



225<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
1789-2014



# John Bright

**Born:**

May 23, 1884  
Middletown, NY

**Received Commission:**

June 6, 1941

**Died:**

March 24, 1948  
Middletown, NY

John Bright was a lifelong resident of Middletown in Orange County, NY, west of the Hudson River. Born there, he attended local public schools and then studied for the bar under lawyer Thomas Watts.

Bright, admitted to law practice in 1906, became a member of his mentor's law firm, ultimately known as Watts, Oakes and Bright. He was active in Middletown civic affairs, serving on the board of education and as corporation counsel under several mayors. He once ran for county judge but was defeated. He served as president of the regional Boy Scout Council and on hospital boards and became president of the Middletown Bar Association and then the Orange County Bar Association.

Bright was a longtime friend of Franklin D. Roosevelt. As president, Roosevelt rebuffed Tammany Hall by nominating Bright (and, simultaneously, Simon Rifkind) over Tammany's preferred candidates.

Judge Bright presided over many cases connected to World War II. In one, three New York women were convicted of spying for Germany. In 1944, Judge Bright ordered the denaturalization of Fritz Kuhn and other German-American Bund leaders. In 1946, Judge Bright served on the panel which heard the antitrust suit against the motion picture industry.

The SDNY was overburdened and understaffed when Judge Bright, age 63, died of a heart attack. His senior colleague Judge John C. Knox said Judge Bright was "a victim of overwork and devotion to duty."

**Sources:**

Judge Bright Dies; Sat in War Cases, N.Y. TIMES, Mar. 25, 1948, at 27.

For the Federal Courts, N.Y. TIMES, Apr. 4, 1948, at E8.