



Justice Robert L. Sonfield
National Society Sons of the American Revolution
President General 1963-1964

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Compiled by John Greer and John Anderson, July 2020

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES OF NEW GENERAL OFFICERS



A glance at the career of Compatriot Robert L. Sonfield, who was elected chancellor general of the National Society at the seventy second Annual Congress held in Philadelphia in May, reveals a busy life of legal, religious and fraternal activities.

Born in Nacogdoches, Texas, the son of Leon Sonfield, then a Methodist minister, and Martha Chapman Sonfield, the family moved to Galveston, Texas. Shortly thereafter, his father resigned the active ministry, became a lawyer, subsequently serving as Justice of the Supreme Court of Texas.

Educated at the Allen Military Academy, the Law School of the University of Texas, with one year of post-graduate work at Columbia University Law School, New York City, he went to Beaumont, Texas, where the family had moved, to engage in the practice of law in the latter part of June 1916. World War I intervened and he soon found himself serving overseas as a combat infantry officer with the 36th Division. Following

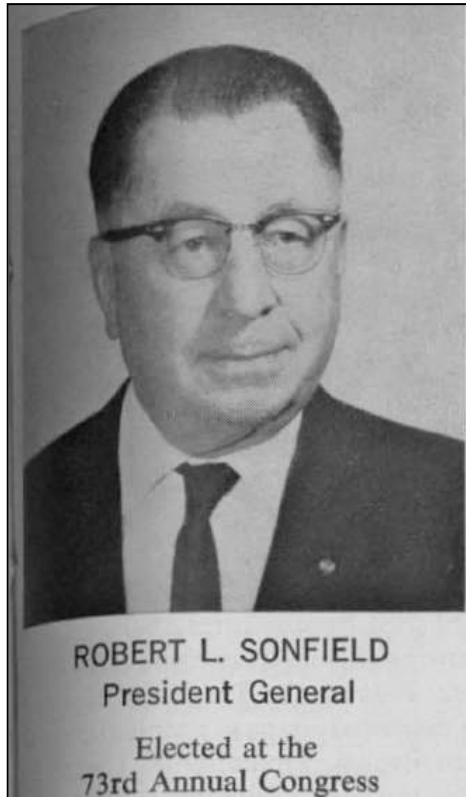
the armistice, he was detailed to Berlin, Germany, where he served as American representative on various Commissions.

He resumed his practice of law at Houston, Texas, and continued practice until the outbreak of World II. He was recalled to active duty, served for a time with the parachute troops, and was subsequently assigned as Staff Judge Advocate at the Infantry School, Fort Benning, Georgia.

Compatriot Sonfield has been a member of the Texas Society since March 11, 1918, and has served as president of local chapter, secretary-treasurer of State Society; vice president of the State Society, president of the State Society and national trustee for Texas. He is past district commander of the American Legion and is a member of other clubs, civic and fraternal organizations.

He is married to Margie Whitson Sonfield and lives with his wife in Houston. He has two sons, Robert L. Sonfield Jr. who is married and has one child and who is now his law partner, and Richard H. Sonfield. His wife has one son, Thomas S. Erwin, who is married and has four children.

The President General's Message



This is my initial report as your newly elected President General. You have conferred upon me a very great honor. That honor imposes upon me a very great responsibility.

It means, among other things, that I must "live and breathe" S.A.R; that I must be on the alert and be ever mindful of my responsibilities to the Society; and, that I must do everything within my power to further the aims, ideals and objects of the Society, as set forth in our National Constitution and Bylaws, and in the resolutions adopted at the various Congresses. I believe whole-heartedly and without reservation in those aims, ideals and objects.

The objects of the Society, as expressed in our Constitution, declared to be patriotic, historical, and educational, and include those intended or designed to perpetuate the of those patriots who, by their services or sacrifices war of the American Revolution, achieved the independence of the American people; to unite and promote fellowship among their descendants; to inspire them and the community at large with a more profound reverence for the principles of the government founded by our forefathers ; to maintain and extend the institutions of American freedom, and

to carry out the purposes expressed in the preamble of the Constitution of our Country and the injunction of Washington in his farewell address to the American People."

