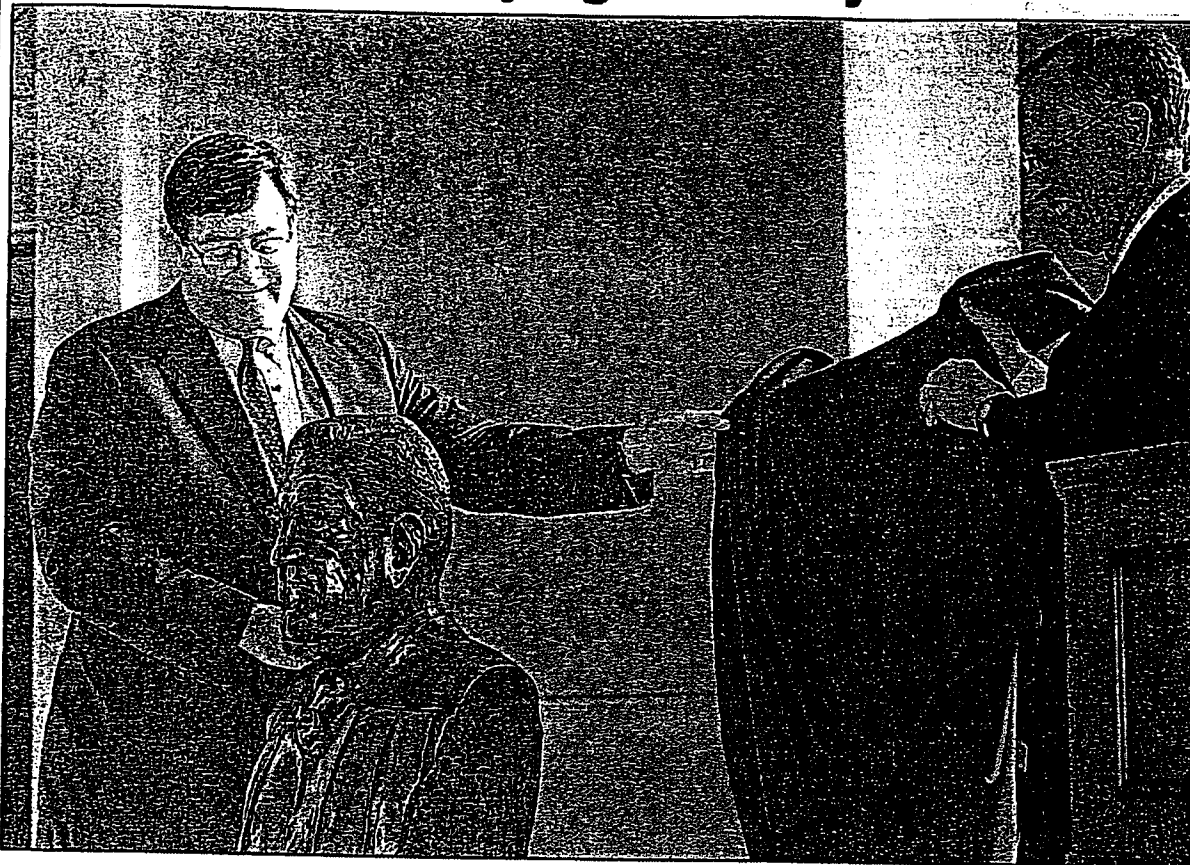


Former justices judged worthy of honor



Photos by Jamie Martin AP

Howell Thomas Heflin Jr., left, looks at a bust of his father, the late U.S. Sen. and state Supreme Court Chief Justice Howell Heflin, at a dedication ceremony Monday renaming the Alabama Judicial Building as the Heflin-Torbert Judicial Building. Alabama Chief Justice Drayton Nabers assists Heflin.

Building renamed for Heflin, Torbert

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Two former Alabama Supreme Court justices, lauded for their efforts to unify the state court system, were honored Monday in a building that now bears their names.

In the midst of family, friends and dignitaries, the busts of the late 24th Chief Justice Howell Thomas Heflin and 25th Chief Justice Clement Clay "Bo" Torbert Jr. were unveiled in the rotunda of the newly named Heflin-Torbert Judicial Building, formerly the Alabama Judicial Building.

It was an honor family and friends said was well-deserved for two men known as much for their outgoing personalities as their dedication to fairness in law.

"Being chief justice was challenging and a great deal of fun because of the quality of the justices that I



Former Alabama Chief Justice C.C. "Bo" Torbert Jr., with the Heflin bust in the foreground, speaks to a crowd gathered at Monday's ceremony.

served with," Torbert said after the ceremony. "The chief is the first among equals. When you decide a case, every vote counts the same."

With degrees from Auburn University and the University of Alabama Law School, Torbert was elected to the Alabama House of Representatives in 1958 and

later to the Alabama Senate. He served as the state's chief judge from 1977 to 1989.

An Opelika native, the 76-year-old was a fair jurist on the bench and in his home, his son, Clement Clay Torbert III, said.

"In dealing with him on things, he had that judge's mentality of weighing the sides and deliberating. It kind of drove me crazy. ..." said Torbert III, a Montgomery attorney. "His being a lawyer and later a judge are a big reason I'm a lawyer."

But his father's most lasting impression, he said, was the way he treated others.

"I've seen the way he's treated people — white or black, rich or poor — and that's what I remember the most. Being around him as a kid, I saw that he knew how to treat people," he said.

Building: Justices lauded

From Page 38

Heflin, Torbert's predecessor from 1971 to 1977, is best known in Supreme Court circles for successfully promoting Alabama's Unified Judicial System, a national model that helped expedite the judicial process and simplify judicial procedures, according to Hugh Maddox, a Supreme Court justice from 1969 to 2001.

"Without him and without his enthusiasm I don't think any of this judicial reform would have occurred," Maddox said. "When Chief Justice Heflin came on the court, he just worked and

worked and worked. He had the ability to get other people to work and get excited about some of the things he was pushing for."

But while his co-workers noticed his work ethic, his family saw the more relaxed side of Heflin, the jovial man with a deep Southern drawl who loved to bless the food during holidays.

"He was fantastic to be around," said his grandson, Wil Heflin, 17. "When we had family outings, everybody was drawn to him."

A former U.S. senator and Tusculumbia resident, Heflin died in March. He was 83.