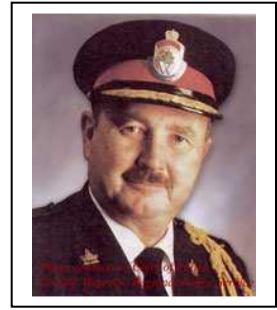# Harold Basse

Harold Basse was 21-years-old when he reported for duty as a police officer in the basement of Waterloo's old City Hall. It was 1953, and Basse was leaving behind a well-paying job as a meat packer to start out in a detachment that wasn't much bigger than a closet.

It was a risk and a huge pay cut, but the young man who would go on to become the youngest police chief in Canada saw promise in that tiny office on Erb Street.

During his first years as a constable, Basse pursued off-hour police courses in London, Toronto and Aylmer. When he didn't get promoted, Basse became discouraged and began looking for work elsewhere.

When Basse's boss discovered that he was disillusioned, he promoted him to corporal. Soon after, Basse made sergeant and then inspector. In 1965 he was named police chief of the Waterloo force and in 1973, when the region consolidated its forces he became the deputy chief under Wilfred Henrich.

Life became complicated for Basse when Henrich died suddenly and Basse was passed over for an outsider from Toronto named Syd Brown who became the new police chief. Brown's tenure was mired in controversy until he was finally dismissed under allegations of police brutality, opening the door in 1979 for Basse to become chief.

Brown fought the dismissal and so, for a while, the regional force had two chiefs – Basse, the active chief, and Brown, inactive. Brown finally left in 1986 with a monetary settlement.

Basse, who was born the eldest of six children on a farm near Kalstern, Saskatchewan, started working at a young age for the Lemberg Saskatchewan Co-op. His family moved to Kitchener after his father, a grain buyer, became ill with respiratory problems as a result of his job. The family name – Bassendowski – was legally changed by his father.

In Kitchener, Basse delivered groceries to the country stores and then worked for J.M. Schneider before joining the Waterloo police force.

His legacy was one of a quiet, hardworking chief who brought the force into the modern era with computers and the new regional headquarters on Maple Grove Road. Philosophically, he changed the way local police do their jobs by introducing the concept of "community-based policing" and recruiting more women and visible minorities to the force.

He was remembered as a leader who held his officers to a high standard. "He was professional and he wanted the people working for him to be professional. But he was also a very caring man," said one constable.

Basse, who described himself once as a workaholic, was proud of his career but expressed regret at not having spent more time with his three children, Debra, Mark and Jennifer and his wife Dorothy. He retired in 1992 after experiencing some health problems. He lived in a home on Paradise Lake, St. Clements.

When Basse died suddenly at 70 of a heart attack more than 500 people assembled at St. John's Lutheran Church to pay their final respects.

Photo courtesy of Chief of Police Gravill, Waterloo Regional Police Service