As a lawyer my great and consuming concern is for the preservation of the rights of the states and of our Constitution as was intended and as written by our forefathers, and to maintain and extend the institutions of American freedom as stated in our National Constitution.

The Constitution of the United States establishes a Legislative branch to enact the laws, an Executive branch to enforce the laws, and a Judicial branch to interpret the laws. The men who framed the Constitution knew full well that one of the essentials of freedom was the preservation of the rights of the states, and it was therefore expressly provided that all powers not expressly delegated to the Federal Government are reserved to the states.

It was intended that the courts should interpret the law; and, it was never intended that the courts should determine what the law ought to be, or that the Constitution is outmoded, or to amend the Constitution by judicial edict. It is this separation of the branches of government, a continuation of the rights of the states, and the maintenance and extension of the institutions of American freedom that assures and guarantees our freedom and independence, and it is absolutely essential that the separation of the branches of government remain inviolate.

As your President General I intend to spread the gospel of the rights of the states, for the preservation of the Constitution of the United States as was intended by our forefathers, to maintain and extend the institutions of American freedom, and the preservation of our Constitutional Republican form of government.

An increase in our membership is an imperative necessity. However, it is incumbent upon the Society to present a program that will be of interest and will induce a desire for membership in the Society. We must have a progressive, aggressive, and definite program. We must stand up and be counted. We must let it be known that we are opposed to socialism, communism, and every other kind and character of "ism," save and except Americanism. If we take that course and if we present our views with dignity and restraint we shall have no membership problem, because all real Americans think as we think and will be anxious to join with us in our fight for the preservation of our Constitutional Republican form of government, and to maintain and extend the institutions of American freedom.

In this fight I will need the help and cooperation of every member of the Society. My sincere hope is that we will stand together.

The President General's Message



We are living through turbulent times. Since 1918 there have been two world wars and the fiasco of Korea, which has been inappropriately termed a police action. Even now there is no real peace, just a breather, with the specter of a third world war hanging by a hair over our heads.

Chaos, heartbreak and disorganization of government exist throughout the world. The forces of socialism, communism and disorganization are on the march, with ruthlessness and godliness as their mottoes. There exists in our Country today a very serious threat of socialism and communism. It is an insidious, creeping thing which seeks to undermine our present form of government, our freedom, our way of life and our very existence. It appears that we are on the verge of mob rule.

After the First World War the legionnaires staged a march to Washington to ask for something to eat and for an opportunity to earn a living. They were driven from the City by machine guns, bayonets and armed force.

On August 28th, 1963, another mob descended on Washington. For them the red carpet was spread. The President of the United States interviewed the leaders. The Attorney General of the United States lauded the movement.

In other words, there exists a situation that would be ludicrous except for its seriousness. The present administration in Washington is encouraging mob rule and demonstrations and the President in a public statement asserts that the demonstration in Washington was a success and that should continue.

There is confusion in the minds of the people. There is a feeling of insecurity and uneasiness and unsafeness. There a feeling of complete frustration.

In the year A.D. 29 Christ walked the desolate roads of Palestine. Everywhere there was weeping, suffering, heartbreak and devastation caused by the marching hordes of Romans. It is pathetic and pitiable that in the centuries since that time our civilization has advanced so little. Today there is the same frustration, suffering, bloodshed and confusion.

We have the United Nations, a spawning ground of communism. The Charter was written by a communist for the benefit of communism and it has even been held that the Nations Charter supersedes the Constitution of the United States. Then, there is the World Court with only one

representative from this Country, composed in the main of socialists and communists, who would desire nothing better than an opportunity to have jurisdiction over the internal domestic affairs of this Nation, and would have such jurisdiction except for the "Connally Amendment," which the present administration desires to "do away with." Then, the last insult to our intelligence and threat to our security is the so-called "Test Ban Treaty" which lays our nation wide open to another "Pearl Harbor."

