

WENDILL EARL REDWINE

RCBA President 1937

By the time he died on October 24, 1967 at age 69, Earl Redwine had become legal legend.

Known as a tough on crime prosecutor and, later, an expert on water law, Redwine is most famous for his successful prosecution of the notorious “Chicken Coop Murderer” Gordon Stewart Northcutt. Hollywood star Clint Eastwood ultimately produced and directed a film about the Northcutt murders called “The Changeling” which was released in 1980. It starred Angelina Jolie and John Malkovich.

Redwine was born on a farm on January 20, 1894 in Dade County, Missouri to Cambridge and Dora Redwine. By the time he moved to Riverside, many of his friends referred to him as “Ozark” because of his place of birth. His parents moved the family from Missouri to Riverside when he was 11 years old. He eventually attended Riverside Poly High and was the class president during his senior year.

He attended Stanford Law School and worked as a law librarian at the school while completing his courses. He was admitted to the California bar in 1921 after graduating that year. By 1925, he was hired as a Deputy District Attorney in Riverside. It was during these years that Redwine developed his reputation as hardnosed prosecutor.

His “Northcutt” fame started in 1928 when it was discovered that Northcutt, age 23, had murdered and buried the bodies of youngsters (allegedly as many as 20) at his chicken ranch in nearby Wineville. Northcutt eventually surmised that he was under suspicion by law enforcement and fled to Canada. In a previous profile of Redwine by noted Riverside attorney Justin McCarthy, it was reported that extradition problems arose and so Redwine, without telling anyone, traveled to Vancouver, B.C. He spoke with the Mounties and then hustled the suspect into a waiting car and sped for the border with Canadian officials in hot pursuit. He then chartered a train to bring Northcutt back to Riverside.

During the trial, Northcutt was defiant, foul-mouthed and belligerent. Redwine portrayed him to the jury as a pathological liar and a sadistic degenerate. The jury took just two hours to convict the defendant after about 27 days of trial. He was sent to the gallows on October 2, 1930.

In McCarthy’s profile of Redwine, the prosecutor was quoted as saying “I brought him down here. I tried him. I convicted him and I went and watched them hang the SOB.”

Interestingly, Wineville eventually changed its name to Mira Loma as a result of the bad publicity from the Northcutt case.

By 1930, Redwine was elected as Riverside County’s District Attorney. Various newspaper articles from back in those days describe the tough on crime exploits of his office. For example, in the September 10, 1932 edition of the San Pedro News, it was noted that Isaac Rubidoux, 23, of the famous pioneer family, had been arrested for attempting to extort \$5,000 from wealthy rancher C.W. Benedict.

The same paper reported in its May 5, 1933 edition that Redwine had served notice upon promoter Hobart Glassey that a nudist colony would not be issued a permit to operate in Riverside County.

Redwine was reelected as District Attorney in 1934. That same year the Desert Sun reported that Redwine’s office had moved to close three gambling clubs (Dunes Club, 139 Club, and Cove Club) which were frequented by Hollywood movie stars. It was part of a continuing effort to close all gambling

establishments in Riverside County. It appears that nudity and gambling were both on the no-no list under Redwine's regime.

Another notorious case handled during Redwine's tenure as the D.A. occurred in 1936 when Sheriff Deputy John McNeill was arrested for the beating of his wife. She died that same day on August 13, 1936. McNeill claimed that she had been killed by a prowler but evidence ultimately established that he committed the crime. Redwine faced defense attorneys Russell Waite and John Neblett in the trial of the case. After five days of trial, the jury convicted McNeill on October 30, 1936 (note that the crime took place on August 13 and conviction occurred just two and half months later!). After an unsuccessful appeal, McNeill was hanged on July 9, 1937.

The Desert Sun reported in its August 5, 1938 edition that Redwine's office had secured 330 felony convictions out of 334 cases which it had tried over the past two years.

It was while Redwine was the head man at the D.A.'s office that he became president of the Riverside County Bar Association in 1937. It should also be noted that, while he was the D.A., Redwine hired another Riverside legal legend—John Gabbert—in 1935 to work at his office.

From 1941-1949, Redwine served as the first County Counsel for Riverside County. He also developed an expertise in water law and was one of the lawyers involved in the significant case of *Arizona v. California* (1955) 350 US 114 which related to a dispute between the two states over water rights from the Colorado River. He served as counsel for the Coachella Valley Water District and he later helped form the Eastern Municipal Water District.

In 1958, Redwine joined with Maurice Sherrill, a former county counsel and public defender, to form Redwine & Sherrill. The long-time firm specialized in, among other matters, water law.

He also served in many community organizations and was a prior Exalted Ruler of the Riverside chapter of the Elk's Lodge.

Although he passed away over 50 years ago, Redwine remains in the pantheon of illustrious Riverside lawyers and he will always be remembered for obtaining the conviction of one of California's most infamous serial killers.

Written by Bruce E. Todd