

Jean Murrell Capers

Jean Murrell Capers was born in Kentucky, with her family moving here when she was 6 years old in 1919. Her parents were both teachers, and stressed the importance of education.

Capers graduated from Western Reserve University in 1932 with a degree in education. For 5 years she taught, first at the elementary level, and later as a health and physical education teacher at a high school. Wanting to do more to serve her community, she returned to college, enrolling at Cleveland Law School, where she earned her degree in 1945.

Capers often said she had the best profession in the world as a private practice attorney. Through the years, in addition to that practice, she served as an Assistant Police Prosecutor, an Assistant Attorney General, and in 1949, the first African-American woman elected to Cleveland City Council. She represented the 11th ward for over 9 years.

Appointed to the municipal court bench in 1977 to fill an unexpired term, Capers was 62. She was successfully elected to fill the balance of the term, and re-elected again, but was forced to leave the bench due to age limits in 1986. Although considered too old for the bench, Capers continued in the practice of law. As of this writing, she is the oldest living retired judge in Ohio, calling an end to her practice of law in 2011, when she was 99. She received an honorary Doctor of Laws degree from Case Western Reserve University School of Law in 2009.

Jean Murrell Capers served Cleveland Municipal Court from January 18, 1977 to December 31, 1985.

