

Services set today for Oscar Knutson

Published June 17, 1981

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Funeral services will be held at 3 p.m. today for Oscar R. Knutson retired chief justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court, who died Monday.

Knutson, 81, was appointed to the state Supreme Court in 1948 and served as Chief Justice from 1964 until his retirement in March 1973. He continued to participate in hearings on a limited numbers of appeals until 1977.

He was a native of Perry, near Superior, Wis. The son of immigrants, he could not speak English until he attended school. The family moved to Warren, Minn., in 1916. Knutson finished high school there and graduated from the Northwest School of Agriculture at Crookston.

Knutson attended St. Olaf College at Northfield, Minn., for one year and then the University of Minnesota and its law school, dropping out a couple of times because of lack of money.

He practiced law in Warren from 1927 to 1941 and was its mayor from 1936 to 1941. His first law partner was Julius Olson, who was appointed a district judge in 1930 and later was appointed a supreme court justice. Knutson was appointed a district judge in 1941 and in 1948 was appointed to the supreme court to succeed Olson, who retired. Knutson was appointed chief justice in 1962.

Survivors include Knutson's wife, Katherine; two sons, Robert,

Minneapolis, and Richard, St. Paul; and a daughter, Anne Lee of St. Charles, Ill. Services will be at the Werness Brothers Chapel in south Minneapolis, with no visitation or reviewal. The family had suggested memorials be given to the University of Minnesota Law School Scholarship Fund.

Oscar R. Knutson

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Minnesota lost a distinguished jurist with the death of former Chief Justice Oscar R. Knutson this week. But it has not lost the fruit of Knutson's efforts to improve the state's legal and judicial system. Improvements Minnesotans take for granted today are part of that system largely as a result of Knutson's foresight and initiative.

Knutson's most visible achievements were from the bench, first as a district court judge, then as associate justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court for 14 years, finally as chief justice from 1962 to 1973. His legal scholarship, clarity of expression – and down-to-earth good sense that enable him to cut through pettifoggery to the heart of the issue.

In addition, Knutson can be thanked for the state's public defender system, for its mechanism to assure a responsible judiciary, for improved court administration and efficiency. As president of the national Conference of Chief Justices, his work extended beyond the state's boundaries.

Knutson was one of those rare individuals who contribute to their fellow citizens not only during their lifetimes, but long after, through an enduring legacy of achievement. Minnesotans are the better for his having been among us.