

Florence K Murray - October 21, 1916 - March 28, 2004



Newport, RI - Florence Kerins Murray, 87, of 2 Kay Street Newport, a retired Rhode Island Supreme Court Associate Justice, died Sunday, March 28, 2004 at Newport Hospital Newport, RI.

Justice Murray was the wife of the late Paul F. Murray. A practicing attorney for fifty years and the United States Attorney for the District of Rhode Island from 1977 to 1981, and the daughter of the late John and Florence MacDonald Kerins.

She lived in Newport her entire life. Judge Murray graduated from Syracuse University in 1938, and Boston University Law School, in 1941.

She began her professional career teaching in a one-room schoolhouse on Prudence Island. She was a member of the **Women's Army Corps** from 1942 to 1946, attaining the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. She received numerous military awards, including the Legion of Merit in 1944. At one point in her military career she served as Adjutant for all Women Army Corps training centers and was responsible for the supervision of 20,000 women.

In 1951 she was appointed by the United States Secretary of Defense as a member of the National Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Service.

She was among the first women in Rhode Island to sit for the Bar Exam. She passed the Massachusetts Bar Exam in 1942 and the Rhode Island Bar Exam in 1946.

She was a member of the Rhode Island, Massachusetts, United States District Court for the District of Rhode Island, United States Supreme Court, United States Tax Court, and the United States Court of Military Appeals Bars.

She began her law career in private practice in 1947. In 1952 she and her husband practiced under the firm name of Murray and Murray.

She was a member of the **Rhode Island Senate** from 1948-1956 and a member of the **Newport School Committee** from 1948-1957, serving as chairperson from 1957-1957.

In 1950, starting what was the precursor to the Rhode Island Family Court, she was appointed a Master by the Rhode Island Superior Court and heard divorce cases.

In 1956 Governor Dennis J. Roberts appointed her an **Associate Justice of the Rhode Island Superior Court**.

She was the first woman to serve as a judge on any court in Rhode Island.

She served as an Associate Justice on the Rhode Island Superior Court from 1956 to 1978.

In 1978 Governor J. Joseph Garrahy elevated her to Presiding Justice.

In 1979 she was elevated to an **Associate Justice of the Rhode Island Supreme Court** by election of the Grand Committee. She was the first woman to serve on the Court.

As an Associate Justice of the Rhode Island Supreme Court she authored over 500 opinions. She was selected on two occasions as one of five finalists recommended to the President of the United States for openings on the United States Court of Appeals for the First Circuit.

In 1990, the Newport County Courthouse was renamed the **Florence K. Murray Judicial Complex** in her honor.

After serving the state of Rhode Island for forty years as a judge, she retired in September of 1996.

She received 5 presidential appointments to serve on various commissions, including an appointment as a member of the Civil and Political Rights Committee of Presidential Commission on the Status of Women from 1960 to 1963.

Judge Murray was most recently appointed by President William J. Clinton to serve as a board member of the State Justice Institute. Over the course of her life she served on countless councils, committees, boards, foundations and institutes.

She received over 40 honors and awards recognizing her contributions to Rhode Island State Government, the Judiciary and acknowledging the many 'firsts' she accomplished as a woman. She received **11 honorary Doctorates** from colleges and universities.

- She was a Fellow of the American Bar Foundation and a past member of the Board of Editors of the American Bar Association Journal.
- She was a past chairperson of the Credentials Committee of the National Conference of State Trial Judges and the American Bar Association.
- She was a Director of the American Judicature Society and a member of the Judges Advisory Committee to the Standing Committee on Ethics and Professional Responsibility for the American Bar Association.
- She was a member of the Joint Subcommittee on Judicial Discipline of the Standing Committee on Professional Discipline of the American Bar Association. In 1996, the Rhode Island Commission on Women named her 'Woman of the Year'.

- She was the founding chairperson of the Rhode Island Committee for the Humanities.
- She founded the Newport Girls Club and served on the Boards of many civic organizations, including the Rhode Island YMCA, Syracuse University, Bryant College, Boston University, Salve Regina College, the National Judicial College in Reno, Nevada, Touro Synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island Blue Cross Blue Shield, the National Conference of Christians and Jews and the Presidents Council at Providence College.

She was a graduate of Rogers High School and a communicant of St. Mary's Church in Newport.

Judge Murrays life reads like a treatise on public service. She was recognized as a trailblazer for women's accomplishments at both the state and the national level. She shattered many glass ceilings in her career and had a reputation for advancing women's issues in a manner that was neither abrasive nor shallow.

One of her great joys during her forty years of service as a judge was working with the more than 35 law clerks that served in her chambers during her years as an Associate Justice of the Rhode Island Supreme Court. She advised the law clerks that served in her chambers that she did not hire 'yes' men and woman but wanted individuals that challenged the Courts interpretation of the law.

Two of those past law clerks now serve as judges in the Rhode Island Judiciary. Although her professional career evidenced an exceedingly sharp intellect she had a reputation for her 'commonness'.

She was a gifted public speaker who often recognized the power of humor in making her point. She was an 'unofficial' Newport historian and could begin a lecture on the history of Newport and its politics at the slightest urging.

She was an avid walker, both while on the Supreme Court and in her retirement. As a result of these walks she often accepted rides back to her office or home from 'familiar strangers' whom she had impacted in her many years as a judge.

On one occasion she accepted a ride back to her office from an individual she had long before sentenced to the Adult Correctional Institute. She later commented on how 'polite' he was during her ride back to her office.

She is survived by her son and daughter in-law Paul F. and Beth Ann Ryden Murray of Algonquin, IL.

Her funeral was held on Friday, April 2, 2004, at 9:00 AM from the Memorial Funeral Home, 375 Broadway, Newport, with a Mass of Christian burial at 10:00 AM in St. Marys Church, Spring Street, Newport. Burial was private.

Donations in her memory may be made to the Florence K. Murray Scholarship Fund, C/O Anthony Piccirilli, 10 Sweet Fern Trail, Saunderstown, RI 02874 or to the Boys Girls Club of Newport County, 95 Church Street, Newport, RI 02840.