

Colonial Williamsburg

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Colonial Williamsburg Remembers U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor

The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation is deeply saddened by the passing of retired U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, a longtime friend of the Foundation and the broader Williamsburg community. She served on the Colonial Williamsburg Board of Trustees from 1988-2001 and then as a Senior Trustee until her death.

“Justice O'Connor was a trailblazer for women in law and played a key role in advancing civil discourse in the Court,” said Colonial Williamsburg’s President & CEO Cliff Fleet. “Her work on behalf of Colonial Williamsburg grew out of her belief that civil discourse, civics education and civic engagement were crucial elements of American democracy. We continue that legacy through our mission to share a complete story of our nation’s founding and its origins here in Williamsburg. She will be missed by the staff, donors, guests and community members she inspired during her tenure.”

Upon her retirement from the Court, O'Connor founded the Sandra Day O'Connor Institute to further the work she had begun as an associate justice and Colonial Williamsburg Board member. She also founded iCivics, an organization centered on civics education that Colonial Williamsburg continues to partner with today to provide educational resources to inspire lifelong civic engagement.

In 2011, O'Connor was awarded the Churchill Bell, the Foundation’s highest award given to those who exemplify what it means to be active, engaged citizens. “For Sandra Day O'Connor's work, it takes knowing that her exemplary life and career marked a turning point — after more than 200 years — when the highest court of the earth's greatest democracy began to benefit from the perspectives of half its citizens,” said then-Foundation President & CEO Colin Campbell during the ceremony. She was introduced by then-U.S. Supreme Court Justice and Colonial Williamsburg Trustee Anthony Kennedy.

Born on March 23, 1930 in El Paso, Texas, she spent her childhood on her family’s ranch in Arizona and was admitted to Stanford University at age 16. She attended Stanford Law School in 1950 and graduated after two years instead of the usual three.

O'Connor was the last U.S. Supreme Court justice to have held an elected office. In 1970 she was elected to the Arizona State Senate. In 1975 she was elected to the Superior Court of Maricopa County and was appointed to the Arizona Supreme Court of Appeals four years later.

In 1981 she became the first woman appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court, nominated by President Ronald Reagan. She retired in 2006 after more than two decades on the Court.