

In Memoriam
Edward James Goff
February 6, 1878 – August 18, 1942



Memorial Services
Hennepin County Bar Association
Minneapolis, Minnesota
1943

1878—EDWARD JAMES GOFF—1942

Edward James Goff was born in Janesville, Waseca County, Minnesota, on the sixth day of February, 1878. His parents were John B. Goff, born in Belfast, Ireland, April 23, 1829, and Margaret Goff (formally Miss Margaret Joyce) of Faribault, Minnesota, who settled in Waseca County in the year 1877.

The life story of John B. Goff is in itself one of adventure and settlement in pioneer history. He came to America when he was 11 years old and settled near Hartford, Connecticut. In 1845 he ran away from home and sailed the seven seas as a merchant man for a period of three years and then enlisted in the United States Navy. As a sailor he visited practically every country on the globe and when his term of enlistment expired he went to Venezuela where he participated in the Venezuelan revolution. Later he fought in three distinct rebellions in Central America. After his return to America he assumed charge of a wagon train bound from St. Louis to California. Although this wagon train was repeatedly attacked by Indians, Mr. Goff saw the convoy safe through to San Francisco. In San Francisco he enlisted in the United States Army and later once more in the Navy. He was discharged from the Navy in New York the day Fort Sumter was fired upon, whereupon he hastened to the recruiting office and enrolled as a member of the 69th New York Infantry commanded by Col. Corcoran—a part of Meagher's famous Irish Brigade and participated in every engagement of his regiment and at Fredericksburg in the last charge of the Irish Brigade he was badly wounded by a piece of shell which tore his arm from wrist to elbow. Later he received two other wounds and was honorably discharged from service for physical disability.

He was a man of great strength and the four sons who survived him were men of unusual physique. They were Edward James Goff, Emmett John Goff, Frank Goff and Arthur Goff. One daughter, Mrs.

James Andrews of Minneapolis, also survives him. To his war time comrades John Goff was known as “Cast Iron Jack”.

We alluded briefly to the history of John B. Goff for the sole purpose of showing the background of his illustrious son, Edward James Goff. He, too, was moved by the spirit of achievement and adventure. As a typical American boy at work and play Edward James Goff entered the field of athletics in the early days of “sand lot baseball leagues”, being naturally adapted to the romance and achievement so loved by his forebears. After attending public schools in Janesville, Minnesota, and graduating from its high school he entered professional baseball in year 1900 as a twirler for the Pacific Northwest League and did mound duty with the Tacoma and Portland clubs. It is reported that scouts had their eyes on him and were about to select him for some of the top baseball leagues in the East when he terminated his career in baseball by accepting a position as telegraph broker in a grain firm in the city of Minneapolis, Minnesota. This work later brought him into the management of various grain offices in the Dakotas and Canada.

This spirit of romance and achievement inherited from his sturdy Irish forbearers pulsed through his blood and forced him, so to speak, to look for further achievement along the lines of orderly government and law. Thus he accepted a clerkship in the office of the Clerk of District Court of Hennepin County in 1905.

On December on December 24, 1907 he married Tena Cliffgard from Grafton, North Dakota at Chicago, Illinois. She survives him. Mr. and Mrs. Goff lived in the city of Minneapolis for one year after their marriage and then moved to St. Louis Park, where they built a home and lived until Mr. Goff’s death. These two were more than lovers, more than man and wife—they were pals. As far as is known to any one of their thousands of friends, not one word of criticism or misunderstanding ever passed between the two. Their life was a benediction to themselves and to everyone that knew them.

A short time after he became a member of the Clerk of District Court's staff he was elevated to the position of chief clerk of that office. He worked and studied industriously and became highly efficient in his duties and soon gained pronounced information and insight into the various ramifications of the departments in that office, and into the significance of legal documents involved in the practice of law and required to be filed. This made him an outstanding advisor of young and beginning attorneys who invariably when they became "stumped" in respect to the orderly filing of such documents consulted him and in return received courteous and competent direction and advice. There is a host of lawyers, many of them members of this Bar, who gained courage from meeting and talking to him, and who now carry the memory of him with affection and holy reference.

