

SCATTERING HAYSEED

'Country' Image Delights Fowler

By KENT BIFFLE

"Clayton comes into a courtroom, scatters hayseed in the jury box and walks out with the verdict," a lawyer said Tuesday.

He was talking about Clayton Fowler, new chief defense counsel for Jack Ruby.

Fowler has a low flashpoint. As president of the Dallas County Criminal Bar Association, he recently took to task the powerful Dallas Crime Commission.

During the Ruby trial, he openly criticized use of a public relations firm by Judge Joe B. Brown, who still presides over the case.

The only way to compare Fowler with San Francisco's Melvin Belli, who directed defense during the trial, is to say they are poles apart.

"Why Mr. Belli is a polished lawyer," said Fowler humbly. Then he began remarking on how the case should have been handled in the first place.

Fowler said, "That psycho psychomotor . . . what did he call it? Psychomotor epilepsy. That was a new approach to insanity.

"In Texas we have a test for insanity in criminal cases. It may be antiquated. But it's still the law. It centers on the question of whether the defendant knew right from wrong."

More important, Fowler feels, is that Belli's defense did not emphasize an appeal for mercy from the jury. "They put all their eggs in one basket," he said, quoting Dist. Atty. Henry Wade.

"They didn't give jurors a chance to wonder what they themselves would have done in Jack Ruby's shoes. They didn't make a strong plea for sympathy," he said.

The immediate plan of Fowler, who in more than 20 death penalty cases hasn't lost a client to the electric chair, is to search the

trial record for legal errors.

At a change of venue hearing last year, Fowler testified he felt that Ruby couldn't get a fair trial in Dallas County. He said Tuesday that still holds true.

He pointed out, however, that he is not abandoning the sanity issue and will likely pursue that later on.

"Red" Fowler, 43, comes from the piney woods around Colmesneil (Tyler County). "They let you out of high school when you can spell the name of the place," he grinned.

A big man with thinning red hair, Fowler puts saccharin pellets in his iced tea in an attempt to hold his weight to 220.

During Yule season he abets his partner Costine A. Drobny in mixing up for lawyers and news media men something called World War Five Punch.

It includes fermented strawberries, champagne, sweet potatoes, cucumbers, onions, and sausage.

A 3-time loser in legislative races, Fowler is a Boy Scout committeeman and an elder at

Churchill Way Presbyterian Church. He has four children.

Many of Fowler's acquaintances don't know that he is missing a right leg. It was lost in the crash of a Navy training plane in 1942.

Fowler went to Southern Methodist University Law School in the GI bill. But he's never completely left the piney woods. He has a 1,500-acre farm in Tyler

County where he raises quail.

In a dispute over ownership of a hog, Fowler once subpoenaed the pig into court. He delights in his "country" image and he likes being thought of as a "common man."

And if Life Magazine really thinks Henry Wade has "a corball manner," they haven't yet met Clayton Fowler.



—Dallas News Staff Photo

Clayton Fowler . . . Hasn't lost a client to the chair yet.