

# THE WORKING CAREER OF ROBERT MACINTOSH

A Boilermaker.

Robert MacIntosh tells his story of starting work during the second world war as a teenager - working and operating the boilers in the ships for the navy during the war and in the merchant marine after the war. He was first hired as a Boilermakers Helper in Trenton, NS, in 1948 during the open shop era, worked his way to British Columbia after joining Lodge 128 and worked the refineries of Sarnia, ON.

## The Working Career of Robert M. MacIntosh

### A Boilermaker

I, Robert MacIntosh, was born in Trenton, Nova Scotia on July 7, 1925. My parents were Robert and Annie MacIntosh. I had two older brothers: Al and Ernest.

In 1941, at the age of 15, I became a machinist apprentice employed in the nut and bolt machine shop in the Trenton Steel Works at 13 cents per hour. A year later that wage doubled to 26 cents per hour. I went from boyhood to manhood without a pause for any of the usual teenage stuff. That same year the *Canada Unemployment Insurance Act* came into effect. It was welcome news to the workers in a town that had known such terrible poverty. It was wartime again and jobs were plentiful, but the older hands in the plant would never forget the long, hard times that they only recently pulled through. The U.I. legislation was applauded by all.

This was also the time I was introduced to union organizing. There were a couple of events that always stood in my mind. The first one was when I was a kid: “union” was the talk of the town. At the Trenton Steel Works there was talk of joining the Steelworkers Union. One gentleman became the leader of the movement at the shop. His plan was to leave his work station at a certain time, which he did, and as he walked down the aisle others were to follow him as he passed their work station. He walked out the front door, turned around, and saw he was alone. All that talking the crew did — and none of them followed through. He was disciplined for his action, but later on he was successful in bringing in a union.

Another time involved a man name George MacEachern. The town rumour was that he was a communist. I was not sure what that term meant at the time, but I found him to be a nice guy. Apparently he was in attendance at a union organizational meeting during the previous evening, the objective being to organize the workers at the nearby Foundation Company shipyard. Since Pictou was a non-union town, the panic button was pushed and George was tagged a trouble-maker.

Years later I read his biography, in which he tells his story of his dismissal. He had surfaced at that meeting to shoot down the organizing drive, because he wanted a Canadian union. The union trying to organize the shipyard was the Boilermakers, and they chartered Local 565, but it never won recognition. Ironically, it turned out that all George succeeded in doing was to keep Pictou a non-union town during the war. The Steelworkers finally won certification in 1950.

I lost a friend of mine who was only 17. Willard was working in the coal mines in Stellarton when the roof collapsed. This was a tragedy many mining towns of Canada knew about all too well.

At 18, I joined the Navy on July 7, 1943 — it was war time. The streets were full of soldiers and airmen from the bases located around the province; an able-bodied young man in civilian clothes was beginning to become a rare sight.

At training camp some of my instructors introduced me to boilers. I attended classes on steam engineering, gauge glasses, instrumentation. We were taught quite a bit about boiler construction, both fire-tube and water-tube. I became a stoker, and before being assigned to a ship we were put in the Manning Pool to clean the boilers of the ships while they were tied up at the dockyard.

It was a dirty, dirty job — the soot would get everywhere. When the ships were out in the North Atlantic they wouldn't use the soot blowers, so as not to attract a German U-boat. We would wire brush and inspect the steam and mud drums. When we opened up the units we would be exposed to the asbestos lagging. Basically the whole unit would have asbestos on it. We would eat our sandwiches with our sooty hands, hoping to see our names on the sea draft one day.

I did end up working in the boiler room on a corvette on the Atlantic till D-Day and then I moved up to a battle ship, HMS Uganda. We cruised the world from England to the South Pacific, where we encountered the enemy. The war ended for me just after the two atomic bombs were dropped on Japan. We disembarked at the Victoria Dry Docks.

I lost my brother Ernest in the war: his plane was shot down over France. Brother Al returned home to resume his accounting career. I went into the

Merchant Marine using my training from the Navy on the operation of boilers. This gave me the opportunity to learn more about bigger boilers, and to see the world.

After I left the Merchant Marine, I returned back home to visit my mother, my father having passed away while I was in New Zealand. The Nova Scotia Light & Power Commission started to build a new power plant on the East River at Trenton. There were two new boilers fired by Pictou County coal. Babcock–Wilcox and Goldie–McCulloch (B&W) was already on site with a few employees. I was hired to be part of a local crew under open-shop conditions. There were a group of out-of-towners who previously worked with B&W on other jobs. They were the real journeymen; the local hires were helpers.

