trying time in many respects, but a good investment as it laid foundation for efficient advancement years hence when our state would be poised to go paperless. Due, to centralized administration! Phil also experienced a wave of diversification in the bench, with the appointment of women judges—a phenomenon he accepted gracefully, and often recounted with a mix of wonderment in his apprehension.

In the rigors of judicial work, Phil was a consummate professional. When others might opt to scratch out a handwritten order, he insisted on having his typed up. He asked questions of new and experienced attorneys, alike--to be sure he

understood (and perhaps to test whether they understood) what he was being asked to approve. He generously gave of his time in mentoring young lawyers. He relished the collegial association of those on the Judicial Council, the judges representing the districts around the State and the appellate courts.

Phil also led a balanced and zestful life. He enjoyed the beauty and comfort of his travels around the 8th District—often in a spanking new Cadillac. He and Gayle were active members of the Ottumwa Country Club where they socialized regularly and played tennis often. He was a regular in the Men’s Golf League, paired with his neighbor and long-time attorney friend Terry Deneffe—yielding a sportsmen’s loyalty that confounded onlookers who had read the Code of Judicial Conduct, but never seemed to bestow Terry any real benefit.

When Phil retired in 1998, he served as a Senior Judge for five years. It was a great service to his District, and allowed many the delight of seeing him around and about. But, it was always a bit uncomfortable for Phil who had been so fastidious in his legal scholarship and preparation, to be dropped in to a busy court-service day and confronted by evolving areas of the law, a growing wave

of self-represented litigants, and unpredictable needs for language interpretation. Much of Phil's retirement time was spent—you guessed it, enjoying tennis and golf. During the warm months in Iowa, Phil and Gayle resided in their Ottumwa home; and they wintered in the area of Ft. Myers, Florida.

Gayle, a former elementary teacher in the Ottumwa School District, suffered debilitating effects of Alzheimer's Disease in the later years of the couple's retirement and Phil dutifully cared for her. She died July 3, 2015 in Ottumwa; and 18 months later on January 13, 2017, Phil died in Ottumwa. The Colletts are survived by their son Dr. Jeffrey P. Collett (an Optometrist) of Ottumwa, Jeff's wife Robbyn, and Jeff's two children Shea and Drew, as well as step-grandchildren Seth, Sage, and Savannah. Phil was also survived by two brothers and two sisters. Phil and Gayle had two other sons, Paul and Matthew, who died very young of Cystic Fibrosis, leaving Phil and Gayle with a powerful reminder of how precious life is, and imbuing in them a personal mantra to appreciate each day, living it to the fullest.