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Common Pleas Judge William K. Thomas (left) who will preside at the preliminary murder hearing for Dr. Samuel H. Sheppard. Judge Frank J. Merrick (right) transferred the hearing to Judge Thomas.

## Judge Thomas Esteemed for Fine Record, Tireless Devotion to Job

BY AARON JACOBSON

Common Pleas Judge William K. Thomas, who will conduct the preliminary hearing in the Marilyn Sheppard murder, was credit-

ed by his colleagues today as being one of the hardest working and most popular jurists ever to sit on the bench here.

During a four-year career as a

jurist in Geauga and Cuyahoga counties, Thomas has established an enviable record and recently earned one of the highest ratings ever given a judicial candidate in a Cleveland Bar Association poll.

At present the youngest member of the court here, Thomas, 43, first came to public attention when he led the fight which resulted in the closing of the Pettibone Club, swank Geauga County gambling casino, in 1951.

### Held Bench in Geauga

Thomas was appointed to the Geauga County court by Governor Frank J. Lausche in June, 1951 and won a surprise election to the post in November of that year. A year later he resigned because of a "lack of work" and the low salary which the post paid.

Within a few months he was again appointed by Lausche to fill the vacancy created by election of Common Pleas Judge Julius M. Kovachy to the Court of Appeals. He is seeking election to the post for the first time this fall.

And to prove that his complaint of a "lack of work" wasn't just idle talk, he immediately undertook the job of reducing the overloaded docket in the court here through extensive use of pre-trial hearings.

### Innovation in Court

For the first time in history, procedures were adopted under which lawyers were required to bring their clients to the pre-trial hearings. As a result, hundreds of cases have been settled out of court and the new procedures were adopted by other members of the court.

Common Pleas Judge Felix T. Matia was assigned to assist Judge Thomas in the new work during the spring term.

### Studied by Bar

Meanwhile, the success of Thomas' plan won the attention of the Cleveland Bar Association which now has a six-man committee studying the policies being used by the youthful jurist.

A member of the law firm of Harrison, Spangenberg and Hull before his appointment to the Geauga County court, Thomas also served as counsel for the CIO-United Auto Workers Union here.

Judge Thomas lives with his wife, the former Dorothy Good of Columbus, and three sons, John R., 14, Richard G., 12, and Stephen G., 7, and a daughter, Cynthia, 3, at 120 E. Washington St., Chagrin Falls.