

**INTERVIEW BY KAREN AVERAGE AND LISA DOUGLAS OF JUDGE GESELL
FOR CIRCUIT NEWSLETTER
FEB. 1991, AS EDITED BY JUDGE GESELL**

Judge Gerhard A. Gesell is an active and illustrious member of the District Court bench, as well as a devoted, longtime resident of Washington, D.C. At the same time, he maintains a farm in Loudoun County, Virginia, contributes his time and expertise to legal and educational programs, and manages to escape, for rare moments of peace, to an island retreat in Maine.

Judge Gesell was born in Los Angeles in 1910 and raised in New Haven, Connecticut; his father was a professor at Yale University and an eminent physician and child psychologist. Judge Gesell graduated from Phillips Academy, Andover, and returned to New Haven to attend Yale. He continued his education at Yale Law School and received his J.D. in 1935. Judge Gesell spent his summers earning part of his college and law school tuition by sailing boats. He took time to visit and "walk across Europe" as well. At Yale Law School, he directed the Legal Aid Bureau; during those years of widespread financial adversity, over 1800 clients received assistance.

Upon graduation, Judge Gesell moved to Washington, D.C. for "six months experience...I haven't decided if I've had six months experience yet," he quips. He accepted a position at the Securities and Exchange Commission, where he worked in various legal capacities for five years. In 1936, Judge Gesell married Peggy Pike. He now says, "We are still married...our golden wedding was some time ago." Judge Gesell comments: "I haven't done much shifting around," in reference to his years of residence in Washington, D.C. and his enduring marriage.

In 1940, Judge Gesell left the SEC to join Covington & Burling as a partner. He remained at the firm until his appointment to the Court in December 1967. During his years at Covington & Burling, Judge Gesell was a litigator, and now admits he occasionally misses the excitement a trial lawyer experiences in a hard-fought case. He also served as Chief Assistant Counsel for the Joint Congressional Committee on the Investigation of Pearl Harbor Attack (1945-1947) and Chairman of the President's Commission on Equal Opportunity in the Armed Forces (1962-1964). Judge Gesell notes, "I have had 27 years of public service and 27 years of private service," and has operated in all branches of the government. Judge Gesell credits Doris Brown, his secretary, for her skill in helping the management of his cases and who takes full blame for his mistakes. Doris worked with him for fifteen years at Covington & Burling, and accompanied him to the courthouse when he was appointed to the bench.

Judge Gesell enjoys the atmosphere of the courthouse; he has long held an "interest in the court system" and in the "history of the Circuit." He recalls the restructuring of the D.C. Court system in the 1960's. As chairman of the judicial conference committee monitoring the reorganization, he recalls working with Judge Wald, Judge Pratt, Judge Flannery, Judge June Green

and Judge Parker, among others, who were then leaders of the Bar. "The people who were brought together on that committee" worked together on the bench as well; they shared "interest in the court system, and the reorganization brought several of us to this Circuit."

An active member of the community before coming to the bench, Judge Gesell made a particular contribution in the area of education. "I've had a lot to do with education all my life," he remarks. Judge Gesell has taught classes at the University of Virginia Law School and lectured at Yale Law School. In addition, he served as Chairman of the Board of Saint Alban's School for Boys and on the board of the Madeira School for Girls. Judge Gesell also served on the board of Children's Hospital.

Judge Gesell considers Washington, D.C. his home. His grandfather practiced law in the District, and he himself has been a member of the Bar for over fifty years. "I love Washington," he says, and asserts he has long been and continues to be an advocate of Home Rule.

Nevertheless, Judge Gesell does not neglect his Virginia farm. He and his wife raise cattle and hogs, and grow soybeans, corn, hay and wheat. Those who enjoy honey can sample some of Judge Gesell's special brand; he is a beekeeper and tends to sixteen hives.

While not at work as a judge or a farmer, Judge Gesell enjoys spending time with his wife, Peg, and their two children Peter Gerhard Gesell and Patricia Pike Gesell. Peter is a political figure in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and has long worked with the mentally handicapped. Peter has three children: Sabina, who attends Vassar College; Alexander and Justine, who are students in Germany. Patsy lives in New York and works for a computer company.

Judge Gesell is an avid reader; he recently completed Hedrick Smith's The New Russians and Thomas L. Friedman's From Beirut to Jerusalem, and enjoys Tony Hillerman's detective novels as well. When asked about his hobbies, Judge Gesell notes "three hobbies I don't have: I don't talk to newspapers, I don't give speeches, and I don't write articles."