

In Memoriam - Peter B. Waite

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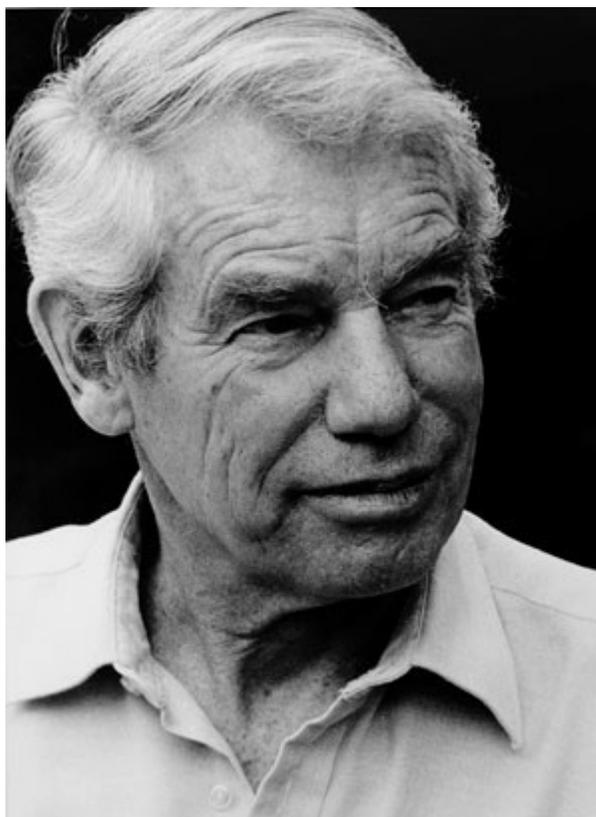
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In Memoriam – Peter B. Waite

Members of the Department of History note with sorrow the passing of one of our most highly esteemed colleagues for over three decades, Professor P.B. Waite. An acclaimed and nationally recognized scholar of Canadian history, Professor Waite is perhaps best known locally for his *Lives of Dalhousie*, which was digitized by Dalhousie Libraries for Dal's 200th anniversary. (Volume 1 can be read [here](#), while Volume 2 can be read [here](#).) He is also remembered fondly by generations of students as a challenging and inspiring teacher. His contributions to the university were such that [he was named a 'Dalhousie Original' for the 2018 bicentenary celebrations](#).

Professor Waite's family — including daughter Anya, who currently serves as Associate Vice-President Research (Ocean) at Dalhousie along with Scientific Director and CEO of the Ocean Frontier Institute — has offered a moving tribute to him, shared below. We offer our condolences on his passing.

Peter B. Waite Obituary



Peter B. Waite (OC, FRSC), passed away on Monday, August 24th at the age of 98. A well-known Canadian historian, professor emeritus at Dalhousie University (where he taught for 35 years), he was first and foremost our devoted and much-loved father.

Our dad was born in Toronto in 1922. He grew up in Ontario and went to high school in Saint John, New Brunswick. He served with the Royal Canadian Navy for almost five years during World War II, achieving the rank of Lieutenant. Veterans were offered subsidies to attend university and Dad obtained a B.A. and an M.A. from the University of British Columbia, and a PhD from the University of Toronto. Dalhousie offered him a teaching job and he never looked back, making Nova Scotia his adopted home and instilling in his family a love of nature, the outdoors, swimming, canoeing, tennis, skiing and pick-up hockey on Williams Lake. Dad and his friends discovered the beaches at Crystal Crescent (then marked as Coot Cove) on a survey map, bushwhacked in to inspect them, and eventually saved them from becoming a sand-and-gravel quarry by petitioning the premier to purchase the land and save it for Nova Scotians. He took us hiking all over Nova Scotia, and planted our own suburban yard thickly with local firs, spruces, and bracken fern.

In his youth he felt one had to walk history to learn about it. He travelled to Russia in the time of Khrushchev, a trip that whetted his appetite for a lifetime of exploration. He was a key member of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, putting important historical spaces physically on the map for Canadians. He was a strong supporter of the excavations at Louisburg, which we inspected in the early years as windswept plots flanked by white transect lines. He also spent many summers travelling, particularly in Europe, with a special passion for cathedrals and small churches. He and our mother, Masha, were able to enjoy lots of adventures together, including many trips to Europe, sabbaticals in England and in Australia, and fabulous tours of South America, China and Egypt.