In 1911 he enrolled as a student of law in the Minneapolis or Minnesota College of Law. After his graduation and admission to the practice of law in the State of Minnesota, he was appointed Assistant County Attorney of Hennepin County by William N. Nash. He was reappointed by Floyd B. Olson, successor to Nash in 1920. His success in the trial of criminal cases was phenomenal. In 1930 he was elected County Attorney of Hennepin County, an office he held until his death August 18, 1942.

He was a man with a large frame which caused him to tower over his rival attorneys. His size and commanding personality together with his courtesy and ability made him a personage long to be remembered in the annals of court room battles.

The roster of men convicted and serving time as a result of Mr. Goff's prosecution sounds like reading from the underworld's "Who's Who." For instance there are Connors and Bernstein, Hopkins Bank Robbery; Ray McConnell, Penn Avenue Bank Robbery; John Carroll, Liberty State Bank Robbery; Roy Lane, Geo. Stauffner, Albert Soroco, Gongoll, Kenneth W. Palmer and a host of others who might well be classed as big time big shots at the lower levels. Aside from prosecutions

Mr. Goff devoted a great deal of time and effort in his attempt to get laws before the various state legislatures prohibiting the sale and manufacture of machine guns. On numerous occasions he sought a city ordinance which would restrict the sale of firearms and cartridges within the city limits. He was an ardent supporter of change in our present statutes to make penalties more severe for the man who makes crime a business than for the first offender.

He was a member of the Elks and Masonic lodges and the Hennepin County and Minnesota Bar Association.

In habit and home life he was a man of few wants. His diversion consisted mostly in reading books, principally biographies, and going to the movies. He never drank liquor and never took part in any of the so-called immoderate pursuits of life. In judgment he was extremely broad-minded and sympathetic with the faults and difficulties of other people, and in action just and merciful—but hated hypocrisy. He was a great leader and organizer. By words and conduct towards his assistants he would inspire them to give their utmost to the service of the public. He would have a word of praise for any little achievement accomplished by one of his assistants and he would never criticize them for any mistake of judgment.

Perhaps no other person owes more to Edward James Goff than your biographer. The reason why I should be the first person to be appointed Assistant County Attorney upon Mr. Goff's election is somewhat difficult to understand. It means but one thing to me, that is, that he gave me my biggest, perhaps my first real chance in life. He became like a father to me, and it is with the utmost veneration, love and respect that I write these words of farewell until we again shall meet, when all of us have crossed the bar.

Per M. Larson

Photographs of Edward J. Goff from the Minneapolis Newspaper
Photograph Collection of the Hennepin County Library.*



Hennepin County Attorney Edward J. Goff
Date of photo: January 13, 1931.

* The photograph on the first page was taken on December 12, 1935.



Hennepin County Attorney Edward J. Goff
Date of photo: January 13, 1931.



Daniel F. O'Brien, Joe Hallman, Mayor William A. Anderson
& Edward Goff.

Date of photo: April 25, 1932.