There is only one comforting thought in the midst of all this internal and external "mess." We have our churches, our religious and patriotic organizations. We have our steadfast faith in God. We have the Mothers of America. So long as we have this faith, these ideals, and the Mothers of America, we may have hope for and confidence in the future of America.

Many of us have grown careless. We take too much for granted. We do not realize how fortunate we are and what advantages, privilege and opportunities we have. There is need here today for a rededication to the principle and ideals of the Constitution. Whether or not our nation will survive depends upon you and me and upon Americans everywhere. We must be vigilant. We must be active. We must be alert. We must not take things for granted. We must think for ourselves and not permit others to think for us. We must take an active part in religious and civic affairs. We must be Americans. We must let our representatives in the Congress know what we want in no uncertain terms. We must not fail to exercise at each and every opportunity our greatest privilege-the right to vote.

Most important of all, and I cannot overemphasize it, we must not lose our faith in God.

There have been many remarkable mistrials or illogical decisions in the judicial history of mankind, and there have been many miscarriages of justice, and many occasions in which the judicial systems have snapped under the strain of prejudice or other pressure. The trial of Christ was, of course, the most infamous. Then, there was the trial of Socrates, that great Athenian philosopher, in 399 B.C., who was indicted for "impiety," and the trial of Alfred Dreyfus, an officer in the French army who was charged with espionage and without any evidence of probative value was sentenced to life on Devil's Island.

One of the most shocking decisions, however, is that of the Supreme Court of the United States in the case of School District of Abington Township, Pennsylvania, vs Edward Lewis Schempt, 10 Law Edition 2d 844, wherein prayer and Bible reading in the schools were decreed to be unconstitutional. In this connection, it required a master mind to conceive such a farcical decision, in the face of the 1st Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, which reads that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assembly, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances." The Supreme Court appear to have a phobia as concern the 14th Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, and attempts in this remarkable decision to construe the 1st Amendment in conjunction with the 14th Amendment in concocting this modern atrocity.

We are now standing on the brink of a precipice, and must, and I repeat, must, actively assert OUR rights. Our forefathers were Christians. Has it come to pass that we must bow to the will of a mere handful of atheists and permit ourselves to become not only a pagan and unchristian Nation, but a communist welfare state?

The President General's Message



We are shocked and stunned at the tragic death of the President of the United States. It is astounding and beyond belief that such a malicious and wanton act can be committed in a free nation such as ours. However, it serves to illustrate, and as a tragic example of, the grave danger with which we are faced by the presence of Castro and communism in Cuba, only a very short distance from our shores, the urgent necessity of reasserting the Monroe Doctrine, that we more carefully guard the security of our nation and its leaders by a continuing protection of the entire Western hemisphere from the encroachment of any foreign power, and particularly communism, and the very urgent necessity of immediately taking action, and any character of action that may be required, to completely rid Cuba of Castro and communism.

The remarks of Chief Justice Earl Warren with respect to assassination of President Kennedy and the assassin are to be deplored. He immediately and without just cause blamed "the Far Right" for the assassination, when as a matter of fact the assassin was a Castro sympathizer, a communist, and a member of "the Far Left." The so-called "liberals" are adept at accusing the so-called "conservatives" with engendering ill will among the people of this Nation. They completely overlook the fact, however, that it is their acts and conduct that are responsible not only for the ill will, but

also for the confusion and sense of frustration in the minds of the people. A good illustration is the so-called "Civil Rights Act of 1963." The proponents of the Act are contending not indiscriminate enforcement of existing civil rights, but or new civil rights to be created by new laws which would make it illegal for such persons to discriminate against certain other persons. As a matter of fact, the Civil Rights Act IS ten percent civil rights and ninety percent extension of Federal executive power at the expense of the individuals, the states and municipalities-in fact at the expense of everyone, and the creation of a dictatorship.

We, the people of the United States, the greatest nation that has ever existed on the face of the earth, desire to live as we want to live, not as the federal government tells us we must live.

