



Ralph R. Kitchen - *Business, Industry and Professions*

Ralph Ross Kitchen was born in Bangor, Maine, on July 23, 1881, the son of Samuel Smith Kitchen and Marada (Ada) Jackson Kitchen. He went to public schools in Bangor and then was connected with Sterrett and Company, New York builders, working as an estimator, and later with James Stewart and Company of New York. Following his success with that company, he was promoted to the position of superintendent and later manager of the firm's Pittsburgh office. In that capacity, he came to Wheeling to supervise the construction of a portion of the Ohio Valley General Hospital.

Kitchen founded the R.R. Kitchen Contracting Company in Wheeling in 1913 and was also President of the R.R. Kitchen Lumber Company, President of the American Spiral Spring and Manufacturing Company of Pittsburgh, President and General Manager of the Wheeling Structural Steel Company, and director of the Dollar Savings and Trust Company, Wheeling Savings and Loan Company, and the Central Union Trust Company. He was also for a time Vice President of the J.E. Moss iron works.

His first jobs with his own company, the Sterling Products building and the National Bank of West Virginia, established him as a leading contractor. His business continued to grow until it became the largest in the state and one of the largest in the tri-state area. A partial list of the structures he built includes the following out-of-town buildings: the agricultural building and women's dormitory at WVU in Morgantown, the Steubenville Bank and Trust Company, Peoples' National Bank in Steubenville, Follansbee High School (now Middle School), Weir High School, the Masonic home in Parkersburg, Fokker Aircraft Corporation and the Triangle Conduit Company in Glen Dale, and several large buildings for the Weirton Steel Company.

In Wheeling, he built the Edward Stifel home (now the Stifel Fine Arts Center), Triadelphia High School (now Middle School), Ritchie School, the nurses' residence at Ohio Valley General Hospital, part of the old Wheeling Hospital, the Central Union Building, Wheeling National Bank, the Riley Law Building, Citizens Mutual Trust Building, the Rex Theatre, Quarter Savings and Trust Building, part of Stone & Thomas, Coeey-Bentz Furniture Store, the Hazel Atlas factory building, the Wheeling Tile Co., the Exposition Hall at the State Fairgrounds, the flooring of the Bellaire Toll Bridge, the Christian Scientist Church, the Twelfth Street Garage and annex, the White Palace at Wheeling Park, Saint Joseph's Cathedral, the Scottish Rite Cathedral, and the Capitol Theatre.

He was also called a "forceful figure" in Wheeling's various civic and communal undertakings and was for a number of years a director and chairman of the Finance Committee of the Wheeling Chamber of Commerce and a director of the Ohio Valley General Hospital. He was also a member of the Masonic Orders, including the Shrine and Royal Order of Jesters; was an Elk; a member of the Fort Henry Club, of which he was chairman of the House Committee of the Pittsburgh Athletic Association; was a director of the Wheeling Country Club; and was a member of the Associated Contractors of America.

On October 9, 1930, he was presented the President's Cup, a well-known trophy of the Wheeling Country Club, for his championship golf. Two days later, on October 11, 1930, he died in Maple Springs, New York, on Lake Chautauqua.

In 1905, he married May Rebecca Van Graveness. They had one daughter, Flora May, and a son, Ralph Ross, Jr., called Ross.