

*A Celebration of Life*

*for*

*William A. Marsh, Jr.*

Sunrise January 31, 1927 – Sunset November 19, 2018



**November 24, 2018**

**12:30 p.m.**

St. Joseph AME Church  
2521 Fayetteville Street  
Durham, North Carolina 27707

*Reverend Dr. Ronald L. Owens, Senior Pastor  
Officiating*

## *Obituary*

### William A. Marsh, Jr.

William A. Marsh, Jr. was a Durham native and life long citizen. His was the son of the late Mrs. Christine Alston and the late William A. Marsh. Born on Carrol Street in Durham's West End on January 31, 1927, he loved his community. This community produced luminaries including the Fitzgerald family, the Rev. Pauli Murray and Ben Ruffin among others; not least of whom is the Durham lawyer affectionately known as "Billy". Attorney Marsh matriculated through Lyon Park Elementary and the Hillside High School class of 1944. He attended Hampton Institute (now Hampton University) in Hampton, Virginia for just a short while before being drafted into the US Army in 1944 where he served in Germany during WW II.

He returned to Durham after the war and entered North Carolina College, now North Carolina Central University and was awarded his B.S. He then entered law school as one of the early plaintiffs to desegregate the law school at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1949. After the most inhospitable treatment in that environment, Attorney Marsh entered law school at NCC, receiving his LLM in 1953. He passed the bar exam which was administered orally and began his legal career which spanned a period of 60 years. He used his legal skills to advance Durham's movement for civil rights. Marsh was central to the school desegregation lawsuit proceedings when African-American families who had submitted 225 requests for reassignment to white schools in Durham and had only eight of these approved for the 1959-60 school year; turned to litigation. He represented students charged with trespassing during a sit-in at the segregated Royal Ice Cream parlor here in Durham in 1957, which event preceded the now famous Greensboro sit-ins at Woolworths. This event is marked by a NC state historical marker in Durham at the corner of Dowd and Roxboro street, then site of the ice cream parlor.

Attorney Marsh was a true pioneer and achieved several "firsts" during his career. He was the first black chairman of the Durham County Board of Elections and North Carolina's first black county elections chairman in 1972. He later served as the first black chairman of the state Board of Elections. He was the first black NC state bar councilor in 1986.





His work for the defense of civil rights has been recognized by the North Carolina Bar Association, and in 1999 Marsh was inducted into the National Bar Association Hall of Fame, which “honors those lawyers who have been licensed to practice for 40 years or more and who have made significant contributions to the cause of justice. Marsh served as the General Counsel for the African Methodist Episcopal Church for many years and was elected as well, as President of the Judicial Council. At the time of his death, he was the denomination's Special Counsel.

He served as General Counsel to Mechanics and Farmers Bank for over 40 years. Additionally, he was General Counsel to Mutual Community Savings Bank, SSB, UDI Community Development Corporation and focused his practice on the business associations, estates and property and personal injury. His specialties included banking, commercial, civil rights, constitutional and voting rights law. He was among the first African Americans in 1968 to join the North Carolina Bar Association which had been segregated. In addition to being a member of the American Bar Association for over 50 years, Billy was also named to the North Carolina Bar Association Hall of Fame. He is a founding member of the North Carolina Association of Black lawyers and the local Durham contingent, the George H. White Bar. In 1982, he was awarded “Lawyer of the Year” by the NC Association of Black Lawyers by its then President, Hon. G.K. Butterfield. He served in numerous leadership capacities, including first African American President of the 14<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Bar and Durham County Bar Association; Life member and past President of the NCCU Alumni Association and Basileus of the Beta Phi Chapter of Omega Psi Fraternity. He is a life member of the NAACP and was twice the recipient of the local chapter’s Freedom Fund banquet award in 1988 and again in 2009.

A Masonic Lodge #28, Shriners (ZAFAs Temple #176); 33<sup>rd</sup> degree Mason-United Supreme Council of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry, Prince Hall Affiliation for the Southern Jurisdiction of the USA; C-Hudson Chapter #63 Holy Royal Arch Mason, PHA; Durham Consistory #218. As a veteran of World War II, he is also a member of the Weaver-McLlean Post 175 American Legion.

Attorney Marsh is a long time mason of the Orient of North Carolina, AASRPHA, past President of the Commanders of the The Rite Orient of North Carolina (33<sup>rd</sup> degree Masons) Doric past Deputy of the United Supreme Council, Southern Jurisdiction of USA and honored as Sovereign Grand Inspector General (SGIG).





Billy was a member of St. Joseph AME Church for over 70 years and in the late 1950's served as superintendent of the Sunday School. He was a member of the Steward Board for over 40 years, and taught the Berean Bible class for over 33 years.

In addition to excellent representation of clients for compensation, Billy donated countless hours of *pro bono publico* services to needy individuals and community groups. His legal assistance to community groups, relative to economic development greatly enhanced the economic health of literally thousands of citizens, assisting them to make productive contributions to society. A sole practitioner for much of his career, Billy formed a partnership with William F. Banks to become Marsh & Banks, Attorneys.

After the passing of his partner in 1987, Billy mentored many lawyers including Robert and John Perry who later formed Perry, Perry & Perry, Floyd Brown, and in 1993 a partnership with his son, William A. (Drew) Marsh III which lasted for 14 years until Drew was appointed District Court Judge for North Carolina in 2007 by Governor Michael Easley. From that time until his retirement in 2013, Billy practiced as William A. Marsh Jr., PLLC. Billy was always dapperly dressed, and a stickler for detail and precision in all endeavors. He was known for his wit and humor. He enlivened many dull discussions with levity and brought groups to consensus on volatile issues locally and at the NC State Board of Elections. Throughout his practice, he made himself available to other lawyers and set high standards for his peers.

He is survived by his wife of 63 years, Bernice S. Marsh, his son, William A. (Drew) Marsh III (Sonja), his daughter, Jewel M. Cummings of Atlanta, GA, his grandchildren, William A. Marsh IV, Kylie Alexandra Marsh, Nicholas Emerson Marsh, and Jade Sawyer Cummings. He is also survived by his sister, Pauline Marsh Caffey of Charleston, SC, and nieces, Christine (Chris) Williams of West Palm Beach, Florida, Pauline (Paula) Caffey of Bethesda, Maryland and Angela Harvey Dickens (Elmer) of Suffolk, Virginia.





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