

About the Speakers



Justice Marian P. Opala, District No. 3

The Supreme Court of the State of Oklahoma



Justice Marian P. Opala, who was born in 1921 in Lodz, Poland, became a United States citizen in 1953. He graduated from the Oklahoma City University School of Law the same year. In 1957, he earned a BSB degree in economics from Oklahoma City University and in 1968 his master-of-law degree from New York University School of Law. Opala began his legal career as assistant county attorney in Oklahoma County and held this position until 1956 when he entered private practice. He first served the Supreme Court of Oklahoma as a referee from 1960 to 1965. Later he was staff lawyer for Justice Rooney McInerney. For nine years (from 1969 to 1977) Opala directed the state's court system as its first administrative director. He served as judge on the State Industrial Court when it was renamed (in 1977-1978) the Workers' Compensation Court. On November 21, 1978, the then-Governor, now OU President David Boren appointed him to the Supreme Court of Oklahoma. Voters retained him in 1980 for the unexpired term of his predecessor. Since 1982, he has been retained for successive six-year terms. He served as the court's Chief Justice from January 1, 1991 to December 31, 1992. The author of numerous legal papers, Opala is an adjunct professor in three law schools --- at the University of Oklahoma, Oklahoma City University and the University of Tulsa --- and a frequent lecturer at various national judicial and legal education programs. Since 1982 he has been an Oklahoma commissioner in the National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws. A member of the Order of the Coif and the American Law Institute, he was appointed in December 1993 as a public member of the Administrative Conference of the United States. Office: Room 238, State Capitol Building, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73105. Telephone: (405) 521-3839.

From Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marian_P._Opala

The Honorable Justice Marian P. Opala

(born [January 20, 1921](#)) is a Justice of the [Oklahoma Supreme Court](#).

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Early life and World War II service

He was born in [Łódź, Poland](#), the son of a prominent banker. After the [German invasion of Poland](#) in 1939, Opala, then a university student, enlisted in the Polish Army, and following Poland's defeat by Nazi Germany, joined the [Polish Underground](#). In 1944 he escaped Poland via Turkey on the orders of his superiors in order to meet with Polish troops enlisted in the British Army in Palestine and Ethiopia to assure them that the struggle against the [Nazi occupation](#) was being waged vigorously at home with strong [Allied](#) support. After completing his mission, he served briefly with Polish troops in Italy and then parachuted back into Poland to resume his duties with the Underground.

Capture and subsequent liberation

In 1944 Opala was captured by German forces in the [Warsaw Uprising](#) and held in [Flossenbürg concentration camp](#) in Bavaria. After his liberation by the U.S. Army in 1945, he was befriended by Gene Warr, a captain in the [45th Infantry Division](#) from [Oklahoma City](#). Opala confided in Warr that he could not return to Poland after the [Communist takeover](#) and would probably settle somewhere in the British Commonwealth.

U.S. emigration and education

Captain Warr helped him get a job as a translator for U.S. forces in [Occupied Germany](#), and suggested he emigrate to the United States, and offered to help him. Opala settled in Oklahoma City in 1947. Six years later, he became a U.S. citizen. He graduated from [Oklahoma City University School of Law](#) and later obtained a master's degree from [New York University Law School](#).

Early legal career

Opala served as Administrative Director of the Oklahoma State court system from 1968 to 1977. He became a judge on what is now Oklahoma's Worker's Compensation Court in 1977 before being appointed to the state Supreme Court the following year.

Oklahoma Supreme Court service

He was appointed to the Court's District 3 seat by Governor [David L. Boren](#) in 1978, and retained by the voters in 1980, 1982, 1988, 1994, 2000 and 2006. He served as the Court's Chief Justice from 1991 to 1992.

In 2000, Opala was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame. Throughout his career he has been known as a strong advocate of [First Amendment](#) rights, a commitment he attributes to his experiences as a youth in Nazi-occupied Poland. A group called Freedom of Information Oklahoma presents the "Marian Opala First Amendment Award" every year to an Oklahoman who has "promoted education about or protection of the individual rights guaranteed under the First Amendment."

In January, 2005, Opala, then 83 years old and next in line once again to become Chief Justice, filed a federal lawsuit against his colleagues, alleging that they changed Oklahoma Supreme Court rules for succession to chief justice thereby arbitrarily allowing Chief Justice [Joseph M. Watt](#) to serve unprecedented consecutive terms. In July, 2006, a federal appeals court dismissed Opala's lawsuit "[with prejudice](#)". [\[1\]](#)

In addition to his judicial career, Opala is an adjunct professor of law at the [University of Oklahoma](#) and the [University of Tulsa](#), specializing in British and American legal history and constitutional law.

References

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