William J. Harbison

Ward DeWitt, Jr.
Those close to him knew Bill Harbison for much more than the
great legal scholar that he was. For almost twenty years I had the
good fortune to practice law with him and was privileged to be his
friend for over forty years. He was, as everyone knows, an
outstanding lawyer and judge, but perhaps many do not know the
non-legal side of Bill Harbison. In no particular order, Bill was a
churchman, a sports enthusiast, a gardener, a historian, a fisherman,
a lover of literature, and above all a devoted family man. For many
years he was active at Belmont Methodist Church in Nashville, where
he taught a Sunday School class. Although I do not believe he was
ever a participant, he was an avid follower of major sports—in
particular the fortunes of Vanderbilt’s football and basketball teams.
He loved to fish and in many springs he would go to Kentucky Lake
and fish for crappie. He kept a boat on Old Hickory Lake and enjoyed
hours of fishing there with his family and friends. Before he moved to
the steep hillside in the Lealand section, he was a vegetable gardener,
and annually raised a beautiful vegetable garden, strawberries being
one of his main crops. He served as president of the Tennessee
Historical Society and was well-versed in Tennessee history, as well as
world history. For years he was a member of Nashville’s Shakespeare
Club—a group of men who met monthly to read and discuss one of the
bard's plays. He belonged to the Old Oak Club, another group that
meets monthly to hear a paper read by one of the club’s members. His
papers were always interesting, well-written, and well-presented.

Bill Harbison spent many hours with his family, consisting of
his wife, Mary Lib, his two children, Bill and Mary Alice, and his
grandchildren. They frequently enjoyed family outings together.

In short, Bill Harbison was, indeed, much more than an out-
standing lawyer and jurist. He was interesting, modest almost to a
fault, thoughtful, considerate, and entertaining. Many of his legal
accomplishments are in the law books, but perhaps some of the quali-
ties related here are those which many of us will remember longer.
He was a man for all seasons, a man who truly stopped and smelled
the roses. It is hard to believe he is gone; we will all miss him tremendously.