

In Memoriam, Justice John D. Wickhem

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In Memoriam

Justice John D. Wickhem

The untimely death of Justice John D. Wickhem came as a distinct shock to his many friends throughout the state and nation. He was not only an outstanding student of the law and an eminent jurist, but a man endowed with human qualities and a sympathetic approach to all problems with which he was confronted during his long career as a practicing attorney, a teacher of law, and as a judge. His service as a member of the faculty of the State University Law School brought him into close touch with the problems of legal education in this state. He always manifested a keen interest in the curriculum of the two law schools of this state and lent a helping hand to every effort which had as its goal the improvement of the standards of legal education and the admission to the Bar of this state. It was due in no small measure to his influence and efforts that the Supreme Court promulgated rules for applicants to the Bar, which placed this state very high in the field of legal education.

Justice John D. Wickhem was born in the city of Beloit, Wisconsin, on the 25th of May, 1888. He received his elementary education in the District Schools of his native city. He attended Beloit College, where he was awarded the degree of Bachelor of Arts. After leaving college, he devoted several years to teaching history in Beloit High School. Having determined, however, upon law as his life's work, he entered upon the study of law at the University of Wisconsin Law School where in 1916 he was awarded the degree of LL.B.

After leaving law school, he became associated in the practice of law with the late Burr Jones, an outstanding lawyer known throughout the state and nation, who was later appointed an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of Wisconsin. Later, he came to Milwaukee where he became associated with the firm of Lenichuk, Boesel and Fairchild, with which firm he maintained his association until he was appointed to the High Court.

In the year 1918 he accepted an appointment as a full-time member of the faculty of the University of Wisconsin Law School. He was eminently successful in the performance of his new duties, and his former students hold him in very high esteem as a teacher and a legal scholar.

His success in the classroom, no doubt, prompted Governor Kohler to appoint him in 1930 as an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of this state.

In spite of his exacting duties on the bench, Justice Wickhem found time to engage in numerous activities calcu-

lated to improve the administration of justice. He was a member of the Council of the American Law Institute, which was entrusted with the task of restating the law of Restitution; he was a member of the Dane County, Wisconsin and American Bar Associations, American Judicature Society, and on numerous occasions delivered lectures before groups of lawyers and judges throughout the state on various legal topics. He will be particularly remembered by the students of the Marquette University Law School before whom he delivered lectures on the law of Evidence and other kindred legal topics on several occasions.

In recognition of his scholarly attainments and his contribution to the jurisprudence of this state, he was awarded an honorary degree of LL.D. by Beloit College in 1930, by his Alma Mater, the University of Wisconsin, in 1940, and in 1949, a few days prior to his death, by Northwestern University.

His sudden death was a serious loss to the Court, on which he served for many years with such distinction, and to the entire state of Wisconsin.

He commanded the respect of both the litigant and his counsel because both knew that he applied to every cause entrusted to his judgment not only his technical knowledge of the law, of which he was a master, but a sympathetic understanding of human frailties, and a passion for justice. His opinions reflect a thorough appreciation of the natural moral law, of the fundamental issues involved and a judicial temperament so necessary for the attainment of impartial justice.

Justice John D. Wickhem is survived by his widow and two sons, John C., an attorney, and Robert J., an engineer. He was a faithful member of the Catholic Church, and always manifested a strong sense of the spiritual values in life. With the passing of Justice John D. Wickhem his family lost a devoted husband and father, the Bench and Bar a scholarly lawyer, teacher, and an eminent jurist, and the State of Wisconsin one of its most distinguished and most civic-minded citizens.

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