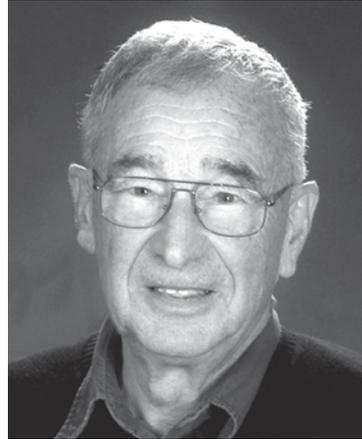


# Honourary Life Members

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## Bob Todd

CANS Honourary Life Member 2010



In the summer of 1959, something happened to Bob Todd that changed his life forever – he ran out of money. At the time, the 22-year-old had just finished his first year of a Masters in history degree at Dalhousie University. Out of tuition cash, he went looking for a job in his hometown of South Farmington in the Annapolis Valley where employment options were limited to working in construction or being a farmhand. “I took a summer job in construction as a labourer and somehow when fall came, I didn’t go back to university, I kept on going,” says Todd. A 40-plus year career in construction was born with that single decision, a decision Todd never regretted.

Todd was born in 1936 and grew up on an apple and root crop farm. The family had horses and oxen, but never owned a car or a tractor. The family ate what they grew and there were always plenty of chores to do. “Play was not a big thing,” he says. But when the opportunity arose, it would mean getting on his bicycle and travelling five to 10 miles to have a pickup baseball game with friends.

Todd was a voracious reader whose home was filled with books and he also enjoyed reading the newspaper. The sports section was his favourite. It was this fascination with the written word which gave rise to his original career interest. “Journalism was my ambition at that time,” he says. Teaching was another possibility. “Well, that would have been my second choice, sort of by default,” he says with a laugh. “If I couldn’t get a job with a newspaper, I would be a teacher.”

In 1954, Todd took some courses in psychology and English literature at Carleton College (now Carleton University) in Ottawa. He also worked as a payroll clerk for an electronics company.

The following year, he enrolled at Acadia University and pursued an honours history degree, with minors in English and economics. He graduated in 1958 and started his Masters at Dalhousie that fall.

Todd’s first job in the construction industry was with Dell

Construction and the first project he worked on involved building 200 permanent married quarters (PMQs) at CFB Greenwood. He immediately took a liking to the profession. “I enjoyed the process,” says Todd. “I liked the fact that you started with basically a piece of ground and you ended up with a usable facility when it was all over.” A curious individual, Todd also liked how he was learning about things which had nothing to do with his previous work experience.

It wasn’t long before he moved up the ranks. “By the time summer was over, I was promoted to foreman,” he says. “My hourly rate was topped up from 65 cents to 90 cents, so I was really getting ahead.” This was also more than he would have been earning as a teacher or journalist, so this made him especially proud.

Todd met his future wife Rachael in the winter of 1961. In the spring of the following year, he began working on a project in Toronto, with the plan to get married later that year. “I drove back from the project in Toronto, got married on Nov. 3, 1962, and had a week of honeymoon in Nova Scotia,” he says. Todd drove back to Toronto and continued working, but one month later, the company assigned him to a new project in Wallis Heights, a military housing complex in Dartmouth.

Now back in Nova Scotia with his wife, bad news arrived. The project was shut down for the winter and Todd was laid off. “I was newly married and fully unemployed,” he says. Todd took a job with Atlantic Contracting and Engineering in the interim. When the Wallis Heights project started up again in the spring, he was hired back on.

The project finished in 1964 and Todd decided to be in control of his destiny, so he started a small contracting company, Eastern Carpentry Limited. That same year, Todd and his wife had their first child, a son.

The first project his company worked on was Embassy Towers on Spring Garden Road in Halifax. Other projects soon followed:

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Park Victoria Apartments in Halifax, the Holiday Inn in Dartmouth, even a project in Saint John, New Brunswick.

It was a tough business because these projects only involved labour, so profit couldn't be made on the materials. "You had to be very sharp in terms of your estimating," he says. "You were basically a one-trick pony."

In 1967, Todd and his wife had a daughter. At the time, the economy was in a downturn, available credit was limited and interest rates were high. "The ultimate result was that basically construction dried up," says Todd. "Money was too expensive. Developers stopped developing and I could not find work for my company. Once again I was unemployed, but this time with a wife, a mortgage and two kids."

The following year, Todd went to work for one of his customers, Cambrian Construction. With Cambrian, he worked on projects such as the Fleet Club and the Shannon Park Arena as a superintendent.

In 1969, Todd was approached by John Lindsay to work with Lindsay Construction as an assistant general superintendent. It was with Lindsay where he spent the bulk of his working career – 29 years, seven months to be exact.

Todd was immediately impressed with Lindsay. "It was a different kind of company," he says. It was non-bureaucratic and the management was very hands-off. "There was minimal direction and maximum freedom to write your own script," says Todd. He moved up the company ranks as Lindsay continued to grow and become a major player in the Nova Scotia construction industry.

In 1978, Todd became a shareholder in the company, joined the board of directors and became a group manager for the construction management portion of the company. This involved managing large complex projects for a fee, "as opposed to bidding and making whatever you could from the process," he says.

In 1985, Todd became Lindsay's president.

Occupational health and safety was always a major concern of Todd's and in 1990, he joined the Construction Association of Nova Scotia's (CANS) safety committee. "There's nothing that will bring that to your attention more than going to the funeral of someone who lost his life on one of your jobs, and I went to a couple," he says.

The work of the CANS safety committee led to the creation of the Nova Scotia Construction Safety Association and Todd is proud of the role this organization played in improving working conditions and the safety record of the industry. Todd was involved with CANS until 1998.

From 1991 to 1994, Todd was also the Nova Scotia provincial vice-president of the Canadian Construction Association. "The big

issue at the time was free trade," he says. The association was supportive of free trade, believing it would improve the movement of materials and the competitive position of Canadian companies working in the U.S.

Nearing 40 years of work in the construction industry, Todd began pondering life after construction and decided to give up the presidency of Lindsay in 1997.

Before Todd retired on Dec. 31, 1998, he served as the project manager for the construction of Horton High School in Wolfville, which was constructed as a public-private partnership (P3). Todd's strong work ethic prevented him from coasting into retirement though. "I could have drifted along and kept an office warm, but I couldn't stop working," he says.

But Todd didn't stay retired for long. "I always say I retired three times and I failed at the first two," he says. In September 1999, Todd went back to work as an independent consultant, working for Nova Learning Inc., a company building three P3 schools in the Annapolis Valley. "I had a great time," says Todd, adding it was not very stressful or intense, nor did he have a financial stake in it. The project ended in 2001.

From 2003 to 2005, he worked for the Port of Halifax after being recruited to do some consulting work on the redevelopment of the port's obsolete cargo and passenger Seawall wharf.

In what seemed to be a fitting choice, Todd retired on Labour Day in 2005.

Todd says it was boredom which kept pushing him to go back to work, but these days, he's busy enjoying retirement. His time is divided between being a grandparent to two grandchildren, chauffeuring and family history research.

His interest in genealogy has made him a fixture at the Nova Scotia Archives on University Avenue. Through his research, Todd learned both he and his wife are descendents of Mayflower pilgrims. Todd's family tree now boasts 343 names.

Looking back on his career, Todd is proud to see the buildings he worked on and he's even prouder to point them out to his grandchildren. "There are buildings pretty much all over the Maritimes I've been involved with in one way or another," he says.