

Obituaries

Wayne Bassett, legislator and librarian, dies

By M.L. Smith
Staff Writer

Wayne Bassett, a four-term DFL state legislator from the Republican stronghold of Nobles County, who championed causes for handicapped children and who developed a library system in Worthington and later in Wausau, Wis., died Friday in his home in Wausau. He was 72.

"He was a very gifted legislator," said former Minnesota Gov. Karl Rolvaag, who served as lieutenant governor during Bassett's tenure in the Legislature. "He was a strong supporter of education and the state college system and the university. He was very talented.

"He was a good companion," said Rolvaag, who also was a friend and sometimes hunted pheasant with Bassett in Worthington.

Bassett, a Nobles County native, was born on a farm in Rushmore, Minn., where his family had been among the early settlers. He graduated from the

University of Minnesota with degrees in library administration and political science.

When he returned to Nobles County, Bassett made his home in Worthington and spearheaded the effort to create a county library system. He wanted the children in Nobles County to have access to books, something he didn't have while growing up on the farm, said Ray Crippen, editor of the Worthington Daily Globe. He later pushed to build a library building.

When one of his children was born with cerebral palsy, Bassett became interested in the cause of educating handicapped children. He helped establish the Crippled Children's School, which is now known as Lakeview School, and when he went to the Legislature, he authored most of the legislation requiring school districts to educate handicapped children, said his son, Eugene of Bloomington.

Bassett, who was active in the labor

movement, won election as a DFLer to the District 11 House seat in a county dominated by Republicans. His mother had served as the Republican County chairwoman.

"He was a favorite son. He had deep grass roots," said his son. "They all liked him. He did wonderful things for Nobles like set up a watershed district for the farmers."

Bassett lost the election in 1957 but regained the seat in 1959 and stayed until 1964.

Bassett left Worthington in 1964 and took a job as head of the Marathon County Library in Wausau, Wis., and later organized the Wisconsin Valley Library Service, a 10-county library system, the largest in Wisconsin.

The Wisconsin Library Association named him Librarian of the Year in 1979. He had served as the library association's legislative advocate and president.

Bassett retired in 1984.

He was a World War II veteran and an active member of the American Legion. He served as president of the Nobles County Historical Society and was active in the Minnesota Historical Society. He was a member of the State Board of Education and the board of Minnesota Society for Crippled Children and Adults.

Besides his son Eugene, he is survived by another son, Wayne Jr. of San Francisco; daughters, Judith Hansing of Minneapolis, Roxanne Ferris of Eagan and Constance Bassett, South St. Paul; sisters, Shirley Humphrey of Slayton, Minn., and Marge Deking of Valley Springs, S.D., and eight grandchildren.

Funeral services will be at 11 a.m. today at Helke Funeral Home in Wausau.

Memorials are suggested to the Carroll Ruth Wessler Memorial Scholarship Fund in care of the Wisconsin Valley Library Service.