
OBITUARIES

District Attorney Henry Wade Dies; 'The Chief' Was a Legend in Texas

Associated Press

DALLAS—Henry Wade, 86, whose 35-year career as district attorney of Dallas County included the murder trial of Jack Ruby and the landmark abortion case *Roe v. Wade*, died here March 1. He had Parkinson's disease.

Mr. Wade, a Texas legend known as "The Chief" around the Dallas courthouse, is said to have never lost a case he personally prosecuted.

He took office in 1951 and went on to compile one of the nation's lowest acquittal rates. Defense lawyers, in fact, formed a 7 Percent Club, whose name reflected their paltry success rate against Wade's office.

The U.S. Supreme Court's land-

mark 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision establishing the right to an abortion began in Texas when a pregnant waitress, identified in court papers by the pseudonym "Jane Roe," sued Mr. Wade. It was his job as district attorney to enforce a state law prohibiting abortion except to save a woman's life.

In 1964, Mr. Wade helped lead the prosecution of Ruby, the nightclub owner who shot to death Lee Harvey Oswald, the man charged with assassinating President Kennedy. The jury took less than two hours to sentence Ruby to death; he died behind bars.

Mr. Wade hid his legal acumen behind a cigar-chewing country-boy manner and a thick East Texas drawl.

Dallas lawyer Peter Lesser, who

lost to Mr. Wade in the 1982 Democratic primary, told the Dallas Morning News that "he's the person against whom all district attorneys will be measured for as long as anybody who's practiced while he was [district attorney] is still around."

Mr. Wade, a Texas native, graduated from the University of Texas law school in 1938 with highest honors. He had been a law review editor and was a member of Phi Beta Kappa and the Order of the Coif.

He practiced law, was an FBI special agent in the United States and abroad, and served in the Navy during World War II. After the war, he joined the Dallas district attorney's office, becoming chief felony prosecutor, before winning election as district attorney.