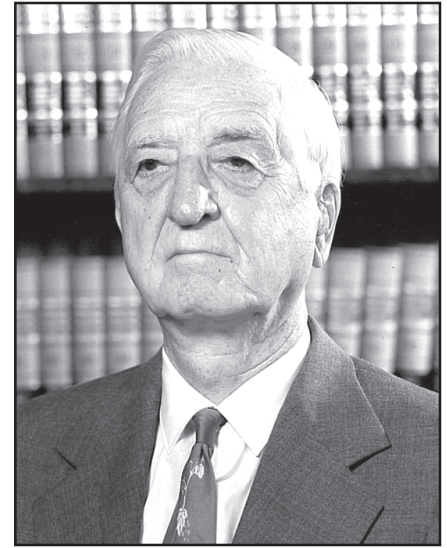


3 Generations



All photos provided by the Kitchens family.



Graydon K. Kitchens, Sr.

The Kitchens: Three Generations Providing Legal Services in Minden Since 1926

By Katherine Tonnas

There has been a Kitchens providing legal services in Minden since 1926. It began with the firm of Kennon and Kitchens and has grown to the current firm of Kitchens, Benton, Kitchens & Black as more generations of Kitchens' lawyers joined the practice. The firm celebrated a milestone in 2000 when it opened an office in Bossier City, the first geographic expansion in the firm's 80-plus-year history.

The family's patriarch, Graydon K. Kitchens, Sr., was born on Jan. 28, 1903, in Trout, La. He graduated from Trout High School (one of 16 members of the graduating class). His father worked in a sawmill and he worked in the same sawmill as a young man. In 1919, he began studies at Louisiana State University. While there, he was a member of the ROTC and a cheerleader for LSU athletics. He graduated in 1923.

His son, Graydon, Jr., talked about his father's cheerleading activities. "LSU had a particular cheer that used a curse word

in it and the student body loved that particular cheer. However, Colonel Boyd, who was president of the university at that time, called my father on the carpet about that cheer and made my dad come to his office and wait a long while before he would be seen," he said. "When Colonel Boyd saw my dad, he told him, 'You will desist using that cheer.' My dad told Colonel Boyd that he was a representative of the student body and that the student body loved that cheer, so he had no choice but to continue to use the cheer. Colonel Boyd was very angry, and my dad fully expected to be expelled from the university because of the fact that he stood up to Colonel Boyd. However, Colonel Boyd never said another word about the cheer, and my dad continued using the cheer throughout that year. He was somewhat surprised at being able to finish the year as a cheerleader, not to mention as a student," he added.

Upon his graduation, Graydon, Sr. taught school for a brief period of time at Summerfield, La., in order to earn money

to attend law school. He graduated from law school in 1926.

During his years in the ROTC, Graydon, Sr. developed a friendship with Robert F. Kennon who was from Minden. Kennon had returned to Minden to practice law. He and Graydon, Sr. formed a law partnership in 1926 (Kennon and Kitchens) and continued the practice until 1956.

During that time, Kennon was elected mayor of Minden, then was elected district attorney for Bossier and Webster parishes. Kennon then was called to duty in World War II. After his army service, Kennon was elected to the 2nd Circuit of Appeal as a judge. In 1952, Kennon was elected governor of Louisiana. Gov. Kennon then appointed Graydon, Sr. as chair of the Louisiana Tax Commission, which required Graydon to attend numerous commission meetings in Baton Rouge.

"I heard my father say on occasion that that appointment was one of the worst things that ever happened to him.



Graydon K. Kitchens, Jr.



Paul E. Kitchens



Graydon K. Kitchens III

He literally lost his law practice because he was always going to Baton Rouge to meetings and was not available for his clients in Minden,” Graydon, Jr. said.

Graydon, Jr. recalled an interesting event about Graydon, Sr.’s chairmanship of the Louisiana Tax Commission. “When Gov. Kennon was defeated for re-election by Earl Long, Mr. Long called upon my dad to resign as chairman of the Tax Commission. However, his term of office for his appointment had not yet expired. My dad always believed that there were two categories of people: Longs and Anti-Longs. My father was the latter. Therefore, when Gov. Long asked my dad to resign, I can remember a family conference at our home discussing whether or not he should accede to Long’s request,” he said. “We all agreed that we would be proud to have a father who stood up to the governor. Therefore, my dad refused to resign and he was later addressed out of office by the Louisiana Senate. I am not sure, but I have always thought that my father was one of the first appointed officials ever to be addressed out of office by the Legislature. We were always proud of him for his courage, and I still am.”