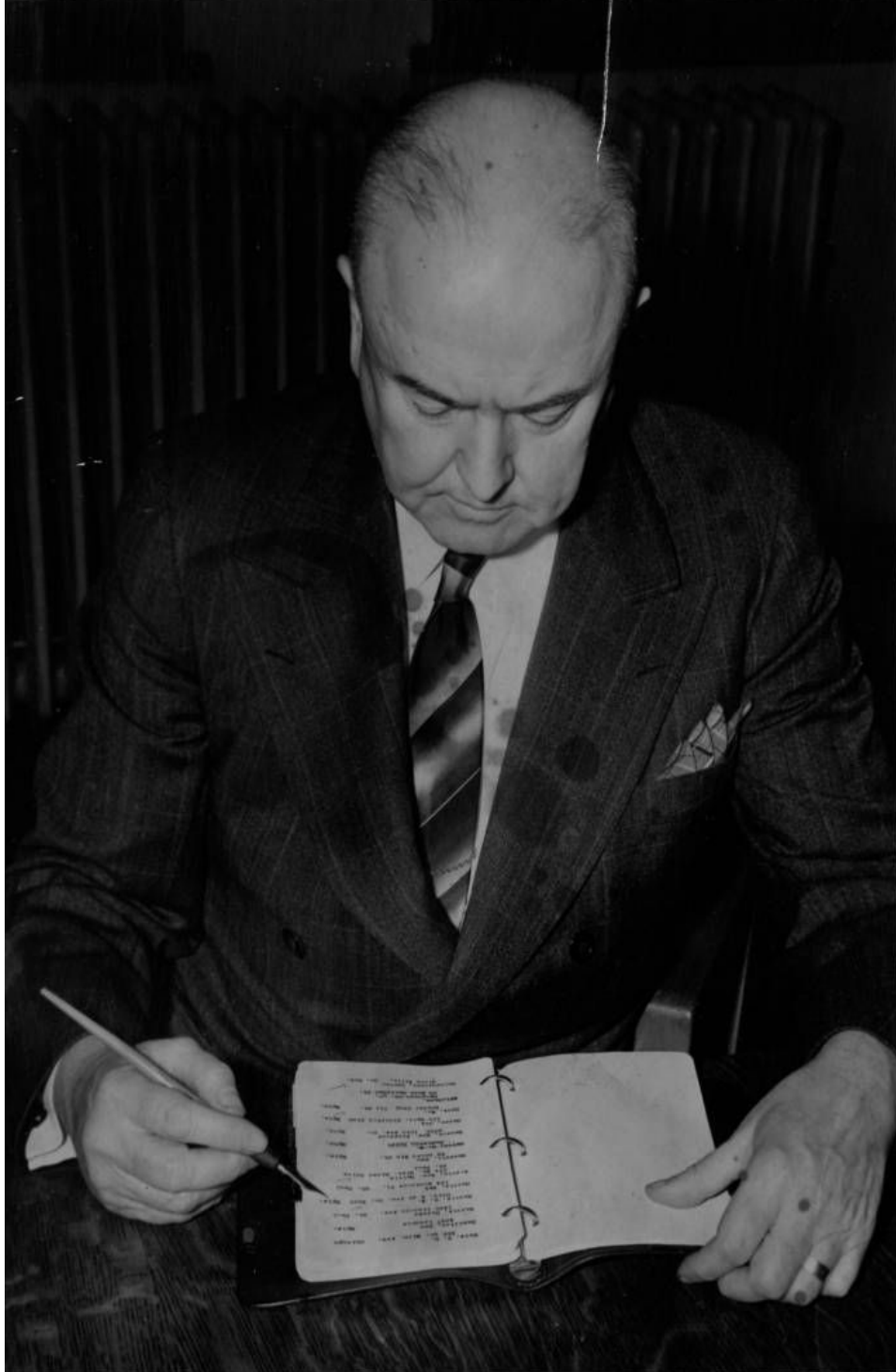
Source: Minneapolis Tribune,
Minneapolis Newspaper Photograph Collection,
Hennepin County Library.



Hennepin County Attorney Edward J. Goff

Date of photograph: January 3, 1933.

Source: Minneapolis Newspaper Photograph Collection,
Hennepin County Library.



County Attorney Goff examines “Deauville Club Little Black Book.”

A little black book listing 350 names believed to be those of the clients of the Deauville Club was confiscated during a gambling raid. Goff checks off names while preparing a list of witnesses to call to learn more about the establishment.

Date of photo: December 3, 1938.



County Attorney Goff is up to bat for the ceremonial first pitch at the
Minneapolis Millers baseball home opener at Nicollet Park.
Date of photo: April 29, 1932.



County Attorney Ed J. Goff's Office
Newspaper reporters are barred from entering the stenographic department
during the grand jury's investigation into vice, gambling and liquor.
Date of photograph: January 21, 1940.



County Attorney Edward J. Goff and Judge Vince A. Day
Date of photo: January 4, 1938.

Posted May 20, 2021.