

* [MP3 Audio file](#) *



The Ah Chuey case challenged the Nevada Supreme Court with a difficult constitutional question, whether a criminal defendant can be compelled, against objection, to reveal a hidden tattoo to the jury for purposes of identification.

A man named Ah Chuey had been seen entering a wash-house in Reno just before gunshots were heard coming from the building. Shortly after the gunshots, flames broke out, and the wash-house was burned to the ground. Later inspection revealed the disfigured remains of a body. Other witnesses were found who claimed that Ah Chuey had fled the wash-house immediately after the shots and before the fire.

At Ah Chuey's trial, inconsistencies in the witnesses' testimony suggested that the defendant might not be Ah Chuey after all. One witness, however, had testified that the man named Ah Chuey had a tattoo on his right arm. When the defendant refused to show his arm, the judge ordered the sheriff to force him to do so, and a tattoo was revealed to the jury. The man thus identified as Ah Chuey was convicted by the jury of first degree murder, and the case was appealed to the Nevada Supreme Court.

The central legal question in Ah Chuey was whether forcing the defendant to reveal the tattoo violated his constitutional right against self-incrimination. In a lengthy and heavily researched opinion, accompanied by an equally erudite dissent by Justice Leonard, the Nevada Supreme Court held that the defendant's rights had not been violated.

Narrator: Gordon W. Rice. Gordon Rice is eminently qualified as the narrator of the Ah Chuey case by virtue of actually having argued cases in the old Supreme Court chambers of the Capitol building where the Ah Chuey case was heard. Gordon Rice was born in Sparks, Nevada, and attended the University of Nevada at Reno. At the beginning of World War II he enlisted in the infantry and was selected to attend the Judge Advocate Officers School at the University of Michigan School of Law. During his last eighteen months in the Army, Rice served as Judge Advocate on General Eisenhower's staff in Europe. Mr. Rice returned to his native Nevada to become a partner in the law firm of McCarran, Rice and Bible and was considered to be the longest practicing attorney in Nevada.

Photograph of page from the Ah Chuey Nevada Supreme Court file courtesy of the Nevada State Library and Archives.
Photograph of buildings in Reno's Chinatown courtesy of the Nevada Historical Society.

[Ten Famous Cases of the Nevada Supreme Court, 1865-1937](#)