



*Attorneys at Law*

MERTON G. HENRY  
(1926 – 2018)



Mert Henry was born in 1926 in Hampden, Maine, grew up on the family farm, went to school in a two-room schoolhouse and ultimately graduated from South Portland High School. He put off his admission to Bowdoin for two years while he served a two year stint in the Army in the Philippines. Mert was the youngest first sergeant serving in the Western Pacific theater.

In 1946, Mert went to Bowdoin as the first member of his family to attend college. He displayed early on his talent for multitasking successfully. He was president of the Debate Council, the Political Forum, the Student Council, and the Independents until his junior year when he joined Alpha Delta Phi fraternity. He won the Achorn Debate Prize and was awarded the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Cup as that member of the three lowest classes “whose vision, humanity and courage have most contributed to making Bowdoin a better college.” Mert graduated *magna cum laude* and was a member of Phi Beta Kappa.

Mert graduated from George Washington School of Law in 1955, where he met and fell in love with fellow classmate, Harriet R. Putnam. Harriet went on in 1973 to become the first woman to be appointed as a judge in the State of Maine.

Mert and Harriet started a family and returned to Maine in 1959. Mert began practicing with the firm of Sheriff & Baird in 1959 and became a founding partner of Jensen Baird Gardner & Henry in 1961. He led the firm in more than name only. He oversaw all aspects of the practice, demanded the highest performance from all of us and led by example. He was an early mentor to women entering the practice and was known to encourage reluctant clients to accept legal advice from young women lawyers. His efforts were subtle and persistent, and the energy it entailed was not lost on those of us who worked with him.

Mert was admitted to the U.S. Supreme Court at the very outset of his career. He was the past president of the Cumberland and the New England Bar Associations. He was elected to the American College of Probate Counsel and was a fellow of the American College of Trust and Estate Counsel, which recognizes only those who reach the peak of their professions. He was the founder and chairman of the Maine Council of School Board Attorneys. His concern for those who could not get equal access to justice drove him throughout his life. He participated in the establishment of the Maine Bar Foundation, the Maine Volunteer Lawyers Project and the Interest on Lawyers Trust Accounts (IOLTA) programs. He and Harriet co-chaired the Campaign for Justice in 2004 and in 2006, he received the Muskie Access to Justice Award to recognize his “commitment to the public good, advanced through hard thinking, deep feeling, a voice of eloquent civility, and passion for justice.”

Mert’s interest in politics and commitment to use the political process for the common good emerged early, beginning with volunteering for Margaret Chase Smith’s 1948 U.S. Senate campaign, and evolving into a strong a friendship and mutual admiration that continued even after Senator Smith’s death, when Mert became President of the Margaret Chase Smith Foundation and served in that capacity for many years until recently stepping back to become Vice President of the foundation, a position he held until his passing. He worked on congressional, senate, gubernatorial and presidential campaigns and as executive secretary and legislative counsel to U.S. Senator Frederick Payne (R-ME). He served as a delegate to several Republican National Conventions, chair of the Maine State Republican Convention, and chair of the Executive Committee of the Maine Republican State Committee. He is being recognized posthumously by the Maine Republican Party with the title of Parliamentarian Emeritus for his long and devoted service.

His commitment to the common good extended broadly into the community in roles too numerous to mention. He chaired the Portland School Committee, was president of Child and Family Services, was trustee and president of Maine Medical Center, a trustee of North Yarmouth Academy, Colby-Bates-Bowdoin Public Television, the Tate Museum, the Scarborough Public Library Corporation, the Portland Museum of Art, Hospice of Southern Maine, the Cumberland County Recreational Center, and the Margaret Chase Smith Library. He moderated the Standish Town Meeting for over a decade. He was a member of the Dirigo Health Commission, the Portland Charter Review Committee and the Maine Special Commission on Governmental Restructuring and an active member of the Trinity Episcopal Church and Episcopal Diocese Maine since 1959. Mert and his friends and colleagues traveled the country, did their research, and created Piper Shores, which was the first continuing care retirement community in the State of Maine.

Mert was devoted to Bowdoin College, serving as a member of the Alumni Council from 1959 to 1961, Board of Overseers, Board of Trustees, and he was elected Trustee Emeritus in 1987. He worked on many committees during the tenure of many presidents at Bowdoin, including the controversial committee that recommended disbanding the existing fraternity system at the college. He served on the New Century Campaign Steering Committee and he and Harriet and their family established the Henry Family Library Fund in 1987. Mert was presented several different awards for his service as an alumnus of the college. Mert received an honorary degree

from Bowdoin, along with Harriet, in 1984. He also received honorary degrees from Northwood University in Michigan in 1988 and St. Joseph's college in Maine in 1996.

Those of us who worked with Mert over the years could never understand how he managed to accomplish so much in the course of a day. He was the ultimate consensus-builder, an excellent listener, and never raised his voice. Even in his later years, Mert came into the office often and attended all firm functions. All of us will sorely miss his optimism and devoted support.