He was a natural teacher and students flocked to his lectures. He was known for making the most arcane of subjects come alive, with his flair for stories and his formidable knowledge of his principal subject, Canadian history. He wrote beautifully, and penned more than 14 historical works, including the *Life and Times of Confederation*, biographies of three prime ministers, including his much acclaimed biography of Sir John Thompson, *The Man from Halifax*, and the two volume history of Dalhousie University, to name a few. Dad had a penchant for poetry and favourites included E.J. Pratt, Robert Service and Archibald Lampman. He particularly loved the German poets Schiller and Goethe.

He was made an Officer of the Order of Canada in 1993 for his contribution to the Canadian historical canon, and was very proud of this great honour. Most recently, for Dalhousie's bicentenary, (1818-2018), he was among fifty-two people who were awarded the title of *Dalhousie Original*. Copies of his two books on Dalhousie University were literally formed into a sculpture for the Life Sciences building, and the illustrious Canadian poet George Elliot Clarke used these books as research material for his wondrous poem about Dalhousie.

We have fond memories of our father in his book-lined study, happily at his typewriter, and later (despite some initial skepticism) on a computer. But he was at heart a social fellow, with a flair for story-telling. He loved family dinners and the chance to regale us with anecdotes. He loved to read aloud to us, too, and one of our fondest childhood memories is the romp with him, first through A.A. Milne and C.S. Lewis, and then through Dickens, Austen, Trollope, and many other greats of English literature.

Music was always a part of family life growing up. Dad had taught himself to play the piano in his youth and I remember his playing Debussy's *Clair de Lune* as a lullaby when we were children. Nina has a vivid memory of singing "Sur le pont d'Avignon" on the Avignon Bridge with Dad and their 8-year-old daughter Lindsay, to the amusement of onlookers!

Dad met our Croatian mother, Masha, in Halifax in 1957 and they married the following year. Mom's formidable intellect and language abilities complemented Dad's skills – she was his editor-in-chief and social director from the outset. She was both his greatest ally and his firmest critic: she kept him humble, all the while terribly proud of his accomplishments. They had 45 very happy years together until her death in 2003. In his eighties, Dad met Lorraine Hurtig, and the two remained inseparable until her death in 2014.

Dad lived at the Veterans Memorial Building in Halifax from 2011 onwards. We cannot say enough about how wonderful his life has been there. Not only was he looked after with incredible love and care, he lived minutes from his two daughters. Dad continued to write and at the age of 90, published his last work, *In Search of R.B. Bennett*, which, in 2013, won the Democracy 250 Atlantic Book Award for Historical Writing, much to his delight. Despite his mobility issues later in life, Dad enjoyed a great deal of independence. He was very social and always came to weekly dinners with his daughters and families. He loved going to concerts and was very proud of his 45-year patronage of symphony music in Halifax, (from the Atlantic Symphony to Symphony Nova Scotia). In the last days of his life, Rachel, a music therapist, came to his room at VMB to sing for him, playing Scottish airs on her guitar, which he loved.

He leaves behind a family who will miss him deeply; his two daughters, Nina (David Wood) and Anya (Paul), grandchildren Christopher (Christine), Lindsay, Eleanor and Andrew, nieces and nephews with whom he kept in touch, and many friends and colleagues. His wife Masha and later, his partner Lorraine Hurtig, pre-deceased him. The staff on Garrison 5 West at the Veterans Memorial Hospital were the kindest, most nurturing and devoted people imaginable, and we would be remiss if we did not include a special thank you to: Sam, Dean, Jeff, Carol, Rachel, Toni, Stephanie, Sharon, Sandra, Sheldon, Jayson, Carina, Geovani, Joanne, Rob, Melanie, Cory, Joni, Rachel#2 (the music therapist), Kristen, Rosemary, and Jennifer, the 5th floor administrative assistant.

A visitation will take place at Cruikshank's Funeral Home Halifax, 2666 Windsor St., Halifax, on Tuesday September 1st, from 4 pm to 8 pm. A private funeral will be held at a later date. Online condolences can be sent through www.cruikshankhalifaxfuneralhome.com. In lieu of flowers, please send contributions to the P.B.Waite Memorial Fund at Dalhousie University: www.giving.dal.ca/waite.