



William (Bill) Henry Richard Charles

September 3, 1927 - April 26, 2025

It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of William (Bill) Henry Richard Charles, BA, LLB, LLM, LLD (Hon), QC, on April 26, 2025, in his 98th year.

He was born on September 3, 1927 in Montreal, Quebec, son of the late William Arthur and Phyllis (nee Beck) Charles. He is survived by his wife of 66 years, Dorine (Clark); his children Susan (Craig Dix), Timothy (Andrea Lindsay), Catherine (David Pitman) and Christopher (Tanya Lorimer). He will be missed dearly by his grandchildren Michael and Lindsay Dix, James and Christopher Charles, Jessica and Sara Pitman, and Meghan and Isabelle Charles.

Bill was a loving husband and father, with a great sense of humour and he enjoyed spending time with his family and friends at the cottage in Boutilier's Point where many gatherings took place overlooking Cowlow Cove. He loved aviation, was in the Air Cadets in high school, served in Germany for the US Air Force during the Korean Conflict, made many model airplanes and obtained his license to pilot ultralight planes in the 1980's. He enjoyed playing hockey with many of his colleagues and his two sons until he was seventy-five years young.

Bill obtained a BA from Sir George Williams College (1949), an LLB from Dalhousie University (1958), an LLM from Harvard University (1960), an LLM from the University of Michigan (1970), was appointed Queens Counsel in 1983 and an Honorary Doctor of Laws (LLD) was conferred by Dalhousie

University in 2001. He became a faculty member of the Dalhousie University Law School in 1960 and after various appointments became Weldon Professor, Dean of the Faculty of Law from 1979-85. He retired from full-time teaching in 1994 and was appointed Professor Emeritus upon full retirement in 1998. He was a Visiting Professor of Law at the University of Victoria Law School during its inaugural year (1975-76) and at the Vrije University in Amsterdam (1998-2008).

Bill was very involved in Court Reform and served as President of the NS Independent Law Reform Commission from 1990-1998. He was appointed Special Counsel in 2008 and retained that title when the Commission was decommissioned and incorporated into the Institute for Access to Justice and Law Reform. He was also involved in several Judicial Administration projects in Ethiopia and the Caribbean.

His interest in legislation covered issues from recycling and environmental clean-up (Tar Ponds) to same-sex marriage rights and his latest research into marginalized people being underserved by small claims courts. He had a life-long commitment to legal education and reform, and authored many academic publications throughout his career, as evidenced by his most recent article titled "Access to Justice in the Nova Scotia Small Claims Court 1980-2022" being included in the Vol. 47 No. 1 (Spring 2024) issue of the Dalhousie Law Journal, published at the age of 96.

Cremation has taken place, there will be a Celebration of Life at a future date. Messages of condolence can be sent to www.harboursidecremation.ca. In lieu of flowers, for those who wish to pay tribute to Bill's incredible legacy and long life in legal education and law reform, the family suggests donations to the Dean William H. Charles Fund at the Schulich School of Law, Dalhousie University. Donations will support a research fund, accessible to students and faculty dedicated to law reform. Link for donations: <https://giving.dal.ca/williamhcharles> or to a charity of your choice.

Tribute Wall

SB

“ Suzie Bee lit a candle in memory of William (Bill) Henry Richard Charles



Suzie Bee - April 28 at 02:03 PM

SB

“ RIP, from the class of '90. You were awesome, we will never forget you.

Suzie Bee - April 28 at 01:58 PM

LJ

“ My condolences to the entire family. Though I never really knew Granddad, I did have a very lovely conversation with him in 2021 at my best friend Sara Pitman's graduation party. He reminded me to seek out the things I love in the future, and at that time having no direction after my undergrad, he some great words of wisdom for me. I am thinking of all you folks during this time. ❤️ -LJ

Lauren Jodrey - May 10, 2025 at 11:50 AM

MC

“ Dear Dorine and family, Willard and I send our deepest and sincere condolences to you all. Even though we only got to spend time with you and Bill at your cottage in Boutilier’s Point, most often at the “Dirt Road Party “, we always enjoyed our conversations and found Bill to be very engaging and humble. He was always interested in what was going on in the neighbourhood and was a wonderful summer neighbour. We know he will be missed by many. Sincerely,
Willard & Maryjean Cavicchi.

mj cavicchi - May 07, 2025 at 04:05 PM

DR

“ Dear family members;
I attended Law School immediately after Bill ended his term as Dean and never had the pleasure of taking a course from him. However, my relationship with Bill was much more fundamental - sharing an hour of ice time with him (along with Tim and Chris of course) at St. Mary’s University together with an equal amount of time in the dressing room, every Wednesday night for 8 months or so over many years. The Bill Charles I got to know that way was a kind, funny and generous person who could laugh at our many imperfections and applaud our rare successes. He was a good person to spend time with. Hi again to Tim and Chris.
David Roberts

David Roberts - May 05, 2025 at 07:55 PM

RP

“ To the Charles family,
I am very sorry for your loss. Torts was my favourite course in first year Law at Dal, due in no small part to Professor Charles. He was a great teacher, had a good sense of humour, and made class enjoyable. I still remember many of the cases that we studied under his direction.

Thank you, Professor Charles.

Rob Purdy

Class of '76

Robert Purdy - May 05, 2025 at 01:56 PM

PT

“ I was so lucky to have Dean Charles as my first year Torts professor. His sense of humour, empathy and above all, a first rate legal mind was a windfall for a newbie. Thank you Dean Charles. My deepest condolences to his family and friends.

