



Historical Notes: Court Family Dynasty



Sir Charles Court and Richard Court, 2006-2007

Oil on composition board by Mary Moore

Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery

“Moore has portrayed the Courts in the Speaker’s corridor of the Parliament of Western Australia”

The Courts: first Western Australian father and son premiers

Sir Charles Court and Richard Court were the first father and son premiers in Western Australia. Sir Charles was premier for nearly eight years whilst Richard Court for eight years.

Sir Charles Court joined the Liberal Party due to ‘disturbing trends’ post-war. In 1953 Sir Charles won pre-selection for the seat of Nedlands for the Liberal party. Ironically he won with ALP preferences. He was member for Nedlands for 29 years. When Sir Charles retired in 1982, his son, Richard Court was elected the member for Nedlands at the resulting by-election on 13 March 1982. They represented the seat of Nedlands for 48 years.

In his maiden speech Sir Charles spoke of the Commonwealth-State financial relations. In 1959 Court was appointed Minister for Industrial Development, Railways and the North-West. He was instrumental to the development

of iron ore in the north-west and bauxite and mineral sands in the south-west.

Court succeeded Sir David Brand after the premier was defeated by John Tonkin's Labor Party in 1972. Court won the election with the National Country Party in 1974. Sir Charles was known for his anti-centralist views and defence of states’ rights. There were controversial issues during Court’s premiership including the Noonkanbah land rights dispute; the introduction of section 54B of the Police Act that prohibited gatherings of more than three people in public without police permission; and the closure of the Fremantle to Perth railway line.

Sir Charles was committed to arts and education with the opening of Murdoch University, restoration of His Majesty's Theatre and construction of the new Art Gallery of WA building.

Richard Court joined the Liberal Party in 1981. In his inaugural speech to the Parliament of Western Australia, Court paid tribute to his father and spoke on economic management. He held a number of shadow portfolios including resources, industrial development and Aboriginal affairs. He became opposition leader of the Liberal Party and finally premier after leading the Liberal-National coalition to victory in 1993.

Richard Court said his government ‘introduced measures aimed at reducing debt, reforming the public sector and supporting economic growth’. Court is recognised for restoring stability following the WA Inc Royal Commission. He lost government when Labor’s Dr Geoff Gallop became premier. He resigned from his seat two months later.

Charles Court, son of an English migrant plumber

Charles Walter Michael Court was born 29 September 1911 in Crawley, Sussex, England. He was the son of Walter James Court, master plumber, and Rose Rebecca Rice. His parents emigrated to Western Australia when Charles was seven months old. They arrived at Fremantle Port, 1 May 1912 and stayed with friends in Leederville.

Court was educated at Leederville and Rosalie primary schools and Perth Boys' School until he was 15 years old. After passing his Intermediate Certificate he left school. Court wanted to study law but the family had insufficient money for university fees so he studied accountancy part-time at Perth Technical College and by correspondence as an articled clerk.



State Library of Western Australia

Rose Court with sons Charles and Sydney (on chair) State Library [BA1011/1377](#)

From private to lieutenant

As a boy, Charles sold newspapers to supplement his parent's income. From 1927 to 1932 he worked as an articled clerk for an accountancy firm. In 1933 Court began practice as a chartered accountant in Perth and 50 years later he was named Australian Chartered Accountant of the Year. He was a founding partner in the accountancy

firm Hendry, Rae and Court from 1938.

In 1940 he enlisted in the army and by January 1942 he was in the Australian Imperial Force. He rose rapidly from the rank of private to officer. On 27 September 1945 he was appointed Lieutenant-Colonel. He served in the south-west Pacific including Bougainville during World War II.



Court Charles Walter Michael:

Service Record [NAA: B883, WX11125](#)

"If you're not five minutes early you're late":

Sir Charles Court

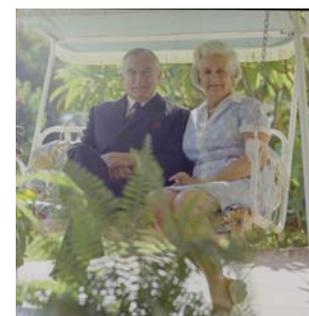
Married at Highgate Hill

On 3 June 1936 at St Albans Church, Highgate Hill, Perth, Sir Charles Court married Rita Maud Steffanoni. They had five sons. His second born son, Barry was president of the Pastoralists' and Graziers' Association. He married tennis star, Margaret Court in 1967. Rita Court died in 1992.

Court married again on 22 June 1997 to his former

nurse, Judith Mildred Butt OAM at St Stephen's Anglican Church, Serpentine, WA.

Sir Charles Court died aged 96 years on 22 December 2007 in Cottesloe after suffering a stroke earlier in the year. A state memorial service was held in Winthrop Hall at the University of Western Australia. He was cremated at the Karrakatta Cemetery. His ashes are in the Church of England section.



