

# JAMES BIGGART ADULT LIBRARY



(1877 – 1932)

Mr. James Alphaeus Alexander Biggart, born on 6 June 1877, at Pembroke, became a Chemist and licensed Druggist at an early age and, by the age of 22 years, had opened the only pharmacy in the Windward district. His father, William Thomas Biggart, was a carpenter; and his mother, Sarah Eliza Biggart (nee Murray), was a daughter of Brutus Murray (1797-1887), the former metayer who had owned Pembroke Estate.

As a public activist, he had been involved in a wide range of activities for over two decades. From 1904, he had organized, or been signatory to, virtually every protest on steamers, roads, education and other conditions in Tobago.

As a practising Anglican, he was pharmacist to the Heart and Hand

Friendly Society founded in January 1906 by the St Andrews A.C. Church, and served on its Vestry and as Church warden. In his native village of Pembroke, he was Secretary to the Anglican Guild at St Mary's in 1914.

As President of the Scarborough Literary and Debating Club (SLDC), and of the Scarborough Brotherhood, a vibrant organization formed in 1909 for intellectual and social improvement, he handed over a building to be used as a public library and meeting house for the SLDC, in 1911.

In 1920, he was the first President of the Scarborough Club, a society formed for recreation and literary pursuits. He was also a member of the committee responsible for the Tobago Public Library, which started on 2 July 1922. Mr Biggart was among those who persuaded the Right Reverend Arthur H. Anstey, the Anglican Bishop, of the need for a secondary school for boys and girls in Tobago, which led to the founding of the Bishop's High School in 1925.

Despite Mr. Biggart's concern for the advance of his race, his was a wider vision, seeing the people of Tobago as part of the onward march of mankind towards its fullest potential. When he became President of the SLDC, in his inaugural address on 11 April 1911, he declared:

"The world is preparing for a great crisis, the universal emancipation of the human intellect from the slavery of ignorance".

The Honourable James Biggart became the first elected member for Tobago in 1925 and continued to represent Tobago until his death on the 11 August 1932.

Mr. Biggart was one of a committee, including Mr. T. H. Hendy (teacher and small businessman, from Barbados), Mr. G. F. Samuel (Pharmacist, from Trinidad), Mr. C. Hatt (merchant), Mr. D. Robertson, Mr. H. I. McNish (teacher, from Trinidad), Mr. H. Massy, Mr. I. B. Wilson (merchant, from Grenada), Mr. T. McKenzie Joseph (planter and businessman, from Grenada), Mr. Samuel I. Bonnett (planter, Adventure Estate, from Barbados), Mr. A. Toby McIntosh (storekeeper, insurance agent, from Trinidad), Mr. T. Jerome Baldwin (teacher, from Trinidad), that convened a large public meeting at the Court House on 19 January 1926, to press for the conversion of Scarborough and its suburbs to a Borough with a Borough Council, which would enable the burgesses to manage the town's affairs. They also called for an extension of the town's boundaries.

The Executive Council refused the request because it was not satisfied that the financial responsibilities would be successfully undertaken, especially since over half the revenue projected by the petitioners was to be derived from the general revenue.

During his tenure as Member of the Legislative Council, Mr. Biggart tirelessly made representations for Tobago's needs. He pleaded extensively for roads, bridges, improved jetties and ports, post offices, a Scarborough fire service, better schools, improved health services, and better telephone and sea communications; but most of his representations to the Government went unheeded because of their alleged cost, or because it was thought that other districts had more pressing claims.

His major achievements included the construction of a market at Roxborough, the erection of a bridge over the Louis D'or River, and the agreement of the Anglican Church to start the Bishop's High School. In the face of opposition from the churches in Trinidad, he also won the Government's agreement to make the Bishop's High School an assisted school affiliated to Queen's Royal College, the leading state-run boys' college.

In recognition of his personal contribution to the establishing of Public Libraries in Tobago, the Adult Library is being named after Mr. Biggart.

September 2014