We have not as yet realized the full import of the astounding opinion of the Supreme Court of the United States that prayer and Bible reading in the public schools are unconstitutional. That decision is only the beginning, and we may say the beginning of the end. Next will come the opinion that the phrase "under God" in our Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag is unconstitutional, what will then follow is problematical and of deep concern.

As an example, it is the opinion of Attorney General C. Donald Robertson of West Virginia, that the required recital of prayer in the public schools as a part of the devotional service and the required reading of the Bible as a part of the devotional service are prohibited; that special Christmas and Easter programs are in an "undecided area;" that a mandatory requirement for all students to salute the flag and recite the Pledge of Allegiance is also prohibited; and, that a moment of silent prayer is prohibited but a moment of silent "meditation" is permitted.

It is encouraging to know, however, that in the midst of mourning the assassination of President Kennedy, in the Halls of the Congress, and in every kind and character of public place, and in the homes, the people of this Nation have turned to the God of our forefathers for guidance and comfort and for strength to sustain us in this great hour of need.

The words of Benjamin Franklin, spoken before the Constitutional Convention at Philadelphia in 1787, come to mind:

"I have lived for a long time, and the longer I live the more convincing proof I see of this truth, that God governs in the affairs of men, and if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it possible that an empire can rise without His aid?

"Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it. I firmly believe this, and I also believe that without His concurring aid we shall proceed in this political building no better than the builders of Babel."

In this hour of tragedy we are in need of a strong guiding hand. We are in need of one who will not tolerate any character of appeasement to the forces of communism and socialism, and who will restore to this Nation its constitutional republican form of government as it was intended to be by our forefathers. It is to be hoped that President Lyndon B. Johnson is that character of leader, and it is further to be hoped that each of us, irrespective of party affiliations or political belief, will pray that he have the support of the Almighty and be given strength to shoulder the tremendous burden imposed upon him in guiding the affairs of this great Nation.

The President General's Message



The National Society of the Sons of the American Revolution was created by Act of the 59th Congress of the United States. Section 2 of the Act sets forth the purposes and objects of the Society as follows:

"That the purposes and objects of said corporation are declared to be patriotic, historical, and educational, and shall include those intended or designed to perpetuate the memory of the men who, by their services or sacrifices during the War of the American Revolution, achieved the independence of the American people; to unite and promote fellowship among their descendants; *to inspire them and the community at Large with a more profound reverence for the principles of the government founded by our forefathers*; to encourage historical research in relation to the American Revolution; to acquire and preserve the records of the individual services of the patriots of the war, as well as documents, relics, and landmarks; to mark the scenes of the Revolution by appropriate memorials; to celebrate the anniversaries of the prominent events of the war and of the Revolutionary period; *to foster true patriotism; to maintain and*

extend the institutions of American freedom, and to carry out the purposes expressed in the Preamble to the Constitution of our Country and the injunctions of Washington in his farewell address to the American people."

The Preamble to the Constitution of the United States reads as follows:

"We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, *and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity*, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."

The farewell address of President George Washington, delivered on September 19, 1796, contains this statement:

"Toward the preservation of your government and the permanency of your present happy state, it is requisite that you resist with care the spirit of innovation upon its principles, however specious the pretext . . . if in the opinion of the people, the distribution or modification of the constitutional powers be in any particular wrong, let it be corrected by amendment in the way in which the Constitution designates . . . But let there be no change by usurpation."

What then is the role of our Society in these trying times? I have received a few critical letters from Compatriots with respect to messages that I, as your President General, have published in the magazine. I have been told that our effort should be devoted exclusively to promote fellowship; to encourage historical research; to acquire and preserve the records of the individual services of the patriots in the

Revolution; and, to mark the scenes of the Revolution by appropriate memorials. In other words, there are those who would have us be nothing more than a historical Society and ancestor worshipers. With any such premise I do not agree. I do agree that we should do those enumerated things. But, there is a further and perhaps greater obligation imposed upon you and upon me, upon every member of our Society, and upon every real American everywhere, namely: *"To inspire them and the community at large with a more profound reverence for the principles of government founded by our forefathers; to foster true patriotism; to maintain and extend the institutions of American freedom, and to carry out the purposes expressed in the Preamble to the Constitution of our Country and the injunctions of Washington in his farewell address to the American people."*

