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Robert J. Farley

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Dean John Webster Wade

While it is somewhat discouraging to be considered a contemporary authority on the early life of one as old as Dean John Webster Wade, it is flattering to be considered a possible contributor to his early training as a law student. This is one of the great compensations of teaching—to live vicariously, deserved or not, in the reflected success of a former student. It is in the latter category that I take pride in being requested to give these details and comments about one whose association I treasure. Regardless of whether the credit for John Webster Wade's legal education should go to myself or Dean Pound, I, at least, knew him first!

Contrary to popular belief, John Webster Wade was not born in Oxford, Mississippi, but in Little Rock, Arkansas. His father, John William Wade, was a native of Morton, Mississippi. After graduating with three degrees from the University of Mississippi, John William Wade married Sarah Webster, a member of a pioneer Mississippi family, who was a graduate of the Union Female Academy and a native of Oxford.

According to the belief of people over thirty, the way in which a twig is bent portends the growth of the tree. Thus, a family story of Dean Wade's teenage years may have pointed to some future traits. In his youth he developed a penchant for nicknames, and after applying appropriate new titles to his two younger sisters, he renamed himself Jack. His father, who had become a circuit judge, acquired a farm outside of Little Rock which included two mules that John promptly named for himself: Jack and John. Did this signify egotism? Surely it did not, since the subjects were such lowly beings, without pride of ancestry or hope of posterity. Instead it belied a quiet sense of humor that he has continuously inhibited rather than exhibited.

After the untimely death of Judge Wade, the family moved back to Mrs. Wade's ancestral home in Oxford. John, then a purposeful lad of fifteen, was the man of the family. It was here that he spent his most formative years attending both Oxford High School and the University of Mississippi. Once when the new superintendent, who was reputed to be unpopular and slovenly, challenged anyone in the morning assembly at Oxford High School to give him a complete quotation from the Bible, John regaled his fellow students with what was considered a bull's eye answer from Proverbs: "Go to the ant, thou sluggard, consider her ways and be wise"! This seems to have become his motto for he has been noted always for industry and wisdom.

Having received his B.A. degree with honors from Ole Miss, John Wade attended the School of Law and graduated in 1934. It was during this period that I came to know him in the relationship of teacher and student. Although modest and respectful in demeanor, he never hesitated either to question an instructor or to make him defend or explain practically any positive assertion; he reversed the approved method and questioned Socrates! He was always prepared and had read not only the assignments but also seemed to have researched the footnotes and the reference literature. His interest and industry were equally prodigious. One of his classmates, Sidney May, was of the same character. If an instructor called on either Sidney or John at the beginning of the hour, the result was an argument. The instructor might easily become simply the moderator if he chose—and frequently he did. About the middle of the first semester of their senior year, a formal petition appeared on the faculty bulletin board praying that for the rest of the term no professor call on either John Wade or Sidney May to recite, and requesting such other further and general relief as might seem meet and proper in the premises. The petition did not receive any collective faculty action, but both these men made distinctive records as well as impressions.

John Wade graduated with "Special Distinction" and an all-time high record, which will never be surpassed. He has an "A" in every subject. Registrar's records are now confidential, but perhaps he will forgive me for exposing him since there is no malice involved. Despite his record and the competition he provided, he was popular with his fellow students. One other incident I recall. During his senior year there appeared from time to time warnings, decrees, and sanctions for infractions of student traditions and rules, which were mysteriously signed "The Rectifiers." These sanctions sometimes took the form of practical jokes. No one ever learned the membership of "The Rectifiers," so well were their secrets guarded, and I believe that I am the only person who discovered, purely by chance, two of them—one being John Wade—at one of their nefarious enforcements when the building was practically deserted.

Judge Wade had three degrees from Ole Miss: B.A., M.A., and LL.B. John had an ambition to equal this background, and after graduation from Ole Miss, he attained it in 1935 by procuring an LL.M. from Harvard. Although he may have surpassed his father in learning by earning an S.J.D. degree in 1942, perhaps this compares favorably with a circuit judgeship.

John Wade began his teaching career at Ole Miss the next year after graduation from Harvard. It was a difficult initiation because many of his students were former contemporaries and all of the faculty were his former instructors. He handled this situation with natural dignity and the assurance of superior capability, yet modestly and conscientiously. Although during the next several years he was offered visiting positions elsewhere, both Chancellor Butts and Dean Kimbrough found that they could not spare him. Perhaps they would not recommend him for a leave of absence because they were afraid of losing such a prize.

In February 1946 I came back to Ole Miss as Dean after eleven years' absence at Tulane. John had returned to the faculty after serving in the Marine Corps during World War II, and I had the opportunity to be associated with him as a colleague at this time. Against the better judgment of then Chancellor Butts, I recommended John for a year's leave of absence to be a visiting professor at the University of Texas. He never returned, going the next year to Vanderbilt and eventually succeeding Ray Forrester as Dean.

If there is one attribute that best describes John Webster Wade, it is *conscientiousness*. It is from this quality that vectors of duty, industry, and self-discipline spring. He is so conscientious in every detail that, while I knew he was an outstanding faculty member, I should not have believed that he would have made a good administrator because he seemed unwilling to get tough occasionally, which people over 30 once thought a necessary quality in a dean. John, on the other hand, believed in due process for students in 1946 when cause for dismissal was still a matter of administrative discretion. An incident after the first examination period upon my return to Ole Miss in 1946 will suffice as an example. The law school, trying to keep open during the war, had admitted among others a special student who would otherwise have been ineligible. This student was, in fact, ineligible to remain at the time of John's and my return. John failed him, and before I knew anything about the matter this student had by-passed me and appealed to the Chancellor on the ground that John had graded his paper unfairly. In the meantime, *conscientiously*, John had offered to refer the paper to arbitration. The student used this gesture against him as an indication that John did not believe his own findings. When the matter came to my attention, I called in the student and summarily put him out of school for the reason that even if he had made a high grade, he would still have been ineligible for readmission.

About this time, I heard a story of a plumber who was working with an apprentice, which helps depict the kind of man John Wade is. The plumber was down on his knees working on a pipe. The apprentice was watching and asked, "How much do you get an hour?"

"Nine dollars."

"And you get a dollar and a half for me even when I'm not doing anything?"

"Sure. Here, hold this candle if you're so damned conscientious."

John did not receive pay at Ole Miss such that it hurt his conscience, but there were occasions at faculty meetings and other times when I was tempted to hand him a candle. Nevertheless, I take much pride in my past associations with him and relish the idea that in some way, maybe from his observations of what a good teacher should not be, I affected his two great traits of humor and good conscience.

It is a privilege to join in paying tribute to a great man and in so doing to bring out, incidentally, what many have wanted to know but were afraid to ask about John Webster Wade!

ROBERT J. FARLEY*

* Dean Emeritus, University of Mississippi; B.A. 1919, LL.B. 1924, University of Mississippi; J.S.D. 1932, Yale.