

Honourary Life Members

Adam Folk

CANS Honourary Life Member 1996



It certainly turned into a very long year. Adam Folk, retired senior vice president of Steen Contractors Limited and an honorary Life Member of the Construction Association of Nova Scotia, originally came to the Maritimes on a year-long assignment. That was back in 1954/55.

"At that time Steen had just been awarded the contract for work on Camp Gagetown in New Brunswick," Folk recalls, "and they asked me if I would come down to work on the project for a year. That first phase involved four or five buildings and they estimated it would take about a year to complete. However, it turned out to be a very successful project for the company and became the single largest contract Steen had ever undertaken up to that point. It grew to include 25 to 30 buildings and we were there for about three years."

This success, though he didn't know it at the time, shaped the rest of Folk's career and life. "At the time we were wrapping up the Gagetown project, Steen was looking to expand and I was asked if I would stay in the region to help set up an Atlantic office. So in 1957/58 my family and I relocated to Halifax and we've been here ever since." The East Coast is a far cry from Folk's early years as a boy on the prairies of Regina, Saskatchewan, or even from his years growing up and learning a trade in Toronto. He followed his father's footsteps to become a plumber and joined Steen as an apprentice for his first real job. He remained with the company right up to his retirement in 1996.

It was during his Toronto years that Folk met and married his wife, Marcia. The birth of their three children almost tracks his career path with Steen: Kim was born in Toronto, Cathy in Fredericton and Kelly in Halifax.

The Folks arrival in Halifax coincided with the emergence of a new residential subdivision called Wedgewood, which was taking shape just off the Halifax peninsula on the mainland. "People thought we were crazy," Folk says, "for wanting to live here. I remember friends and associates asking me, 'Why do you want to live way out there in the woods?' The question seems a little funny today, considering that Halifax has grown right out past us now."

The house the Folks first moved into is still there, right next door to where they currently reside. Folk says he never regretted the decision to move here. "Things were good here and there was a lot of opportunity in the construction industry at the time. I believe there are still a lot of great opportunities in construction for those who want an exciting, challenging career. The industry certainly treated me very well during the period of time I was involved."

'Involved' is certainly an apt word to describe Folk's participation in the local construction industry. He managed Steen's Maritime operations, including such projects as Purdy's Wharf—perhaps the most recognizable feature of Halifax's waterfront skyline; major hospitals throughout the region; and the development of the Hibernia offshore drilling platform.

"We were part of the group that worked on the construction of the platform, and that was a very interesting project in which to be a part. It was an unusual project for a mechanical contractor such as ourselves in the sense that these types of projects are normally built in a shipyard. This one wasn't. It was built right in the water and all the infrastructure was created on-site to support it."

Folk's involvement stretched far further than just the projects Steen was involved in. No fewer than 10 organizations benefited from his volunteer time, including the Mechanical Contractors Association of Nova Scotia, the Mechanical Contractors Association of Canada, the Construction Management Bureau of Nova Scotia and, of course, the Construction Association of Nova Scotia (CANS).

His involvement with the Mechanical Contractors Association of Nova Scotia actually began with that body's predecessor, the Nova Scotia Master Plumbers Association. He served as Chair for both organizations, as well as being a director of the affiliated national association.

A reflection of the emphasis Folk placed on training and apprenticeship can be seen in his work as a founding member of the Joint Journeyman Training Committee, an initiative of UA Local 56 and the provincial Mechanical Contractors Association, a member of the Nova Scotia Plumbing and Heating Apprenticeship Advisory Committee, and as a member of the National Manpower and Training Committee, a joint effort of the then Department of Manpower and Training, the United Association and the Mechanical Contractors Association. This last group was the beginning of efforts to harmonize provincial apprenticeship programs and requirements across the country and establish national standards. It eventually led to the Gold Seal program now familiar across Canada. One of the industry efforts Folk is most proud of is the role he played in founding the Construction Management Bureau of Nova Scotia in 1972. Folk says the lessons he learned during this province's first ever labour lock-out in the construction industry, coupled with his position as chair of CANS' Labour Relations Committee, taught him the need for a forum where concerns could be addressed without resorting to such drastic measures.

His involvement with CANS spread across various

committees, sections and councils, as well as several years. During his time as a director of the Association he served as chair of the Membership Committee in 1968, he chaired the Bid Depository Joint Advisory Council in 1971 and was chair of the Mechanical Section on four separate occasions: 1963, 1964, 1975 and 1991.

He also served as president of the Design and Construction Institute of Nova Scotia.

"Over the years I got far more out of my involvement with the industry than I put in," Folk says, "and I think that goes for most people if they get involved. I met a lot of good people in the industry, across all the various sectors. I think construction can provide anyone with a good living if they're willing to put something into it."