As careful as were our forefathers to outline in plain and unambiguous language the powers and authority of the Federal Government, the provision of the Ninth Amendment that "The enumeration in the Constitution, of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny and disparage others retained by the people," and the provision of the Tenth Amendment that "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people," there has been a constant and continuing encroachment by the Federal Government on the rights of the States and of the people. The Constitution is being amended by court edict. The Supreme Court of the United States has become a legislative body rather than an interpretative body as was intended by our forefathers; we are faced with tyranny and complete loss of States' Rights by the encroachment of federal power and by court edict; and, the Constitution is being amended by usurpation. As a matter of fact, many of the grievances of the colonies set forth in the Declaration of Independence face us today.

How may we accomplish those very important purposes and objects? We must stand up and be heard. We must be vigilant. We must let our Congressmen and our Senators know where we stand, what we want, and what we demand of them. We must not sleep on our rights and we must not grow careless. We must take an active part in religious, civic and political affairs. We must, and I repeat, we must, preserve those ideals for which our forefathers fought, suffered and died.

The words of Thomas Paine, that great patriot, made in January of 1776, come to mind:

"The sun never shined on a cause of greater worth. 'Tis not the affairs of a city, a county, a province, or a kingdom; but of a continent - of at least 1/8 part of the habitable globe."

And, his words made in December of that same year:

"These are the times that try men's souls; the summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict the more glorious the triumph."

Many of us have grown careless. We take too much for granted. We do not realize how fortunate we are and what advantages, privileges, and opportunities we have. There is need today for a rededication to the principles and ideals of our Constitution and the flag. Whether or not our Nation will survive depends upon each of us and upon Americans everywhere. We must guard our liberties and privileges as we would our lives. We must accept and fulfill our responsibilities of citizenship. We must resist the efforts of those who would circumvent our Constitution, nullify that great instrument, disarm us and create a one world government, and make of this Nation a socialist welfare state. We must, and I repeat, we must preserve those ideals for which our forefathers fought suffered and died, and our constitutional republican form of government as was intended by our forefathers.

SAR Magazine LXVII_No.1_Summer 1972, p. 61

In Memorial



**ROBERT L. SONFIELD
1893 - 1972**

Compatriot Robert L. Sonfield, Past President General of the National Society of the Sons of the American Revolution, was called to eternal rest by his Creator on June 24, 1972.

By unanimous resolution of the Board of Trustees of the National Society of the Sons of the American Revolution, this page is affectionately and respectfully dedicated to our late beloved Compatriot, Robert L. Sonfield. His esteemed memory will live in our hearts and remain an inspiration to the Society he served so well.

Find A Grave Memorial

www.findagrave.com/memorial/143528154

Texas SAR History Volume 1, Feb 1, 1980 p. 112

ROBERT LEON SONFIELD NSSAR #29478, TSSAR #162 Deceased



He was born March 6, 1893, at Nacogdoches, Texas. His father was Leon Sonfield, then a Methodist Preacher, and his mother was Martha Chapman, a daughter of Captain Robert Duncan Chapman, a well-known Confederate Veteran who came to Texas in 1865. His parents moved to Galveston, Texas, where his father was pastor of St. James Methodist Church, then the largest in Texas. Shortly thereafter his father resigned the active ministry, became a lawyer, subsequently serving as a Justice of the Supreme Court of Texas. The family was living in Galveston at the time of the great hurricane of 1900, managed to survive, and thereafter moved to Beaumont, Texas. He received his early education in Allen Academy, Bryan, Texas, and his college education in the academic and law departments of the University of Texas, with post graduate law at Columbia University in New York, being admitted to the Bar in 1914, before completing his law course. He engaged in the practice of law after returning to Beaumont in June, 1916. He was appointed U.S. Commissioner

