

EUGENE O'DUNNE

Retired Supreme Bench Judge Eugene O'Dunne passed away on Friday, October 30, 1959 at Ogunquit, Maine, at the age of 84 years. He was born on June 22, 1875 in Tucson, Arizona, the son of the Chief Judge of that territory. His mother was a member of a well-known family of Fairfax County, Virginia. Eugene O'Dunne came to Baltimore in the 1890's and studied law at the Law School of the University of Maryland, receiving his degree of L.L.B. in 1900. Thereafter, he conducted an exploration into South America and upon his return to Baltimore in 1903 immediately delved into politics and public life. He organized a Young Men's Democratic League and secured an appointment as an assistant State's Attorney. He left that office in 1910 and engaged in the private practice of law. During the time he served in the State's Attorney's office, he was instrumental in having the Legislature pass a law, subsequently known and quoted as the "O'Dunne Act", which permitted judges presiding in the Criminal Courts of this State to impose sentences of a lesser degree than the minimum penalties provided for. However, he kept in the public eye, running unsuccessfully for State's Attorney, on three occasions. He lectured on Criminal Law at the Law School of the University of Maryland for many years. He was against the old justice of the Peace system, claiming there was too much politics injected into the appointment of magistrates, who many times decided cases not on the facts and the law, as many appointees were not even lawyers, but on which side had the greatest

political strength. He had the satisfaction of seeing the law passed setting up the People's Court of this City, and which has now become an institution where justice prevails. Eugene O'Dunne also proposed other judicial reforms, subsequently enacted into law, which reorganized the Attorney General's office and did away with the practice of the hiring of private counsel to State boards and departments. He was named Chairman of a commission to study the State's prisons and many of his recommendations were adopted. He was appointed as an Associate Judge of the Supreme Bench of Baltimore City in 1926 by Governor Albert C. Ritchie to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Judge W. Stuart Symington, and served with distinction, being elected to two consecutive fifteen year terms, until 1945 when he retired, having reached the constitutional retirement age of 70 years. He resumed the practice of law, receiving many honorary degrees, but spent a great deal of his time at his summer home at Blue Ridge Summit, Pennsylvania, among his books and enjoying the companionship of his many friends, especially lawyers who visited him there.

Judge O'Dunne's first wife, Mrs. Elise M. Reardon O'Dunne, died on August 30, 1935, and he was remarried after his retirement from the Bench to his present widow, Mrs. Helen Keep O'Dunne. Also surviving Judge O'Dunne were four children, namely: Mrs. John P. Winand, Eugene O'Dunne, Jr., Hamilton O'Dunne and David O'Dunne. Shortly after his father's death, Eugene, Jr., who practiced law in Washington, D. C., passed away.

Much more could be said here of Judge O'Dunne's attainments, his loss to his family, and friends and the community, but inasmuch as the members of the Supreme Bench will undoubtedly hold a memorial meeting to honor the memory of their former colleague, at which time full and complete coverage will be made, it is felt that to elaborate more at this service might detract from that memorial service.

By the Committee