Sir Charles Court and his wife Rita, March 1974. State Library [BA1119/P2503-3](#)

Number 2

Richard Court, son of a Western Australian premier

Richard Fairfax Court was born on 27 September 1947 in the Perth suburb of Nedlands, Western Australia. He was the fourth son of Sir Charles Court and Rita Steffanoni.

Court was educated at Dalkeith Primary School and the prestigious Hale School from 1959 to 1963. The following year he began studies at the University of

Western Australia for a Bachelor of Commerce which he completed in 1968.

On 17 April 1970 he married Helen Margaret Dewar, daughter of Louis Roy and Barbara Beeck at St Lawrence Church in Dalkeith. They had one son and one daughter but divorced in 1977. Court later married Joanne Frances Moffat, daughter of William George and June Ellen Hood on 7 January

1989 at St Andrews Church, Claremont. They have one daughter.

Richard Court and his wife, Jo are Christians. Court was a church warden in the Anglican Church. He is currently chair of the Perth Diocesan Trustees of the Anglican Church. In another volunteer role, he is trustee of the Channel 7 Telethon Trust.



"...Richard and Richard's wife, Jo"
[ABC website](#)

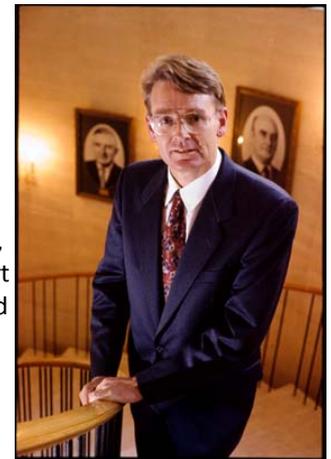
From truck driver to company director

Richard Court worked as a truck driver while studying externally. He was a tutor in industrial relations on the Pilbara 1969. From 1969 to 1970 he was a management trainee at American Motors and then Ford Motor Company in Detroit, USA. When he returned to WA he ran his own fast-food business, Sir Henry's Food Stores, from 1970 to

1974. Court was managing director of Court Marine Pty Ltd from 1974 until he entered parliament.

After leaving parliament, Court established a Consultancy: RF and Jo Court. He accepted a senior advisory role with accountancy firm KPMG. He also became chairman of Resource Investment Strategy Consultants. In 2010 it was reported that he was a consultant for Kerry Stokes'

Australian Capital Equity. He has also been chair of the engineering company GRD. He is currently non-executive chairman of the National Hire Group and a director of WesTrac Pty Ltd, two companies that are part of Seven Group (part owned by Kerry Stokes). He has also been a director of Iron Ore Holdings and Helm Wholesalers' Pty Ltd.



State Library of Western Australia

Richard Court
State Library [BA1622/167](#)

Music and sailing

Sir Charles Court's great passion was music. He was a talented cornet player. He was Junior, Amateur and Open Champion Cornet Player 1928 and Champion of Champions for all brass instruments at Tanunda, South Australia in 1930. Court played trumpet and cornet in orchestras and bands. He was also a conductor of bands including the RSL Memorial Band until 1952. He famously

performed in the orchestra pit when dancer, Anna Pavlova made one of her final Australian performances.

Richard Court's favourite pursuit is sailing. In the 1960s and 1970s he won the state Skate Class Yachting championships. As a child he built yachts on the back verandah of Cherrita, his childhood home in Dalkeith.



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RSL Junior Band, 1930 State Library [BA1163](#)



BRONZED:

Statue of Sir Charles Court on the corner of St George's Terrace and Milligan St, Perth CBD.

Photograph: courtesy of Will Russell



In 2011 a bronze statue created by sculptor, Tony Jones was unveiled on St George's Terrace in Perth to commemorate Sir Charles Court's 100th birthday.

Courts: honours and departures

Sir Charles Court was well recognised in his own lifetime for his army service, accounting and political career. The year Sir Charles retired as premier he received a knighthood. In December 1945 he was awarded the OBE (Military Division) for ensuring 'maintenance of all troops along three separate lines of communication'. In 2003 he was awarded Centenary of

Federation Medal.

Richard Court was also awarded for his service to the community. In 2003 he was presented with the Centenary of Federation Medal which was the same year he was appointed Companion of the Order of Australia (AC). The citation states it was for "service to the Western Australian Parliament and to the community, particularly the Indigenous community, and in the areas of child

health research and cultural heritage and to economic development..."

Richard Court has kept a low profile since his departure from politics. He thought it was time for his family to live in private.

When Sir Charles died in 2007, former prime minister, John Howard described Sir Charles as a 'strong and effective leader premier, a great Liberal and fine Australian'.

Sources

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