

Remarks of U.S. Senior Circuit Judge Frank M. Coffin
on the Occasion of the Presentation of a Portrait of
Former Chief Justice Vincent McKusick of the
Maine Supreme Judicial Court
Portland, Maine
June 17, 1993

As the old saying does not go, many are hanged but few are remembered. I think it is safe to say that Vincent McKusick will be among the few.

I speak first as one whose friendship with Vincent stems from our deep-rooted college ties. Although we did not quite overlap at Bates, we soon became friends. We had in common the tutelage in reasoning and persuasion of our beloved, if acerbic, debate coach, Brooks Quimby. We each made the fateful decision to return to Maine to practice law.

I remember that I had been interviewed by a partner in a large Boston firm when I finally decided to return to my home town, Lewiston. When I told the partner of my decision, he shook his head sadly and said, "I thought you would have made a better lawyer than that." Well, I came back and loved almost every moment of my life and work. When Vincent, toward the end of his time with Mr. Justice Frankfurter, wrote and asked what I thought of his prospects were he to return to Maine, I am afraid I didn't hesitate. I wrote in effect, "Come on in. The water's fine." I think I also said that his prospects were far from hopeless.

The man we honor today has accomplished so much in so many areas that it takes all of us this afternoon to cover the ground. I have the honor to speak for the federal judiciary. We consider him a blood brother. He probably knows more federal judges than most federal judges do. He has worked side by side with them on important committees, notably the United States Judicial Conference Committee on Federal-State Jurisdiction. As Maine's Chief Justice he did much to bring life into the Maine State-Federal Judicial Council. And as Chair of the Conference of State Chief Justices he was the moving spirit behind the Orlando, Florida, National Conference on State-Federal Judicial Relations in April, 1992, where 300 state and federal judges joined in the largest and most significant such joint enterprise in our history.

Vincent also has had a great deal to do with the Supreme Court of our country without being a member. Of course, he served as a law clerk. More recently the Court chose him to help it as Special Master in a complex boundary dispute between Maine and New Hampshire. And most recently, he was appointed as one of five members of the panel charged with management of the funds of the estate of Justice Holmes, devoted to the definitive history of the Supreme Court.

And, of course, he came at one point very close to joining that Court as a member. Although fortune did not see fit to take him from Maine, I have always called him my Chief Justice. I view Vincent McKusick as embodying in his values and outlook Alexander Hamilton's aspiration as expressed in Number Eighty-One of the Federalist:

The National and State system are to be regarded as ONE WHOLE.

Hamilton capitalized every letter in the words, ONE WHOLE. This concept has no room for a first and a second class system of courts. Chief Justice McKusick by his leadership on his own court and his work on federal court matters has perfectly fulfilled the ideal.