

## Kelso Law Offices

Founded: 1850

Location: 7 East Main Street, New Albany (1850–1910); corner of Bank and Spring Streets (1910–15); Elsby Building, Spring Street (1915–74); 409 Bank Street (1974– )

Jonathan Kelso opened his law firm on East Main Street in New Albany in 1850. For almost 150 years five generations of the Kelso family have maintained a practice in New Albany. Almost all of the Kelso counselors have been active in the community.

Jonathan Kelso was a native of Pennsylvania. He quickly became popular in his adopted town. Three years after he set up his practice he was elected to the city council, and two years later he was appointed mayor.

James V. Kelso joined the firm in 1856, four years before his father's death. James had been born in Madison and had attended Asbury College, later renamed DePauw University in honor of a wealthy New Albany resident. He served as the principal of the New Albany school for four years before deciding to join his father in the practice of law. Law school was not required to become an attorney at the time. Instead, one became an apprentice, or "read law," under a senior attorney. James studied under both his father and John M. Wilson. When the Civil War erupted, James enlisted on the Union side and was assigned the post of quartermaster. After the war he held various public offices, including stints as both the county attorney and the city attorney.

James's son, Charles Kelso, became part of the family tradition in 1883. By the time Charles came of age, graduation from a department or separate law school was almost a necessity. He matriculated at the New Albany Business College, and after graduation he attended the University of Louisville's law department. With law degree in

hand he immediately joined the family business, remaining in the firm until his death on the eve of World War II. Charles's son, Robert R. Kelso, followed in the steps of his father in 1921. He continued to practice into the late 1960s.

Four oil portraits hang above the bookcases at the firm created by Jonathan Kelso, reminding the present generation of its debt to the past. Robert A. Kelso, a native of New Albany and a graduate of the University of Chicago, was the fifth generation of Kelsos to practice in the Floyd County city, and he continued the tradition into the late 1990s. Like previous generations of the Kelso clan, he served his profession and his community well. He sat on the State Board of Law Examiners for a decade, beginning in 1979. In 1972 he began renovating an old house on Bank Street to serve as the Kelso offices. The old house came replete with a spiral staircase and wood-burning fireplaces, and it continued to be used as the office into the late 1990s. In 1998 the firm continued to provide counsel in the general civil law.