

MARK LANE PUT on a good show last week in the usually peaceful and quiet courtroom of Probate Court Judge Joseph Evans.

Lane was charged with contempt of court, and he wasn't shy about indicating contempt for everyone involved in the proceedings. Lane, who lives in California and is licensed to practice law in New York, had been accused of taking Mrs. Grace E. Walden, a ward of the court, to California, out of the court's jurisdiction.

Lane specializes in books about assassinations, and Mrs. Walden is alleged to have been a witness to the 1968 murder of Martin Luther King Jr. She was in the hospital in Bolivar until shortly before she left Tennessee.

In view of the author-lawyer's undoubted contempt for Tennessee courts, it was surprising when Evans not only withheld an immediate ruling on the contempt charge but also made Lane a co-guardian of Mrs. Walden, who has been declared mentally incompetent.

As Lane strutted and raged throughout the day, declaring that Mrs. Walden would get no justice in Tennessee courts, he remained calm, his voice even, as Judge Evans conducted the hearing.

And, some courthouse observers say, he ended by outfoxing Lane, who agreed to the judge's low-key suggestion that he would wish to become a co-guardian of Mrs. Walden.

As co-guardian, the observers point out, Lane is under much more control of the court than he had been as Mrs. Walden's attorney.

Lane has much leeway in handling her property and other estate, it is true. But he must have permission of the court to spend any money in her behalf, and must account for any expenditures with vouchers. And he must file an annual accounting with the court each year.

Furthermore, since Lane lives out of the state, it was necessary that a co-guardian be appointed. Duncan Ragsdale, a Memphis attorney, agreed to accept the chore, and thus will provide Evans a direct link to Lane, should one be needed.