

## Biography:

**John Bowlby** was born in Hamilton on September 12, 1926. His father, Charles William Reid Bowlby, was a lawyer and distinguished WWI veteran who was later appointed to the Court of Appeal. John completed secondary school at Hillfield School and Pickering College. He attended McMaster University where he was a prominent member of the Drama Club. In 1948 he was admitted to Osgoode Hall Law School. His articles were served under the supervision of John Arnup and J.J. Robinette.

He was called to the Bar in September of 1951 whereupon he joined the law firm his father had founded, which by then was called Griffin, Parker, Weatherston. John was a civil and criminal litigation specialist from the outset. For most of the latter half of the twentieth century, the major criminal and civil cases in Hamilton were dominated by the “Three Johns”: Bowlby, John Agro, and John White.

Bowlby was appointed Queens Counsel in December of 1963. He was active in federal politics and closely affiliated with Liberal MP John Munro, who he later successfully represented in a libel suit against the Toronto Sun. He was elected a bencher of the Law Society in 1966 and re-elected in 1971, 1975 and 1979. His primary area of interest at the Law Society was Legal Aid. He sat on the Legal Aid committee of the Law Society from 1966 to 1980. He chaired the Legal Aid Committee from 1971 to 1980 – a time period during which the mandate of Legal Aid was dramatically expanded under his leadership. He also served on the Unauthorized Practice, Discipline, Professional Conduct and Legal Education committees.

John Bowlby was elected the Treasurer of the Law Society in May of 1980 and was re-elected to that position in May of 1981 and 1982. Bowlby’s election represented the first time since Æmilius Irving that a Treasurer was elected from outside of Toronto. His re-election for a third term broke a tradition of two-year incumbencies that had existed, with a few exceptions, since 1950. In May 1983, immediately following the completion of his third term as Treasurer, Bowlby was appointed to the Supreme Court of Ontario, High Court Trial Division, where he served until his untimely death at the age of 62 in January of 1989.

John Bowlby was one of those “larger than life” characters. The force of his personality never failed to fill the room. Jack Batten wrote of him: “Without resorting to arrogance or belligerence, he left no doubt of his presence in the courtroom, and he approached life outside the courts with the same large spirit.”<sup>i</sup> Loyalty, tenacity and compassion were the hallmarks of his character.

The Treasurer portrait that hangs in Osgoode Hall was painted by Bowlby’s childhood friend, William R. Thompson.

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<sup>i</sup> Batten, Jack *Learned Friends: A Tribute to Fifty Remarkable Ontario Advocates*, Toronto: Irwin Law 2005, page 81