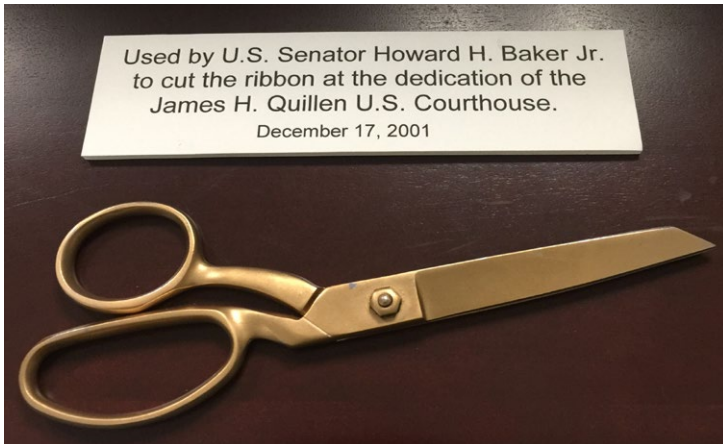




# Court Historical Society NEWSLETTER *Eastern District of Tennessee*



September 2019



*Used by Senator Baker*

## Scott County's Howard Baker

*By Don K. Ferguson*

"I just realized that the last two people to touch these scissors were **Howard Baker** and me."

These are the words of reverence and respect for **Senator Howard H. Baker Jr.**, spoken by retired law clerk **John Marshall Smith** when he donated to the Court Historical Society the scissors Senator Baker used to cut the ribbon at the Greenville federal courthouse dedication ceremony in December 2001. The Society placed the scissors on display in the courthouse.

This attitude toward the late senator is also held by many others, two of whom we will mention here, who, like Smith, are Scott Countians who knew Baker in his home community as he rose to fame as a U.S. Senator, presidential candidate, White House Chief of Staff, and U.S. Ambassador to Japan.

They are **Senior U.S. District Judge Thomas W. Phillips** and Huntsville lawyer **Don C. Stansberry Jr.**, both longtime members of the Court Historical Society.

We thought we would provide here a few memories these three men have of Baker, the late leader for whom the Knoxville federal courthouse is named.

### **John Marshall Smith, age 67**

"After the dedication ceremony [at the Greenville courthouse], the senator handed the scissors to me and I put them in my



*QUILLEN AND BAKER—In December 2001, Congressman Jimmy Quiillen, left, and then-Ambassador Howard Baker, next to him, joined in cutting the ribbon for the opening of the new federal courthouse in Greenville, named in honor of Quillen.*

desk drawer." And there they remained until Smith retired in 2017. He retrieved the scissors when clearing out his desk, and it struck him that he and the senator were the last ones to touch the scissors.



*Smith*

Smith, now of Greenville but originally from Huntsville, knew the Baker family and played with the senator's children as a child.

"My parents were friends with Senator Baker, or as he was known then, 'Howard Henry,' to differentiate from his father, who was Howard. I saw him every Sunday at First Presbyterian Church of Huntsville and played with his kids when we were in the age range of 5 to 10 years old." He was my Sunday school teacher.

"His father-in-law, **U.S. Senator Everett Dirksen** [of Illinois], came to visit his grandchildren quite often, and on those occasions, he would pick me up and tell me how much I had grown since his last visit. Senator Baker was probably the reason I decided to become a lawyer.

"I didn't work for the Baker firm as a lawyer, but worked as a clerk while in law school and on Saturdays in the summers."

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## Scott County's Howard Baker *continued from page 1*

### Judge Phillips, age 76, a former Baker law partner

“One day when we were young lawyers, **Ernie Petroff** and I were walking back to the law office from the Scott County Courthouse, which was across the street from the Baker law office, and unbeknownst to us, **Senator Baker** was watching, and when we arrived at the office, he said, ‘Gentlemen, I can’t believe that you actually walked across that grass! Do you not realize that we’ve spent a lot of time and effort to get that grass to grow.’ He had worked to help make Huntsville look better, and the grounds around the courthouse had been landscaped and new grass planted. “We never walked across that grass again.



**Judge Phillips**

“Senator Baker had great humility. He believed that all people were worthy of respect. When he was in Huntsville, you would frequently see him down at the courthouse or walking around the mall in front of the courthouse, and he would talk to everybody he met. And he did this throughout, regardless of whatever high position he held through the years.”

Judge Phillips told of Senator Baker’s love of candy. “He liked to go to the movies. Toward the end of his life, Ernie and I would take him to the movies down in Knoxville. He had a bad habit of buying a lot of candy at the theater. He would always buy four or five boxes and eat quite a bit of the candy. **Nancy (Kassebaum Baker)**, his wife) would always caution us not to allow him to eat too much candy. We would see her at church the next Sunday and she would ask how he did. Of course, we never told her about the candy.

“We all went to First Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, and Senator Baker used to teach a Sunday School class. In later years, I taught Sunday School, and he was in my class.”

Senator Baker always held a big Fourth of July party at his place. “It was for everybody in Scott County who wanted to come,” Judge Phillips said.

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
OF THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF TENNESSEE, INC.

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**Stansberry**

### Don C. Stansberry Jr., age 80, a former Baker law partner and next door neighbor

“I was never anywhere or around anyone that absolutely everybody liked like they did Howard Baker. He was just so highly regarded, it was stunning.

“Everybody would do whatever Howard wanted them to do. I had never been around that before. It was fascinating.

“Howard was a very good lawyer. He had so many talents and accomplishments that people kind of forget that.

“Back then, we tried most every case in one day. The courthouse (Scott County Courthouse) would empty out to come to the courtroom to watch him finish up a lawsuit. He could just stem-wind that place.”

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**Senator Baker** died in 2014 at the age of 88.

### SUCCESSFUL DEBATERS



Photo by Christenberry.  
The U-T Debating Club which, divided into two groups, made tours of the middle and eastern sections of the state last week, winning all of their meets, and bringing glory to the institution. From left to right, they are: Leonard Rogers, Nancy Poore, Fran Bass, Thomas McKinney, Henry Carmichael, Gene Liggett, James Allison, Dr. John B. Emperor, coach, and Frank Wilson.

**SOPHOMORE DEBATER—U.S. District Judge Frank W. Wilson’s** skills as a lawyer and judge are well known, but he was also a talented debater in college, as we have learned from this photograph that appeared in a 1936 issue of the University of Tennessee student newspaper, then called the “Orange and White.” Judge Wilson is shown on the right in the light-colored suit. He received his undergraduate degree from UT in 1939 and his law degree in 1941. He served in Chattanooga from 1961 until his death in 1982. Our thanks to U.S. Bankruptcy Court **Chief Deputy Clerk Betty Shelton** for this news clipping, which she found among some old boxes of papers that belonged to the late **Bankruptcy Judge Ralph Kelley**, Chattanooga, a close friend of Judge Wilson’s.