for the Eastern District of Texas, with headquarters at Beaumont. He became a member of the law firm of Sonfield, King and Sonfield. Soon World War I intervened and he volunteered for service on the day of the declaration of a state of war. He enlisted in the Texas Guards, April 6, 1917, and entered the Officers Training Camp at Leon Springs, May 4, 1917. He was appointed 2nd Lt., Fifth Infantry, T.N.G., and assigned to Company G, and subsequently transferred to Company B, 143rd Infantry, Thirty-Sixth Division. He sailed with the First Battalion, 143rd Infantry, from Newport News, Virginia, for Camp Aldershot, near Halifax, Nova Scotia, for an exhibition review before the Governor General of Canada, thence for France, where his Battalion rejoined the 36th Division, which participated in the Champagne offensive and the Meuse-Argonne offensive. He was promoted to the rank of 1st Lt. in August 1918, appointed as aerial observer of the 36th Division, later rejoining his division. After the armistice in 1918, he was detailed as a member of the Inter-Allied Commission on the repatriation of Russian and allied prisoners of war, and the American Military Mission with headquarters at Berlin, Germany, in charge of the supervision of all prison camps in which allied and Russian prisoners were confined, and distribution of food therein. He received a citation from the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of Great Britain for the aid he rendered British prisoners of war, and letters of commendations from General John J. Pershing, General George H. Harries, and from Lt. Col. Carl Taylor. Upon his release from the Army he resumed the practice of law at Houston, Texas, and continued until the outbreak of World War II. He was recalled to active duty in the early part of 1942, served for a time with the parachute troops, and was subsequently assigned to the Infantry School, Fort Benning, Georgia as Staff Judge Advocate. At the request of the Army, he wrote a textbook on Military Justice, "A Guide for the Administration of Military Justice," printed by the Army in two editions which was widely used as a textbook, and also at the Nuremberg Trials. He retired with the rank of Lt. Col., and in October of 1946, returned to private law practice in Houston. Late in the fifties, he and his son, Robert Jr., formed the partnership of Sonfield and Sonfield. Mr. Sonfield was authorized to practice law before all the courts of Texas, Federal Courts, Supreme Court of the U.S., all governmental tax agencies and the U.S. Court. He was an active member of the SAR for more than fifty years, having joined on March 18, 1918. He claimed membership through his great-great-grandfather, William Chapman, who served as Sergeant in Captain Uriah Goodwin's

Company, Third South Carolina Regiment of Continental Troops. He served both the State and National Societies in numerous capacities, such as President of local and state society; Secretary- Treasurer of both, Chancellor of the State Society. He served as National Trustee and was a member of the Executive Committee several years. He was Chancellor General in 1961-1962 and he was President General in 1963-1964. For many years, he regularly attended the National Congresses and the Executive Committee Meetings. He served on the Americanism and American Sovereignty Committees; the Implementation of our Chartered Purposes; and the Resolutions Committee for three National Congresses. Among the outstanding awards he received for his services were: the Minuteman Award; the Patriots Award; the Gold Good Citizenship Award and the Silver Good Citizenship Award. He was active in civic and veterans organizations, was District Commander of the eighth district of the American Legion and for over twenty years served on the Official Board of his church. The law firm of Sonfield and Sonfield served as the attorneys during the development of Valley Inn & Country Club at Brownsville, Texas. Due to the demands of the work, Mr. Sonfield moved to that location in January, 1971. He had hoped that he would enjoy semi-retirement in a very pleasant-like area. But that was not to be — his death came rather suddenly on June 24, 1972. A courageous compatriot — he loved his country, and served it in War and Peace, speaking out firmly for his beliefs. A devoted husband and father; a true Patriot and Friend, his memory shall be cherished always. He married Dorothy Huber in 1927 and she died in 1949. They had two sons, Robert L. Sonfield, Jr. and Richard Huber Sonfield. Married Margie Whitson Erwin in 1952. One stepson, Thomas S. Erwin. There are seven grandchildren and two step-grandchildren. His Revolutionary ancestor is William Chapman of South Carolina.

Robert L. Sonfield Award

This award is presented to the state society with the largest numerical increase of members at the end of that year.