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"MIDNIGHT" TRIAL TO BE FEATURE OF UGA LAW DAY OBSERVANCE

ATHENS, Ga. -- It is the only murder case in Georgia history to be tried four times and is the subject of the best-selling novel, "Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil," which begins filming later this year in Savannah. On Friday, March 7, the murder trials of wealthy and socially prominent antiques dealer Jim Williams become the focus of Law Day, the annual observance of the principle and practice of American law and justice, at the University of Georgia.

At 2:30 p.m. in the UGA Chapel, students in the School of Law's mock trial program will re-enact the testimony of key witnesses in the third trial. Sonny Seiler ('57 alumnus), the acclaimed Savannah attorney who represented Williams in three of his four murder trials, will share trial exhibits and photographs and provide commentary following the testimony of several of the witnesses. Peter Muller ('87 alumnus), a partner in Seiler's firm of Bouhan, Williams & Levy, will portray Williams. Fuller E. Callaway Professor Ron Carlson, a leading authority on trial practice and evidence, will play the judge and also offer trial analysis.

Following the trial re-enactment, a reception will be held on the fourth floor of the law school's new addition, Dean Rusk Hall, from 5-6:30 p.m. Seiler and a favorite character from the book, Mrs. Emma Kelly, will autograph guests' personal copies of *Midnight*. "Mrs. Emma," known as "The Lady of 6,000 Songs," will provide music for the occasion and perform special requests -- all from memory.

At the Chapel re-enactment, Seiler will distribute a summary overview of the case and provide audience members with a simple glossary of relevant legal terms. Later, he will field audience questions.

"Presentation of the exciting facts which played a role in this trial presents a real challenge to our students," said Carlson, the mock trial faculty advisor. "Their participation in this event with leading members of the bar affords an excellent educational opportunity. It also promises to provide the audience with a glimpse of the some of the strategies which marked this litigation."

Williams was accused of shooting and killing Danny Hansford during a dispute in his home, regarded as Savannah's grandest mansion, on May 2, 1981. Williams claimed it was self-defense. Two Savannah juries convicted him of murder, but the convictions were overturned on technicalities by higher courts. A third jury was hung, but following a change of venue to Augusta, Williams was acquitted of all charges. In January 1990, Williams died at home in the very room where his former housemate had died nine years earlier.

In 1994, author John Berendt's *Midnight in the Garden of Good & Evil*, based on Williams' lengthy legal battle and the author's encounters with some of Savannah's more colorful characters, became a runaway hit, spending nearly 140 weeks to date on the *New York Times* bestseller list. Clint Eastwood will direct the screen version of the book, and some of Hollywood's biggest stars are reportedly lobbying to land much-coveted parts.

The crowd-pleasing Mrs. Emma will provide background music for the School of Law's annual student academic and leadership awards luncheon, held at 12:30 in the Georgia Hall of the UGA Tate Student Center.

This year, the law school is also reviving the tradition of Parents' Day, inviting parents of first-year law

students to sit in on their children's required torts class, attend the awards luncheon, and participate in the Law Day program.

All events are open free to the public, except the awards luncheon, for which tickets may be purchased from the School of Law's Alumni Programs Office for \$12. Attorneys may earn CLE credit for attending the trial re-enactment for a registration fee of \$10.