

Honourary Life Members

Ian MacInnes

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Ian MacInnes says he's not sure why he gravitated toward the construction industry as a career choice, but suspects it might have a lot to do with a theory put forward by an old friend and mentor.

"There are a lot of great people involved in the construction industry, and one of them was my old friend Jimmy Kent, whom I met while working in Newfoundland. Jimmy had this theory about construction, saying the reason we chose that line of work was because we had never grown up; we still wanted to play with trucks and tractors, hammers and nails like we did as kids. I guess there's some truth in that."

MacInnes' "growing up" was actually done in Nova Scotia's Annapolis Valley in the small community of Hortonville. He can remember going to grade school in a small, two-room school house, before graduating and moving on to an Applied Sciences degree from Acadia University in Wolfville.

"My very first construction job was the restoration of a covered bridge between Hortonville and Avonport," MacInnes recalls. "I was still in school and was looking for a summer job, so I went to see the foreman to ask for work. He said he couldn't hire me because he didn't know which political party my parents voted for. So I went home and asked them; they each voted for a different one, one Liberal, one Conservative. I went back to the foreman and told him, 'Well, you're guaranteed at least one vote.' He agreed to hire me, but I had to work the night shift, 6 p.m. to 6 a.m."

"I certainly met some of the most 'interesting' people I've ever known working that particular job. The night seems to bring out a totally different type of person than those you meet during the daylight hours."

After finishing his studies at Acadia, he took a few

years off to work before returning to finish his education with a degree in Civil Engineering from McGill University in Montreal. It was during these years that he worked in several different projects in Newfoundland and Labrador, eventually joining Tidewater Construction of New Glasgow. It was while working there that he served as project engineer on the construction of a breakwater in Port aux Basques.

"The breakwater had to be built to control the swells, which were too high and prevented the ferry—the William Carson—from being able to dock at the new terminal. It's funny, because the locals told the government the swells were too much for the Carson at that site long before the decision was made to send her there. The old terminal was sheltered by Vardy's Island. So the breakwater was needed to make the harbour suitable for the Carson.

"Part of the challenge was that we had no where to get the rock we needed to build the breakwater. So what we ended up doing was drilling tunnels, called coyote tunnels, into the rock face of Graveyard Point, filling it with explosives and detonating about a 100 foot deep section off the Point to create the rock we needed. Although this method had been used before elsewhere, in those situations the tunnels were packed with sand after the dynamite was set; we were the first to fill the tunnels with water. The explosions caused quite a stir in Port aux Basque when we set them off."

However, it's the explosion that didn't take place that makes the project still stand out in MacInnes' memory. "At one point we ran out of dynamite, and I had to take a truck and drive inland to get some more. There was no real road at that time, so it was pretty rough going. On the way back, one of the tie rods broke and I had to wire it together in order to get back to the site. When I got back, I found out just how close a call I had just survived; the dynamite they gave me was so old, the nitroglycerin had

worked its way out during the drive and was loose in the back of the truck."

After McGill, MacInnes returned to Nova Scotia and started his own construction company, Quemar Co. Ltd. "I did a lot of small jobs, the kind of things no one else seemed to want to do. There was nothing major, maybe 40 to 50 service stations throughout Atlantic Canada, a lighthouse at Chebucto Head, a radio transmitter in Newfoundland, a lot of jobs for the oil companies—nothing major, just all strange little jobs that seemed to come out of the woodwork.

"One of the odd little projects I did with Quemar was the lighthouse keeper's residence up at Port Bickerton. I put in a bid on the project without even looking at the site, something I had learned not to do earlier in my career but forgot on this occasion. I was reminded why I'd learned that lesson when I won the bid and finally went to inspect the site.

"There was no road, no way into the site except by boat. One reason my bid was lower than everyone else's is because they had all allowed for the use of a barge to carry in their equipment. So what I ended up doing was cutting a road along the edge of the beach into the site, across several different property lines, in order to get my equipment in to do the job. It worked out in the end though; the Department of Transport ended up taking it over and maintaining it as an access road to the lighthouse."

"My last construction job was the management of about 115 houses being built for the US military in Goosebay," MacInnes remembers. "We went in and built the streets, put in the services and power lines, erected these pre-fab houses, made the grass grow—basically created a whole little town."

During his years on the building side of the construction industry, MacInnes split his time between his own company and Aberdeen Paving Ltd., still a familiar name in local construction. But by 1969, MacInnes says he was ready to try a new challenge, and left construction to become a supplier. He formed Ian MacInnes Enterprises Ltd. and became a top distributor for such companies as Master Builders and Dow Chemical of Canada Ltd.

It was during his years as a supplier that MacInnes became heavily involved with various industry associations, serving as Chair of the Construction Association of Nova Scotia (CANS) in 1975, and later as Chair of the Canadian Construction Association (CCA) in 1979. He also served in a number of other capacities, including stints as Chair of the General Contractors Section, Standard Practices Committee, president of the Design Construction Institute (DCI) and as CCA liaison.

"I believe that if you work in a particular industry, you should give back some time to it," MacInnes says. "That's one of the important things in life."

It was this sentiment that led to his first involvement with the CCA. The national annual general meeting was scheduled for Halifax, but there were some problems with the organizing committee and MacInnes was asked to help get things back on track.

"When I stepped in as Chair of that event the deadlines were fast approaching, but we put together a fine program. I had the best committee you could ask for. Everyone seemed to have a great time. I got to meet a great bunch of people through my association with the CCA over the years."

During his time with CANS, MacInnes dealt with several issues, including labour shortages, centralized bargaining and the formation of the DCI. His year as Chair of the CCA came at the height of the debate surrounding construction of the MacKenzie River Valley pipeline, but stands out in his memory for other reasons as well.

"It was a very interesting time and I traveled all across the country, but it was probably the hardest year of my career. The full-time president was ill during my whole term, and actually passed away at the end of the year. Plus, a number of other key personnel left at the same time. It was a tough year."

By 1984, MacInnes says he had "worked myself out of my best line. Dow informed me they were going to take over the distribution of their own products, but gave me three years notice—more I think than any other distributor received. In fact, they asked me to join Dow, but I decided it was time to move on."

Calling it semi-retirement, MacInnes kept himself busy doing some arbitration and mentoring. It allowed more time for a passion that he first discovered in the early 1970s: sailing. His love of the sport resulted in not one, but four Marblehead trophies he and his crew won sailing in the famous Marblehead to Nova Scotia race.

That same passion was passed on to his son, Brian, who accompanied his father at the young age of 10 years old on a sailing trip down the Saint Lawrence and around the coast to Halifax. Brian is currently in New Zealand as a member of the crew on one of the boats competing for a shot at the America's Cup.

Ian and Rosemary, his wife of more than 40 years, have three children: Holly, Heidi (married with one daughter) and Brian (married with two children).