



Charles L. McKeehan

Born: March 29, 1876, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Died: March 23, 1925

Federal Judicial Service:

Judge, U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania

Nominated by Warren G. Harding on January 30, 1923, to a new seat authorized by 42 Stat. 837.

Confirmed by the Senate on February 9, 1923, and received commission on February 9, 1923.

Service terminated on March 23, 1925, due to death.

Education:

University of Pennsylvania, A.B., 1897

University of Pennsylvania Law School (now Carey Law School), LL.B., 1900

Professional Career:

Private Practice, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: 1900-1923

U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel: 1917-1919

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Judicial Biography

*The sudden death of long-time Senator Boies Penrose on December 31, 1921 had a number of important political consequences, including an effect on future judicial appointments. Governor William Sproul, a Republican, chose patrician George Wharton Pepper, a

* The following material is excerpted from JUDGE HARVEY BARTLE, III, MORTALS WITH TREMENDOUS RESPONSIBILITIES, A HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA, 3-12 (Saint Joseph's University Press, 2011). Reproduced with the permission of the author, Judge Harvey Bartle, III, and the publisher, Saint Joseph's University Press.

distinguished Philadelphia lawyer, to fill the vacancy in the United States Senate, and State Senator Edwin H. Vare and his younger brother Congressman William S. Vare took over from Penrose as the bosses of the Philadelphia Republican organization.

Pepper was elected in the fall of 1922 to complete the little more than four years remaining in Penrose's term. The Vares eyed him with suspicion. Pepper refused to surrender his independence on appointments but was willing to consult with the organization on certain patronage matters. Nonetheless, he made it clear that federal judgeships were off limits. Edwin Vare had warned Pepper at a meeting, ". . . there's something I think you should know. It is that with our power over the organization we can send anybody we want to the United States Senate - anybody." It was not an idle boast.

Pepper defied the Vares in recommending to President Warren Harding the nomination of his friend Charles Louis McKeehan, who had no political organization support, for the temporary judgeship that had been created for the Eastern District in September 1922. The President thereafter sent McKeehan's name to the Senate. He was confirmed in February 1923. McKeehan was the thirteenth judge to serve on the court.

Born in 1876 in Philadelphia, McKeehan was the son of a lawyer. He obtained his undergraduate degree from the University of Pennsylvania where he was President of his class and later his law degree from the same institution. As a law student, he spent time in the office of George Wharton Pepper, who in effect acted as his preceptor. He volunteered for military service at the outbreak of World War I, even though he was over forty years old. Although refused permission to serve in combat because of a recent appendectomy, he held non-combatant positions in the Army and achieved the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. During his legal career, he and Owen J. Roberts, later a Justice of the United States Supreme Court, were law partners. McKeehan also taught negotiable instruments and contracts at Penn Law School. From the time of its inception in 1902 until his appointment to the bench, he was the Secretary of the Board of Law Examiners, which had responsibility for examination and admission of lawyers to the Pennsylvania Bar. When not engaged in professional pursuits, he often sailed a small boat at Barnegat Light, New Jersey, where he had a summer home. Like Pepper, he was an active Episcopal churchman.

McKeehan was also a member of the Executive Committee of the Association Against the Prohibition Amendment. Needless to say, this was a problem for someone who was going to be required to enforce the prohibition era Volstead Act as a federal judge. Before his confirmation, Pepper and the Anti-Saloon League worked out an agreement that McKeehan would issue a statement that he would uphold the Prohibition Amendment and related laws. He did so and thereafter was approved by the Senate. He died in March 1925, at the age of forty-eight after only two years on the bench. His funeral was attended by hundreds of leading citizens, including Senator Pepper, ex-Governor Edwin Stuart, and numerous judges and members of the bar. With his death, his temporary seat was not to be filled, and the Court, which consisted of three judgeships at this point in its history, continued to function with his two older colleagues, J. Whitaker Thompson and Oliver B. Dickinson.