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The history of Baker McKenzie is a story of imagination, determination and hard work. For more than 60 years, thousands of men and women have joined in the great adventure of creating and nurturing our unique global organization.

1901

Russell Baker is born into a farm family in Portage, Wisconsin in the US. At age 12 his family moves to Texas and in 1917 to New Mexico, where young Russell learns Spanish and develops a budding passion for diverse cultures.

1920

Unable to afford the fare, Baker rides for days in cold cattle cars to enroll at the University of Chicago. He works as a boxer at county fairs to pay his tuition. He also meets his wife, Elizabeth, a daughter of missionaries who grew up in Mexico.

1925

With a law school friend, Baker opens Baker & Simpson, the first of what will be several law firms bearing his name. He focuses on helping Mexican nationals and builds a practice specializing in immigration, bankruptcy, criminal and tort law.

1928

Baker brings Corrine Rice, an appellate lawyer, into the firm — an early indicator of his lifelong interest in diversity. Four years later, Rice becomes a name partner in Baker's new firm, and her name stays on the door until 1949, five years after her death.

1933

Abbott Laboratories, a leading pharmaceutical company based in Chicago, begins a push to expand internationally. Baker will soon add it to his fledgling corporate practice, where it remains a major client to this day. It is the start of the world's first truly global corporate practice.

1942

The US tax code is amended to encourage investment in Latin America. Baker sees an opportunity to use newly created Western Hemisphere Trade Corporation provisions and, subsequently, foreign-base companies, to help companies reduce their tax liabilities. It was the start of what would become one of the world's largest tax planning practices.

1948

Baker and John McKenzie meet by chance while sharing a cab home. Baker describes his vision of creating an international law firm, and within a year they join forces to establish the firm of Baker's dreams. McKenzie took charge of Russell's flourishing litigation practice, one of the leading practices in the City of Chicago, permitting Baker to dedicate his time to the development of the international practice.

1949

Baker McKenzie is formed. It has four lawyers and a secretary, and fees total US\$75,000. Just over 50 years later, Baker McKenzie will have more than 3,000 lawyers worldwide and revenues of more than US\$1 billion.

1955

Russell Baker returns to the University of Chicago to complete his law degree. He had not received enough credits in his earlier studies for a J.D. before taking the bar examination for economic reasons. (At the time, a degree was not required for bar admittance.) He receives his J.D. with the much younger Law School Class of '55. Baker McKenzie begins its first operation outside the US — in Venezuela. Baker's son Donald moves to Caracas to work with Ramon Diaz, who two years later will become the first non-US partner in the emerging Firm.

1957

Six European nations sign the Treaty of Rome, and the Firm opens an office in Brussels, capital city of the European Community. It is part of a rapid growth period for the Firm that will see the opening of 17 new offices, including eight in Europe, in a decade.

1958

Zurich becomes the Firm's sixth location. Generous tax treaties help its roster of corporate clients grow six-fold over the next seven years, even as a furor erupts in the US over Baker McKenzie's tax advice.

1960

Over the objections of the IRS and US Treasury, the courts uphold Baker McKenzie's strategies for using Western Hemisphere Trade Corporations and foreign-base companies provisions to help companies reduce tax liabilities. Two years later, Congress steps in to block the use of tax foreign-base companies, but increasingly complex tax laws create more work.

1961

Faced with limited prospects for advancement due to an English law prohibiting more than 20 partners to a firm, Terence Lane joins Baker McKenzie to open the Firm's ninth location worldwide. London eventually will become the Firm's largest.

1962

A leading international trademark lawyer is recruited to the Firm. Horst Werder helps begin an Intellectual Property practice, a natural addition to services being offered to US companies beginning to do more business abroad. Early clients include Estée Lauder Cosmetics, whom the Firm still represents today.

1962

John McKenzie dies suddenly of a heart attack at 49. By now, the Firm has 85 lawyers in 13 locations worldwide. Total fees are US\$2.5 million.

1963

The Firm expands to the Asia-Pacific region with the start of operations in Manila and Sydney the following year. Today, the Asia-Pacific practice is widely considered among the best in the rapidly developing region.

1964

The Firm celebrates its 15th anniversary at the 1964 Annual Meeting in Chicago. Forty-nine partners attend. Total cost US\$30,000. Two years later, the first Annual Meeting outside the US will be held in London.

1970

The Firm wants to begin operations in San Francisco, but Bar rules require firms to use the names of lawyers who have passed the state bar or who are dead. After taking a review course and a couple of tries, Baker passes the California bar exam and the office opens. He sets the record as the oldest candidate to pass the examination, which was reputed to be the most difficult one in the union.