After Graydon, Sr. was no longer chair of the Louisiana Tax Commission, he resumed his practice of law as a sole

practitioner in Minden. He practiced in that manner until 1965, when his son, Graydon, Jr., came to practice law with him after serving as law clerk for federal judge Ben C. Dawkins, Jr. in Shreveport for one year. Graydon, Jr. had graduated from law school in 1964 and was admitted to practice in the fall of 1964.

Father and son practiced together as Kitchens and Kitchens until 1970 when the firm merged with John Benton, Jr. and became Kitchen, Benton and Kitchens.

In 1974, Graydon, Sr.’s younger son, Paul E. Kitchens, joined the firm. In 1978, Graydon, Jr. was elected judge for the 26th Judicial District (Bossier and Webster parishes), a position he held until his retirement in 1996. He then rejoined the family firm.

During the 1970s and early 1990s, the firm had several partners and associates. Rick Warren was a partner in the firm Kitchens, Benton, Kitchens & Warren from 1985-95.

In 1988, Graydon, Sr. died, just two years before the firm reached another milestone: the third Kitchens generation coming on board to practice with the firm. Graydon K. Kitchens III, son of Graydon, Jr., joined the firm in 1990 and became a partner in 1993.

Clinton C. Black joined the firm in 2000 and became a partner in 2002. The

firm now is known as Kitchens, Benton, Kitchens & Black.

Graydon K. Kitchens, Jr. is a 1954 graduate of Minden High School. He received his BA degree in 1958 from Louisiana State University, where he was a Distinguished Military Graduate, president of the Baptist Student Union and a member of the LSU baseball team. He was a lieutenant in the U.S. Army/Infantry Branch from 1958-60. He earned his JD degree in 1964 from Louisiana State University Law School (Order of the Coif, Omicron Delta Kappa, associate editor of the *Louisiana Law Review* and president of the Law School Student Bar Association). He is a member of LSU Law Center Hall of Fame.

Graydon, Jr. served as Minden city judge from 1976-78. In 1978, he was elected judge for the 26th Judicial District, serving as chief judge for seven years. He was re-elected without opposition in 1984 and 1990 and retired in 1996. He served on the Executive Committee of the Louisiana District Judges Association and chaired the Louisiana Judiciary Commission.

Paul E. Kitchens is a 1963 graduate of Minden High School. He received a BA degree in 1967 from Louisiana State Uni-

versity and his JD degree in 1971 from LSU Law Center. He was a member of Omicron Delta Kappa and Phi Kappa Phi and the Distinguished Military Graduate in 1967. In law school, he was a member of Phi Delta Phi, National Legal Fraternity. He was a captain in the U.S. Army, Judge Advocate General's Corps, from 1971-74 and served as a senior trial attorney for the U.S. Army. He was named Minden's Outstanding Young Man in 1976 and 1996 and served as president of the Minden Chamber of Commerce, Lions Club and Jaycees.

Paul Kitchens has served as attorney for the villages of Dixie Inn, Doyline, Heflin and Sibley, is a past president of the Webster Parish Bar Association and a member of the Louisiana Association of Trial Lawyers and American Association of Trial Lawyers.

Graydon K. Kitchens III received a BA degree from Baylor University and his JD degree from the University of Mississippi School of Law. He is a member of the Bossier Parish Bar Association and the Webster Parish Bar Association, serving as president in 1994-1995. He served as a member of the Louisiana State Bar Association's House of Delegates from 1991-95 and is a member of the Louisiana Trial Lawyers Association. He is a past member of the Minden Lions Club and the South Webster Parish Chamber of Commerce.



Graydon K. Kitchens, Sr., left, and Louisiana Gov. Robert Kennon. Kitchens delivered a Louisiana Tax Commission report in 1954.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Katherine Tonnas is a solo practitioner. She is a 1994 cum laude graduate of Southern University Law Center, where she served as a member of the Law Review and as a teaching assistant. In 1980, she received a doctorate from Vanderbilt University in education administration. From August 1994 to February 2003, she was a judicial extern for Judge Helen "Ginger" Berrigan, United States District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana, and for the local school board. Dr. Tonnas has been a member of the Louisiana Bar Journal Editorial Board since 2001. (1108 Lake St., Natchitoches, LA 71457)



Robert Kennon, left, and Graydon Kitchens, Sr. in his LSU cheerleader sweater.