Penny Tham

Penny Tham - May 05, 2025 at 01:43 PM

MG

“ Thank you , Professor Charles . You brought out the best in us . You were the spirit of the essence of the class of '74. Deborah Gass

Mary Deborah Gass - May 04, 2025 at 08:59 PM

MK

“ *What a joy it has been to be neighbours with Bill and Dorine both on Beech Street and in Boutilier's Point. Although our visits with Bill were infrequent, we always enjoyed his wit and keen interest in our lives and community. We will miss you, Bill.*

Our condolences to Dorine and the family.

Maria Kuttner and Warren Nethercote

Maria Kuttner - May 04, 2025 at 12:21 PM

DK

“ Bill Charles was not one of my profs when I was in law school but fifteen years later he taught me a lot about law and public policy.

Bill played several key roles in the renewal of the justice system prompted by the Marshal Commission. I was in charge of policy in the AG's Department as it then was and got to know him when we asked him to set up the independent Law Reform Commission. Financially, it was a shoestring operation but with his hard work and adroit recruitment, it punched well above its weight.

So a year later, as part of the same justice overhaul, we wanted to modernize the courts, I knew Bill had the combination of stature, scholarship, and diplomacy to lead an independent TASK FORCE (pictured below) necessary. not only to do the thinking, but to create the political momentum necessary for reform to go through.

I got to know him well as we travelled to public meetings in every corner of the province. He was an able chairman and amiable traveller. I appreciated the attention and respect he gave each presentation, whether it be from a judge, lawyer, local politician or member of the public. I also appreciated his shrewd and occasionally wry observations about some of what we'd heard once we were back in the car.

For good reason the task force's report was known as "The Charles Report" as he did the bulk of the thinking and writing but always after leading a healthy discussion among the other distinguished members, none of whom was backward about putting their views forward. It was a really healthy environment for ideas.

In the end the recommendations were adopted by the Legislature and the courts of Nova Scotia are structured today as envisaged in the Charles Report.

Bill and I kept up a friendship in the years that followed. We'd have lunch every few months. I'd call him from time to time for his

thoughts on something or other, and of course he remained active in the law reform long after I retired from government. Sadly, after I moved away, we lost touch – my fault entirely. I'm bad that way. I saw him one last time perhaps six or seven years ago when he cheerfully told me he was working on the history of law reform in Nova Scotia. If I live into my 90s I only hope I have that attitude and energy.

In my experience in public law the best contributors are not the flamboyant advocates (although they have a role) but the thoughtful ones who find the core issues and suggest a solution in such simple terms that everyone thinks it's been their position all along. Bill did that as well as anyone I ever met.

*My sincere condolences to Dorine and family.
- Doug Keefe*



Doug Keefe - May 04, 2025 at 08:14 AM



“*Professor Charles, thank you. The memories of the lighted squib, the ski lift ticket limited liability wording, the neighbour principle, the man on the Clapham omnibus, these memories bring you to life for me, front and centre soaking up your wisdom, thoughtfully provided. I was fortunate to have you as my prof. Sincere condolences to your family. Hugh*

Hugh Paton - May 03, 2025 at 07:11 PM

AS

“ I have wonderful memories of "Professor Charles" during my Torts and Environmental Law courses at Dalhousie in the 1990s. I valued his insight tremendously and continue to draw from that education. My sincere condolences and thoughts are with those who he leaves behind. A thoughtful, kind, and important person to so many.

Alison F Strachan - May 03, 2025 at 01:54 PM

LD

“ TO DORINE and her close knit family: Please accept my condolences on the loss of Bill after a long and productive life . His intellect and humour were superior and greatly appreciated by both Tim and me although we didn't know him well. He will be missed by you all , but may you be sustained by all your happy memories .
Sadly, Linda Dean

Linda Dean - May 03, 2025 at 12:32 PM

TW

“ My sincere condolences to Doreen and family for your loss. A very fine gentleman, Bill was highly regarded by so many people throughout his long life. Indeed, it was always a pleasure. to talk to such a kind and friendly person. As Dean of Law, Professor of Law and Legal Scholar Bill further enhanced the great reputation of the Law School at Dalhousie University. What a legacy of dedication and service to treasure.

Tom Weeks - May 03, 2025 at 10:29 AM

DM

“ *Bill was my professor in Constitutional Law. His humility, kindness, brilliance and humour left me in awe of him. I will always be grateful for the confidence he bestowed upon this somewhat doubtful and insecure student. Rest in peace Bill, knowing that you guided so many in the profession.*
David Meadows, Class of 1974.

David M Meadows - May 03, 2025 at 08:33 AM

RB

“ *"When an old man dies, a library burns to the ground." Dean Charles changed the landscape of the Nova Scotia legal system, in training generations of lawyers and impacting both Justice and the administration of justice. He also had that rare blend of razor intellect and practicality that made what he did, work. Nova Scotians (and Canadians, and in lands abroad where he served), whether or not directly in the legal industry, are the better for him having passed our way. Thank you. RAB (Dalhousie '91)*

Raffi Balmanoukian - May 03, 2025 at 07:28 AM

SL

“ Dear Family.

Sorry to read about your loss.

It was a pleasure having Bill as a Law Professor a number of years ago.

He was a gentleman, knowledgeable, and knew how to make learning fun.

It was nice to see him in the years to follow at Neptune Theatre periodically.

Please accept my sympathies.

Sincerely, Sean Layden (Dartmouth)

sean layden - May 03, 2025 at 06:57 AM

JR

“ Dear Cathy, Dave, Sarah and Jessica, we are so sorry to hear of your father/grandfather's passing. He certainly had a long and interesting life and we know you will have many happy memories to share. Thinking of you all at this time. Joyce and Bruce

Joyce Roberts - May 01, 2025 at 02:27 PM