

# A Tribute to Pueblo's Last Republican District Attorney

BY ROBERT W. OGBURN

In the beginning, before there were prosecutors and defense attorneys, God interrogated Cain, without advisement of *Miranda* rights, found him guilty of murder, and sentenced him to exile in the land of Nod, without the benefit of a lengthy presentence report from an overworked probation department. Justice then was swift and certain. However, mankind chafed at “swift and certain,” and created prosecutors and defense lawyers along with manmade laws, all of which tended to slow things down a bit. Justice was no longer swift or even certain or even sure.

In today's modern world, we celebrate the “Last of Everything.” If you are a movie fan, you have probably seen the *Last Emperor of China*; the *Last Empress of China*; and the *Last Samurai of Japan*—namely, Tom Cruise. Nicholas II was, of course, the *Last Czar of Russia*.

Today, I'd like to pay homage to Pueblo's Last Republican District Attorney—the late and great Wesley Charles Ernst Kettelkamp Jr., who died on December 13, 2021, at age 97.

Wes was born on July 4, 1924, in Ottawa, Illinois, and raised in Lebanon, Illinois. After graduating from Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, he served in the US Navy (1945–47) as an ensign with service in both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans on destroyers. He graduated from the University of Colorado Law School in 1950 and was admitted to the Colorado bar on October 2, 1950.

Young and ambitious, he ran for 10th Judicial District Attorney (Crowley, Otero, and Pueblo counties) against another young and ambitious attorney, Matt Kikel, and won by 57 votes. Wes, at the young age of 28, was elected district attorney on November 4, 1952, took



The late, great Wes Kettelkamp in 1987.

office on January 12, 1953, and served until January 8, 1957. Wes said he ran in 1952 to “get some notoriety, to let people know I was in town.” Alas, he lost his Republican base in 1953 when Crowley and Otero counties were stripped from the 10th Judicial District, and in a 1956 rematch for DA, he was defeated in his reelection bid. Since 1957 there has been only one Republican candidate for the Pueblo DA's office. The only way to unseat an incumbent DA in Pueblo County is through occasional internecine quarrels in local Democratic Party primary elections.

After another unsuccessful contest for district judge in 1962 and for state representative in 1964, Wes gave up further attempts at political office and became a highly successful

trial lawyer in Pueblo for many years. After leaving the DA's office, he was active in criminal defense work for a number of years, successfully defending a district judge charged with bribery; two county commissioners charged with theft; a chief district court probation officer charged with perjury; and a county zoning administrator and a civil defense administrator, both charged with embezzlement. All were acquitted.

Over the course of his long and distinguished career, Wes received many honors. Notably, he was inducted into the Colorado Trial Lawyers Association and the American College of Trial Lawyers in 1976, received the Pueblo County Bar Association's Award for Meritorious Service to the Legal Profession in 1985, and was named the University of Colorado Small Practice Attorney of the Year in 1992. In addition, he served on the CU Law School Board of Trustees, as a member of the Federal Court Selection Commission, and as member of the Colorado Public Defender Commission.

Wes was also active in local and state bar association activities, serving as president of the Pueblo County Bar Association (1967), as vice president of the Colorado Bar Association (1978), and as a chair of the Colorado Bar Foundation Board of Trustees.

In his spare time, he was also a rancher, raising cattle at Gardner, and later cashmere goats and Tennessee Walkers at Beulah, Colorado.

On December 13, 1952, Wes married Greta Holder and they had four sons. For the next 69 years, they traveled the world together, ranched together, rode horses together, and were seldom, if ever, apart. They lived a storied life of enduring love. CL