Members of the Cunningham family have been practicing law in Natchitoches since 1860. Six generations of Cunninghams have held judicial and political office in Louisiana, ranging from Louisiana attorney general, district judge, state legislator and federal magistrate judge.

The first Cunningham to practice law in Louisiana was John Hamilton Cunningham, who moved from South Carolina to Louisiana around 1841, settling in Homer in Claiborne Parish. He moved to Natchitoches in 1860, where he practiced law until his death in 1886 at the age of 74. A man of many talents, he was also a physician, a planter, a preacher, a merchant and the editor of *The Robeline Reporter*.

Two of his 12 children, Albert Baxter Cunningham and Milton Joseph “Joe” Cunningham, became lawyers. Albert, born in 1847, was both a lawyer and newspaper editor in St. Louis and Baltimore and also served on a tax appeals court. His older brother Joe, born in 1842, stayed in Louisiana. Joe was born in DeSoto Parish and was teaching in Cloutierville in Natchitoches Parish at age 16. When the Cunningham family moved to Natchitoches in 1860, he began studying law in his father’s office.

Joe’s legal studies were interrupted by the Civil War. He served in the Second Louisiana Infantry. He survived the war, resumed his studies, and at the age of 25 was admitted to the Louisiana bar in 1868. Joe was a prominent member of the Democratic Party during Reconstruction, serving as party chair in Natchitoches. After the war, he served as police chief, district attorney, state representative, state senator and delegate to the state constitutional convention of 1879. In 1884, he was elected attorney general for the state of Louisiana. After four years as attorney general, he practiced law in New Orleans as a partner in the firm Cunningham & Lyons while retaining land holdings in Natchitoches Parish. He was re-elected as attorney general in 1892 and served in that capacity until 1900. While attorney general, he participated in the infamous case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, helping write the brief on behalf of the “defendant in error,” the trial judge who fined Plessy, a man who was one-eighth Negro, for riding in the white car of a train.

Joe’s plans to run for governor were derailed in 1900 by a case of yellow fever. He recuperated in Natchitoches, then returned to New Orleans to serve as public administrator of Orleans Parish.
He practiced in New Orleans until a few months before his death in 1916 at the age of 74.

Two of Joe's sons, William Tharp "Bill" Cunningham and Charles Milton Cunningham (Milton), followed in their father's footsteps in the legal profession. Bill, born in 1871, studied law at Tulane Law School and was admitted to the bar in 1904. He was elected district judge in 1912 and died in 1946. His brother Milton was born in 1877. He was educated at the Louisiana State Normal (now Northwestern State University) in Natchitoches and began his career as a teacher. According to a published biographical sketch, as a teacher he was a "complete success, winning the support of the authorities wherever he taught and of the State Department of Education." He decided, however, to give up teaching and study law. His private practice in Natchitoches flourished, and local residents asked him to run for district judge at the age of 29. He was narrowly defeated, but he was successful in other areas of politics, serving as a state senator, police juror and delegate to the Louisiana Constitutional Convention of 1915. He was also editor of the local newspaper, The Natchitoches Times. Milton died in 1936 at the age of 59.

Bill Cunningham died without children, but Milton left a son to carry on the family legal tradition. William Peyton Cunningham, born in 1902, graduated from LSU Law School in 1924. He served in the Louisiana House of Representatives from 1932-40 and chaired the Natchitoches Parish Democratic Executive Committee until his death in 1971. He also served on the Natchitoches City Council for 12 years and was active in local historic preservation efforts.

William's daughter, Lallah Hill Cunningham, did not practice law, but she married a lawyer, DeWitt T. Methvin, Jr., shortly after he graduated from LSU Law School in 1950. He practiced insurance and corporate defense in Alexandria, La., until his death in 2005 at the age of 80.

But William's son, William Peyton Cunningham, Jr., became the fifth generation of Cunninghams to practice law in Louisiana. Peyton graduated from LSU Law School in 1960 and practiced in Natchitoches until his election as judge to the 10th Judicial District Court in Natchitoches. He was re-elected five times, retiring in 1996 at the age of 62. He has been active in his retirement, serving as judge pro tempore and ad hoc in district courts in north and central Louisiana. During his career, he served as president of the Natchitoches Parish Bar Association, a member of the Louisiana State Bar Association House of Delegates and a member of the executive board of the Louisiana District Judges Association. He was appointed by the governor to serve on the State Risk Review Panel, and he also was appointed by the Louisiana Supreme Court as a commissioner to the Louisiana State Bar Association Committee on Bar Admissions.

William's grandson and granddaughter comprise the sixth generation of Cunningham legal eagles, although neither practices in Natchitoches. One of Peyton's sons, Drury Blanchard Cunningham, practices corporate and insurance defense with the firm of

Like her great-great-great-grandfather John Hamilton Cunningham, Mimi Methvin has many talents. She holds a second-degree black belt in American Shotokan Karate, teaches kickboxing, paints and is the family genealogist and historian.

Will there be a seventh generation of Cunningham lawyers? Methvin said her two children “swear they’ll never go to law school.” Her cousin Drury Cunningham said his two children, ages 5 and 8, “have shown no leanings yet.” But neither of them felt pressure to become the sixth generation of Cunningham lawyers. Drury said for him, after completing a finance degree at LSU, he “trick-}

led over to law school; it just kinda happened.” Drury said that growing up, he never saw himself as the son of a lawyer. His father was elected to the bench when he was in second grade so he was always saw himself as the son of a judge. Despite the long family history of Cunninghams on the bench and holding other elective offices in Louisiana, Drury has no plans of running for office, judicial or other-

wise. “I am as apolitical as you can imag-

ine,” he said.

Methvin said family history had nothing to do with her career choice. Going to law school was something she was comfortable with; it seemed like a logical thing to do. She admitted, however, that subconsciously the family background may have influenced her. “You pick up what’s in your history,” she said.

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