

# The Chaffin Legacy

*“His loyalty is to the school. It is his everything.”*

*- Ethel Chaffin*

Verner Franklin Chaffin is an important part of the University of Georgia School of Law on many levels – student, professor and alumnus.

He grew up not far from Athens in Toccoa, graduating as valedictorian of Toccoa High School. After attending Emory University, he transferred to UGA and received his bachelor's degree with honors in 1939. It was then that his long association with Georgia Law began as he pursued his law degree at UGA.

He was an outstanding law student who graduated with a LL.B. *summa cum laude* in 1942. He excelled academically and showed his leadership potential while studying law. He had the highest grade point average of his freshman law class and was presented with the Harrison Company Award for the student having the highest scholastic average during his three years of law school. He was his junior class president, a director of law clubs and associate editor of the *Georgia Bar Journal* (an early version of Georgia law school journals published by the State Bar of Georgia). While a student at the university, he was also a member of Sigma Nu, Phi Delta Phi, Phi Beta Kappa, Sphinx, Omicron Delta Kappa, Blue Key, Phi Kappa Phi and Gridiron. He held various leadership positions in these organizations.

In 1943, Chaffin was commissioned as an ensign in the U.S. Navy and served during World War II and the Korean War as an intelligence officer and Japanese linguist. After the war, he served as attorney for the U.S. Department of Justice in Washington, D.C.

Chaffin began his distinguished teaching career in 1947 at the University of Alabama. After 11 years in Alabama, he returned to Georgia Law in 1958 as a full professor. While serving as a UGA faculty member, Chaffin was awarded a Sterling Fellowship for graduate study at Yale University School of Law where he earned a J.S.D. in 1961. Despite overtures from other schools, Chaffin left UGA only twice – in 1974 and 1985 to teach at the University of North Carolina and the University of Alabama respectively. In 1969, Chaffin was appointed to UGA's Fuller E. Callaway Chair of Law, a position he would hold for the next 20 years.

He specializes in the fields of wills and trusts, federal estate and gift taxation, future interests, estate planning and administration of decedents' estates and trusts. Because of his interest in probate



*Chaffin's portrait which was presented to the law school in 1993.*

law reform, he has been a prolific writer for legal publications and has been of counsel in several landmark cases concerning fiduciary law. He is the author of several books and innumerable articles including *Georgia Annotations to the Restatement (Second) Trusts*, *Studies in the Georgia Law for Decedents' Estates and Future Interests* and *The Rule Against Perpetuities in Georgia*.

His first interest was always the students. He believed that it is here that the legal profession had the greatest potential for improvement. The popularity of his classes attested to his ability to inspire and effectively motivate students toward the highest ideals of the legal profession. In *A Unique and Fortuitous Combination, An Administrative History of the UGA School of Law*, it is stated that a favorite among student imitators at law school libel parties was "Shakey" Chaffin being seen knocking on a grave asking a deceased client the meaning of a codicil in his will.

To this day, Chaffin remains an expert in his areas of law, speaks to professional organizations and regularly consults attorneys. He has been recognized for his contributions to the legal field by receiving the Author's Court Award for Outstanding Legal Writing by a member of the State Bar of Georgia and being the first recipient of the Verner F. Chaffin Career Service Award "in recognition of a distinguished career of outstanding, unselfish and dedicated service to the Fiduciary Law Section of the State Bar of Georgia, its members and the citizens of Georgia." Chaffin is an academic fellow of the American College of Trust and Estate Counsel, a member of the Lawyers Foundation of Georgia, and a life member of the American Law Institute and the Fellows of the American Bar Foundation. He is also an active member of the Athens community and currently serves as the vice president of the Athens Historical Society.

In 1989 when Chaffin retired, the Verner F. Chaffin Endowment Fund that supports an annual cash award for a Georgia Law student who earns the highest grade in the school's introductory fiduciary law course was established. Later this same year, he was given the title of Callaway Chair of Law Emeritus. To this day, he maintains an office in the school's Dean Rusk Hall. In 1993, his portrait was presented to the law school by alumni and friends.

As an alumnus, he served as secretary to the Law School Association for 29 years after which he was given the title secretary emeritus. In addition, he has been the champion organizer of his law class reunions for numerous years. A testament to his dedication to this task is that his class, the Class of 1942, holds the record for the most class reunions over a 60-year period.

At the age of 84, Chaffin is still a very active alumnus who has already been recognized by the LSA for his undying commitment to furthering the mission of the school with the Distinguished Service Scroll Award. Chaffin and his wife of nearly 60 years, Ethel, can often be found at law school events.

In summary, Chaffin has been very active and has excelled in every way he has been called upon in service to the law school. In recognizing his deep commitment to Georgia Law, Ethel Chaffin wanted to ensure that he is forever linked to the law school by establishing an endowed professorship in his name, the Verner F. Chaffin Professorship of Fiduciary Law. As the sole donor for this professorship, Ethel said she desired to honor her husband and make certain he is always remembered. "His loyalty is to the school. It is his everything."

Both Chaffins have a long history of contributing to the University of Georgia. Together, they have contributed to the following units: the School of Law, the Georgia Museum of Art, the Dance Department, the Drama Department and the Performing Arts Center. They have both been recognized several times at the university level for their service to the institution.

The inaugural holder of the Verner F. Chaffin Professorship of Fiduciary Law is another outstanding graduate of Georgia Law, Sarajane Love.



*Chaffin receiving a Younger Lawyer Section (now Younger Lawyer Division) award from a member of the State Bar of Georgia.*



*Chaffin at a law school reception for departing Associate Dean and Professor Sam Davis in 1997. His wife, Ethel Chaffin, is in the background.*



*At the 2001 Rescheduled Reunion held in September 2002 were (left) Quintus (J.D.'81) and Robbie Sibley with (right) Ethel and Verner Chaffin. Photo courtesy of The Picture Man, Inc.*