

---

## **BRIEFING NOTE**

---

### **About Peter J. Bassnett**

#### **Life**

Peter Bassnett was born on November 16, 1933 in Sutton Coldfield, England. He survived bombing raids during the Second World War and was shipped out of the city with other children in order to be boarded in safer country homes. His childhood experiences instilled in him a sense of determination and perseverance. He won a scholarship to a boarding school. One of his first jobs was working as a construction cost consultant. Later he worked briefly as a reporter's assistant on Fleet Street in London. Peter loved books and learning. He earned a Fellowship of the Library Association of the United Kingdom by working and studying at the same time. In London he met his wife Ann. After the birth of their first daughter he moved his family to Alberta in 1966 and became a reference librarian at Calgary Public Library. He continued to work and complete his professional qualifications by writing a thesis on large municipal library boards. After the birth of his second daughter the family moved to Toronto and Peter worked as a director of North York Public Library. His career flourished and in 1975 he became the Chief Executive Officer of Scarborough Public Library. Mr. Bassnett retired in 1995. During retirement he enjoyed travelling, listening to classical music, reading, gardening and appreciating nature. He was an avid book collector and donated a large collection of books, letters, articles, videos and manuscripts on Welsh author John Cowper Powys to McMaster University in January 2005. Peter J. Bassnett died on February 23, 2008 in London, Ontario at the age of 75. He had two grandchildren.

#### **Contributions to public libraries in Ontario**

As outlined in supporting letters, Peter Bassnett played an important role in the development of public library services in Ontario. He loved books and learning and was a strong supporter of public libraries from an early age. In 1980 at the request of the Ontario government he was chosen to examine the structure of the numerous library boards and to clarify the province's role in providing public library services. He travelled to over 200 communities in Ontario during 1981-1982 and consulted widely within the public library community. There were fifteen task groups. More than 50 of his 70 recommendations were accepted. They formed a major part of Ontario's new Public Libraries Act in 1984. This Act continues to provide the legislative and regulatory framework for public library service today. The review brought together the public library community in Ontario. In addition, the review led to the development of many province-wide strategic planning initiatives such as the digitization of information. He was seen as being progressive in that he advocated for the electronic connection of all public library systems in Ontario in order to better facilitate the exchange of information.

## **Contributions to Toronto Public Library**

In 1972, Peter Bassnett moved to Toronto and worked as a library director for North York Public Library. In 1975 he became the Chief Executive Officer of Scarborough Public Library. He managed the library system through a period of rapid growth and oversaw the opening of seven new branches. He was the first Chief Executive Officer in Scarborough to regularly attend municipal department heads' meetings thereby raising the profile of the public library among municipal council. During his tenure, new technology and the provision of multilingual services in 28 languages were offered to Scarborough residents. He also saw the development of a Chinese-language catalogue that was used across Canada. In addition to supporting multilingual collections Mr. Bassnett established a staff position to develop multicultural services and programs for immigrants.

As outlined in supporting letters Mr. Bassnett's approach was about "going out into the community and talking about how the residents see the service and what they expect of it". The number of card holders and circulating items rose during his tenure. In 1998, the former public library systems amalgamated and the Scarborough system became part of Toronto Public Library.

## **Publications**

- Scarborough Public Library Board. *A framework for the development of library service in the Borough of Scarborough*. 1978
- *Ontario public libraries: the provincial role in a triad of responsibilities: the report of the Ontario Public Libraries Programme Review. Public Libraries Programme Review for the Minister of Citizenship and Culture*. 1982

## **Further Reading: Sources Consulted**

1. Peter James Bassnett Obituary. A. Millard George Funeral Home  
<http://www.amgfh.com/condolences/obituary.aspx?id=171342>
2. Bassnett, Madeline. "Peter Bassnett." Globe and Mail. Toronto, Ontario: Sept 1, 2008. p1 L6 in Proquest eLibrary Canada
3. Taylor, Sterling. "Chapter closes as library director to retire after 20 Years, the quiet perfectionist recalls 'figuring out communities needs.'" Toronto Star, June 16, 1995. p SC3. Proquest Canadian Newsstand
4. "In Brief Library link-up studied." Globe and Mail December 5, 1980, p. 46 in Proquest Canadian Newsstand
5. "OLA People Here and Now" March 2, 2008.
6. Letter from Marjorie Daw, Chair, Scarborough Public Library Board, 1988, to Library Board Member Dr. Kathy Gallagher Ross dated October 6, 2008.
7. Memorandum to Library Board Member Gillian Mason from Wil Vanderest, Director, Libraries and Community Information Branch (1983-1989) dated August 19, 2008.
8. Letter to Dr. Kathy Gallagher Ross, Chair, Toronto Public Library Board, from Bas Balkissoon, MPP Scarborough-Rouge River, dated August 27, 2008.
9. *Ontario public libraries: the provincial role in a triad of responsibilities: the report of the Ontario Public Libraries Programme Review. Public Libraries Programme Review for the Minister of Citizenship and Culture*. 1982