1972

A four-year associate, Eugene Theroux, accompanies a US congressional delegation to China and begins to travel there regularly for clients. Nine years later, as a partner, he will give lectures on commercial law for Chinese business people (many of whom will go on to hold important positions in government and business) under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Trade.

1974

The Firm opens an office in Hong Kong only to learn that people believe a ghost inhabits the building. An eight-foot-tall statue imported from New Guinea is posted outside the door, and the ghost disappears. The office thrives, becoming one of the largest in the Firm.

1977 Bangkok office established by Mr. John W. Hancock and Mr. Suchint Chaimungkalanont.

Baker McKenzie ranks top among the law firms in the first annual rankings by the US-based National Law Journal. It will continue to hold that position for more than 25 years. Wulf Döser is elected chairman. He becomes the first non-US partner to lead the Firm.

1978

Russell Baker dies on September 28, the same month and day as his founding partner John McKenzie had died 17 years earlier. Baker McKenzie's attorney roster reaches 500. Baker's death also coincided with the date of the Firm's annual meeting in Paris, the only one he did not preside over prior to his death.

1979

An associated office* in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, is opened. Long accustomed to working with both civil law and common law issues, the Firm now adds to its capabilities an understanding of the sharia, the basic body of Islamic law that underpins many legal systems in the Middle East.

1980

The Firm hires its first director of professional development, beginning a focused effort to improve practice skills and the consistency of legal services across a far-flung global network.

1981

Baker McKenzie's attorney roster reaches 1,000 — making it the first law firm in the world to reach this size.

1987

After more than a decade of system development at the local and regional level, the Firm introduces its first global communications network. Today, Baker McKenzie's technology infrastructure is recognized as a leader among law firms worldwide.

1988

Baker McKenzie becomes one of the first international law firms in Moscow. Later the government would retain the Firm to handle the largest privatization in Soviet history, Volga Automobile Associated Works, which produced 60 percent of the cars in the Soviet Union.

1989

The Firm is the first global law firm to adopt a quality audit program. It provides for the formal inspection of each office's operations and quality assurance procedures on a triennial basis. Baker McKenzie's 2,000th lawyer joins the Firm, in Kyiv.

1997

Baker McKenzie introduces a formal Client Service Program, creating dedicated teams to ensure seamless, high-quality work for major clients.

1998

The Firm celebrates its 50th anniversary. Christine Lagarde, a French national who specialized in antitrust and labor law, becomes the first woman elected chairman of the executive committee.

1999

The Firm's roster of lawyers reaches 3,000. For the first time, global revenues exceed US\$1 billion.

2001

Baker McKenzie implements centralization of global information technology through shared service centers in North America and Asia to provide high-quality service. The Firm received the Best Global Use of IT award for its global IT achievements.

2003

John Conroy is elected Chairman of the Executive Committee. Through his vision and leadership the Firm adopts a global strategy which will result in an unprecedented growth in profitability over the next few years.

2004

Twelve former partners of Mancera Ernst & Young join Baker McKenzie's regional and global tax practices in Mexico including 65 additional tax advisers.

2005

Approximately 70 partners and other legal staff from Coudert Brothers join the Firm in New York, more than doubling the size of the existing office. For the first time, the Firm is listed as one of New York's largest law firms in the New York Law Journal's annual NYLJ 100.

2007

The Firm breaks US\$1 million mark in profits per partner, and its Talent Management Strategy is named a "best practice" by two Harvard Business School case studies.

2008

Baker McKenzie becomes the first law firm to receive the Corporate Social Responsibility Award from the Foreign Policy Association.

Global revenues exceed US\$2 billion, marking four consecutive years of double-digit growth and an 85% increase in profits per partner.

2009

Baker McKenzie opens in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

2010

Baker McKenzie opens in Luxembourg.

Eduardo Leite is elected Chairman of the Executive Committee, the Firm's first Chairman from the Latin America region.

2011

Baker McKenzie opens in Doha, Qatar.

Baker McKenzie opens in Istanbul, Turkey

2012

Baker McKenzie opens in Johannesburg, South Africa

Baker McKenzie opens in Casablanca, Morocco

Baker McKenzie opens in Lima, Peru

2013

Baker McKenzie opens in Seoul, Korea

Baker McKenzie opens in Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Russell Baker is named one of American Lawyer's top 50 innovators for pioneering ideas and initiatives that changed the world of big law.

2014

Baker McKenzie opens in Yangon, Myanmar

Baker McKenzie opens in Brisbane, Australia

An associated office* in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, is opened.

*Legal Advisors in association with Baker & McKenzie Limited

A detailed look at the Firm's history is provided in [Pioneering a Global Vision: The Story of Baker McKenzie](#) by Jon Bauman. This book, published by Harcourt Professional Education Group (Chicago), is available for purchase from [Amazon.com](#).