



Wilson Cowen

JUDGE WILSON COWEN

Wilson Cowen was born on December 20, 1905, in the village of Norse, near Clifton, Bosque County, Texas, the son of John Rentz and Florence Juno (McFadden) Cowen.

He graduated from Clifton High School in 1923. As a representative of his high school, he twice won first place in declamation, and was three times a member of the winning debating team in the annual county interscholastic league contests. He was president of his class during each of his four high school years, ranked second in his graduating class, and was awarded a scholarship to the University of Texas. In his freshman year he won the first prize, a gold watch, as the best speaker in the university intersociety debating contest, and was later a member of the varsity debating and wrestling teams. At the law school of the University of Texas, from which he received his LL.B. degree in 1928, he was a contributor to the law review, was a member of the moot court society, and was the class speaker at graduation.

Admitted to the Texas bar in 1928, Wilson Cowen commenced the general practice of law at Dalhart, Texas, as an associate with the firm of Tatum & Strong. He was president of the Dallam County Bar Association for four years. In 1934 he was elected county judge of Dallam County on the Democratic ticket, and as a judge he sat on a court of record with jurisdiction of probate, juvenile, criminal misdemeanors, and small civil cases. He was also ex officio chairman of the Board of County Commissioners, and as such was also the principal administrative officer of the county.

The Panhandle of Texas was hit hard by the economic depression of the 1930s, and its troubles were compounded by the severe drought in the Great Plains. Dallam County was in the heart of the Dust Bowl. The dust storms, which began in 1932, reached their height in 1935. They caused drastic financial losses and resulted in hardships and suffering by many people. Because of these circumstances, the young judge became involved in a number of local, state, and federal projects and programs that were undertaken to relieve the widespread human distress and to curb the devastating soil erosion in the area. His participation and experience in these activities led to his appointment in 1938 as Texas State Director of the Farm Security Administration, Department of Agriculture. In 1939 he became Associate Director of the agency's Rural Rehabilitation Division in Wash-

ington, D.C., and in 1940 was appointed Director of Region 12 of the FSA. In the latter position he had responsibility for the FSA programs in New Mexico and parts of Texas, Kansas, and Colorado. In 1942 he came to Washington, D.C., to accept the appointment as a commissioner (trial judge since 1972) of the United States Court of Claims. In September 1943 he was granted a leave of absence from the court to serve as Assistant War Food Administrator under Judge Marvin Jones, his mentor and close friend of many years. From July 1 to October 1, 1945, he was Special Assistant to the Secretary of Agriculture during the post-war reorganization of the Department. In October 1945 he returned to the court to continue his judicial duties as a trial commissioner and was appointed Chief Commissioner of the court's Trial Division in 1959. He was a member of the court's Committee on Rules since it was first organized in 1947 and was responsible for many innovations in the court's procedures, including the preparation of orders for the handling of special litigation and the drafting of forms and orders pertaining to discovery, depositions, and pretrial procedures. After Congress first appropriated funds for the new courthouse, which was dedicated on September 29, 1967, he was chairman of the court's Building Committee and acted as its representative in dealings with architects, officials of the Public Buildings Service, and other interested officials and persons.

On June 16, 1964, Wilson Cowen was nominated to be Chief Judge of the Court of Claims by President Lyndon B. Johnson, to succeed Chief Judge Marvin Jones, retired. He was confirmed by the Senate on July 2, 1964, commissioned on July 8, and took his oath of office and assumed his duties on July 14, 1964.

During his service as Chief Judge, he participated in a position of leadership in the revision and modernization of the court's rules and in securing legislation which strengthened the court and broadened its jurisdiction. New laws enacted at his request include acts which: (1) increased the number of the court's judges from five to seven (the first enlargement since 1863) and authorized the court to sit in panels, 80 Stat. 139 (1966); (2) provided for the reference of private claims by either House of Congress to the Chief Commissioner, 80 Stat. 958 (1966); (3) authorized contract reporting of all court proceedings, 84 Stat. 298 (1970); (4) granted the court jurisdiction over contract suits against nonappropriated fund activities (military exchanges), 84 Stat.

449 (1970); (5) gave the court jurisdiction to redetermine excessive profits found by the Renegotiation Board, 85 Stat. 97 (1971); (6) authorized the court to recall retired trial judges, 86 Stat. 529 (1972); and (7) granted the court authority to remand matters to administrative and executive bodies and officials, and to implement its judgments by ordering restoration of officers and employees to office or position or placement in appropriate status, 86 Stat. 652 (1972). As a result of changes in the statutory law and in the rules of the court, the Court of Claims during his tenure became a two-division court which combined in one tribunal the facilities and attributes of a trial and an appellate court. He was the representative of the court on the Judicial Conference of the United States and served on its committees on Trial Practice and Technique and Judicial Improvement.

He retired from active service as Chief Judge of the Court of Claims on March 1, 1977, and assumed status as a Senior Judge. On October 1, 1982, Judge Cowen became a Senior Circuit Judge of the newly created U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit and continues to sit on that court.

Judge Cowen is a member of the Cosmos and National Lawyers Clubs, the Texas Bar Association, the Federal Bar Association, and the American Bar Association. He is a member of the Presbyterian Church.

On April 18, 1930, Judge Cowen married Florence Elizabeth Walker of Texas (b. July 10, 1908; d. March 23, 1989). Judge and Mrs. Cowen had two sons—Dr. Wilson Walker Cowen (b. June 5, 1934; d. February 22, 1987), a graduate of Harvard University and Director of the University Press, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia, and John Elwin Cowen (b. March 24, 1942), a graduate of Gallaudet College and an editorial assistant, Federal Supply Service, General Services Administration.

In 1978, Judge Cowen's colleagues in the Court of Claims, the trial judges of that court, and the staff presented his portrait to the court. It now hangs in the courthouse on Lafayette Square.

On October 25, 1990, Judge Cowen was additionally honored by the Federal Circuit Bar Association for his service of over fifty years in the administration of justice.