

# 108 East Valley

WORDS **BECKY HITCHOCK**  
PHOTOS **WES SEWELL PHOTOGRAPHY**

The building on the street of 108 East Valley is an unassuming one. Little has changed since erected in 1971. Yet for nearly a century, four generations of the family from this address have served our legal community with rich tradition and integrity.

The first generation began with the birth of Hobart Baird (H.B.) Edwards, Sr., in 1897. A native of Mars Hill, North Carolina, the young H.B. traveled south for a teaching job in Hahira. He soon made superintendent. When World War I arrived, he enlisted in the Army. He had to retreat with substantial battle wounds that followed him throughout his life. Page 10, end of 2nd paragraph: So would his nick name, Hell Bent Edwards.

After law school, he returned to life in Lowndes County with wife, Louelle Hodges Edwards, a son H.B., Jr, and two daughters, Oneda and Louvain. Situated in a building adjacent to what is now 108 East Valley, the first generation lived and practiced law in a structure called The Edwards Building.

The first generation made for an outstanding orator. With the voice of a bull, he vowed to help the poor, the orphans and the widows. He served fourteen years in the Georgia State Legislature and ran for Governor in 1932. He served as Valdosta Mayor in 1947-48; then went on to preside as Judge of City Court. All of these and more were accomplished while serving as deacon and Sunday School teacher at Lee Street Baptist Church. He practiced law until his death in 1959.

The statesman once said of himself, "... my work, actions, conduct and untiring efforts on behalf of my clients and people of Georgia, my friends have nick-named me 'Hell Bent' Edwards. I am red-headed, red-blooded, and have been fighting all my life and intend to keep on fighting for the people of Georgia. My clients and contingents know me as 'Hell Bent'; the preacher knows me as 'Heaven Bound'; and the ladies know me as 'Honey Boy.'"

The first generation's passion for freedom under the law and community service would visit into the second, third, and fourth generations of this remarkable family. They are worthy of a seven volume hard back biography.

The second generation began with the late Hobart Baird Edwards, Jr., who began his practice in 1949 as a graduate of the University Of Georgia School Of Law. Junior spent his forty-two year career in criminal defense, domestic relations and in general civil practice. An army veteran of World Word II, he served as the State Service Officer of

the Department of Veterans Services and in the American Legion. He and his wife, the late Marie Howell Edwards, raised three sons; teaching them honesty, good lawyering, hunting, and fishing.

The first son of the third generation debuted in 1943. A graduate of John Marshall Law School, H.B. Edwards, III began practicing in 1968. Criminal defense has long been his forte. He has represented clients in all courts, most of which never met the newspapers, but some have been highly publicized. An exemplary attorney, H.B., III has scores of capital murder (death penalty) cases to his credit.

The second son of the third generation is John Kent Edwards, Sr. A 1970 graduate of Walter F. George School of Law, he served as Solicitor of Lowndes County State Court from 1976-1984. Thereafter, he turned 180 degrees into private practice. And in defending those charged with crimes—not in their prosecution. Kent became the first Public Defender to serve the Southern Judicial Circuit, representing the indigent. He retired in 2014.

William Daughtery Edwards is the third son of the third generation. While quieter and younger than his brothers, William's devotion to the practice of law is without reproach. Since graduating from Woodrow Wilson School of Law in 1982, his primary practice has been criminal defense, real estate and probate matters. He shares the second generation's affection for hunting and fishing.

The fourth generation consists of the Honorable John K. Edwards, Jr., who is Chief Judge of Lowndes County State Court, and John Gee Edwards, who practices law at the family firm.

Judge Edwards never actually practiced law at 108 East Valley. But from early fascination of granddaddy Junior's model car and boar's head wall mount that are situated in the building, to teen-age years of typing accusations for daddy Kent, he has spent many days at the family firm. It prepared him for where he is today. Before election to the State Court bench, he served as Solicitor-General and Judge of Valdosta Municipal Court (City Court). A 1992 graduate of Walter F. George School of Law, he speaks with tender gratitude for his place in the family's history. He is a member of Crossroads Baptist Church and Valdosta Rotary Club.

Gee Edwards is H.B., III's son and has yet to reach the age of forty. A 2002 graduate of Georgia State University College of Law, his work includes criminal defense, plaintiff's personal injury cases and juvenile law. Gee is a court-appointed advocate for children who are depended due to



Kent Edwards, John Edwards, and William Edwards; Standing: Gee Edwards and H. B. Edwards III.



neglect. His wife, Samantha Magis Edwards, is an attorney for the Department of Family and Children Services.

The Edwards family recently granted leave to Valdosta Magazine for snooping at 108 East Valley and asking many questions about their history. Memorabilia of long ago law books, photos, newspaper clippings, and aged legal documents grace the walls and antique furniture.

The sights were met with fascination; the anecdotes with genuinely deep listening noises.

We learned that while defending a tenant farmer, the first generation once had been jailed in Cook County for contempt of court. Apparently, his keen oratories and passion for defending the poor would not allow him to remain seated even when strongly admonished by the judge. Opposed to paying the \$25.00 fine on matter of principle, he opted for a night on the jailhouse cot. When word reached Valdosta that their beloved Hell Bent had been jailed, a motorcade traveled to Adel to fetch him home. When the

crowd surrounded the jail, he calmed them by promising he had been treated kindly at the hands of the Cook County Sheriff.

The family speaks with deep respect for the late W. J. Gibbons; a man whose camaraderie and influence meant much to the first two generations. And they speak fondly of a time when the traffic would be blocked from 108 East Valley so those seeking public office could speak to crowds from the rear of a flat-bed truck.

As part of their own oratory training, when the third generation was underfoot with a group gathered around their grandfather, he would hand them over dollar bills for reciting rhymes with clarity. This activity caused their mother to fret. The rhymes were, apparently, not suitable for the youngsters.

Yet the oratory skills of the present generations of 108 East Valley are excellent. No voices of a bull, but the first generation's vow to help the poor, the orphans and the widows is still intact. **VM**

REGISTER OF PRACTICING ATTORNEYS						
Lowndes COUNTY, GEORGIA						
Date Registered	NAME	ADDRESS	Admitted to Practice Law		How Admitted Examination, Diploma in County	OTHER ENTITLES
			Place	Date		
1873/04	H. B. Edwards III	Valdosta, Ga	Lowndes County	June 1901	Examination	
1873/04	Gee Edwards	Valdosta, Ga	Lowndes County	June 1901	Examination	
1873/04	John Edwards	Valdosta, Ga	Lowndes County	June 1901	Examination	
1873/04	William Edwards	Valdosta, Ga	Lowndes County	June 1901	Examination	
1873/04	Kent Edwards	Valdosta, Ga	Lowndes County	June 1901	Examination	
1873/04	H. B. Edwards Sr.	Valdosta, Ga	Lowndes County	June 1923	Examination	
1873/04	Gee Edwards	Valdosta, Ga	Lowndes County	June 2001	Examination	

This is a photo copy of the "E" page in the Lowndes County Register of Practicing Attorneys. Every member of the Edwards family that has practiced law in Lowndes County signed this document after each was admitted to practice in Lowndes County. The earliest signature is H.B. Edwards, Sr. who signed in 1923 and the last one is Gee Edwards who signed in 2001.