

Colonial Williamsburg

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Colonial Williamsburg Remembers Bob Wilson



Bob and Marion Wilson in 2006. Image courtesy of The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.
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WILLIAMSBURG, Va. (Jan. 27, 2022) – The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation is deeply saddened by the passing of Bob Wilson, former member of the Foundation’s Board of Trustees, founding member of the Raleigh Tavern Society, Churchill Bell recipient and longtime friend.

Bob and his late wife Marion’s leadership and service began more than 40 years ago, helping to advance many of the foundation’s initiatives. Additionally, their philanthropic investment in Colonial Williamsburg’s mission set Colonial Williamsburg on a course to become a powerhouse for educational resources and transformed the instruction of history in classrooms across the country.

In 1989, then-Colonial Williamsburg President Charles Longworth engaged Bob Wilson in the foundation’s vision to dramatically improve the teaching of America’s founding era. Bob saw this as an opportunity to help teachers bring history alive and inspire students in his home state of California. By providing high quality professional development training for educators using primary source materials, students are engaged with American history in new and inclusive ways, helping them understand the backbone of democracy and how our shared history reflects in our present. Since its inception, more than 13,000 teachers — including more than 3,000 from California — have participated both onsite and online, reaching millions of students. In

2019 the institute was renamed the Bob and Marion Wilson Teacher Institute of Colonial Williamsburg to honor their contributions to this important initiative.

“Bob Wilson deeply understood the value of history education,” said Cliff Fleet, president and CEO of The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. “Along with his wife Marion who passed away in 2020, the Wilsons are known affectionately across the Foundation as the father and mother of Colonial Williamsburg’s Teacher Institute, which bears their names today. Through their philanthropy and leadership, the Wilsons were instrumental in taking the powerful ideas explored on the streets every day in the Historic Area to classrooms all over the country. Their passion continues to inspire teachers and students alike to embrace America’s founding principles in the classroom and equips them to address today’s challenges.”

Tab Broyles leads the Teacher Institute as the Peter L. and Patricia O. Frechette Director of Teacher Development.

“It is very hard to put into words the respect, admiration and appreciation that educators and I have for Bob Wilson,” said Broyles. “He had a special love for education and teachers and leaves a legacy of learning where history comes to life on the very sites where these events took place. Teachers learn and network with other educators and are appreciated for their role in sharing the diverse stories of our nation that help to shape our future because of his generosity and leadership.”

In 1993, Bob was elected to Colonial Williamsburg’s Board of Trustees, where he served until 1999. He continued his active service to the foundation as a member of the Senior Board of Trustees beginning in 1999 and the President’s Council in 2002, positions he held until his death. Marion joined him on the President’s Council in 2002, and their son, Tom and daughter-in-law Paula, followed in their footsteps, joining the President’s Council in 2015. The President’s Council fosters greater public awareness of Colonial Williamsburg’s leadership role in preservation, research and historical interpretation. Members are invited by the organization’s president.

“The entire community of The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation mourns the passing of Bob Wilson,” said Carly Fiorina, chair of Colonial Williamsburg’s Board of Trustees. “He and his wife Marion have been leaders in our community for over 40 years. Thanks to Bob and Marion’s vision and generosity, generations of students more clearly understand our nation’s origin story and the power of the ideas that formed America.”

It was also in 2002 that Bob and Marion Wilson were awarded Colonial Williamsburg’s highest honor, the Churchill Bell. The award is given to those who show outstanding leadership and stewardship and exemplify what it means to be active and engaged citizens. “With vision and benefactions, Bob and Marion Wilson extend the outreach of The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, strengthen its educational work, improve its facilities, augment its collections and persuade others to follow their examples,” a statement by the foundation said at the time.

In addition to their philanthropic investments in the Teacher Institute and Raleigh Tavern Society, Bob also served as co-chair of the foundation’s first fundraising campaign, *The Campaign for Colonial Williamsburg*, alongside former trustee Nicki Tanner. The campaign was completed in 2006 after raising more than \$500 million in support of the foundation. He and Marion also contributed to the *Colin G. and Nancy N. Campbell Distinguished Presidential Chair* endowment, which supports the foundation’s president and CEO, and established the *Bob and Marion Wilson Family Endowment for Colonial Williamsburg’s Art Museums*, naming the

introductory gallery. Additionally, the Group Arrivals Building was named in their honor in recognition for their contributions to the renovations of the Visitor Center complex.

Bob and Marion Wilson's legacy will live on throughout many areas of Colonial Williamsburg's educational mission, ensuring *that the future may learn from the past*.

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The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation preserves, restores and operates Virginia's 18th-century capital of Williamsburg. Innovative and interactive experiences highlight the relevance of the American Revolution to contemporary life and the importance of an informed, active citizenry. The Colonial Williamsburg experience includes more than 600 restored or reconstructed original buildings, renowned museums of decorative arts and folk art, extensive educational outreach programs for students and teachers, lodging, culinary options from historic taverns to casual or elegant dining, the Golden Horseshoe Golf Club featuring 45 holes designed by Robert Trent Jones and his son Rees Jones, a full-service spa and fitness center, pools, retail stores and gardens. Philanthropic support and revenue from admissions, products and hospitality operations sustain Colonial Williamsburg's educational programs and preservation initiatives.

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