B&W had a small crew of regulars who worked around most of the country under the open-shop system that prevailed at the time. Unionization had not caught up to this company yet.

After that job I had the opportunity to follow B&W to Windsor. It was a good job for a few years, and we installed four units.

The Boilermakers had signed a first collective agreement with B&W in 1947. It was a significant step for the company, which had a long history of being a very strong proponent of open shop. For the Boilermakers, it re-established Lodge 128 in Toronto.

When I was on site I was approached by the job steward, Sid Matheson, to sign up. I received my union card a short time later and attended my first union meeting. It was a meeting called for the purpose of ratifying the collective agreement. International Vice-President Sam Finlay was at the meeting, and this new agreement put the Boilermakers back in business in Ontario.

I got married to my wife, Olive, on July 21, 1951. We moved to Sarnia where there was lots of boilermaker work: refinery construction, chemical plants, etc. B&W had two boilers to build at the new grass-roots Canadian Oil Refinery. The erector, Slim Roney, had most of the crew from Windsor come up.

I became a job steward at the Dow Chemical plant. I was working for Foster–Wheeler, who were erecting an ethylene glycol unit. It was a rush

job — 6 – 10's for six weeks. I never made so much money. My duties as a steward consisted of collecting union dues and policing our work jurisdiction.

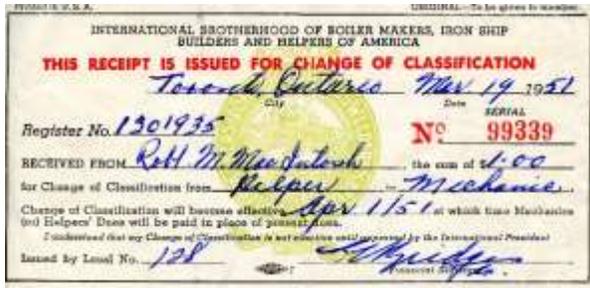


Figure 1: Receipt for changing of classification from helper to mechanic — a \$1.00 fee.

The District Representative for the Boilermakers was Harry Fisher. He was a railroad Boilermaker but was not working with construction Boilermakers. I, along with another steward, Stan Petronski, would meet with Harry every two weeks when he would come down to collect union dues and listen to any grievances.

We used to hound old Harry for copies of the “green book” on jurisdiction.

The on-the-job practices were actually pretty well in keeping with the green book, except for the rigging of major items. We got that all straightened out.

In 1952 in Montreal, a picket line was set up at the Canadian Vickers plant on Notre Dame Street. A radio report told of two rival unions battling for representation rights and violence erupted, which resulted in Sam Finlay being badly beaten by a goon.

The story regarding this incident was that some of Sam's friends decided to even the score. A “heavy” from Chicago arrived at the address of an apartment building to track down Sam's attacker. He went to a certain door, knocked, and when the man answering the knock identified himself, he was floored and left in far worse shape than Sam was in. As legend has it, the heavy had gotten the wrong man — there were two people with the same name living in the building!

Leaving Ontario, my wife and I travelled to British Columbia. I arrived at the Labour Headquarters at 529 Beatty Street in Vancouver, where I met District Representative Jim Downie and Lodge 359 Secretary-Treasurer Maurice Hadley. My first job out of Lodge 359 was in Powell River that October, working on a new power boiler in the paper mill. This was a B&W boiler being erected by C.C. Moore & Company. They erected all B&W equipment west of the Rockies in Canada and the U.S.A.

The general foreman was Emil Rosolowsky and John Witherspoon was the job steward. The afternoon foremen were Norman Mackinnon and Al Prendergast. John MacAulay was the job steward.



*Figure 2: The Father of Lodge 359, Jim Downie. District Rep. for the IBB. He was the one that had the vision of a construction lodge for Boilermakers in B.C.*

In B.C. a better collective agreement was in effect: a higher wage rate and double-time for overtime work, provision for travel time, plus free room and board when away from home. The geography had made room and board a mandatory consideration for skilled tradesmen in the B.C. construction industry from the turn of the century.

In Ontario, room and board was not a consideration because the other construction unions had local lodges in the different towns making most jobs local, with no room and board. Everyone was expected to go home every night. B.C. was a far stronger province union-wise, so the building trades' unions benefitted from united labour, both in-plant and outside.

The Powell River job was my introduction to B.C.'s construction camp life. I was roomed at the Avenue Lodge, which meant sharing a room. The food was top quality in every respect: we had three choices of main course at dinner and supper and whatever you wished for at breakfast. The construction industry was beginning to look up as a lifetime career for me.

When the Powell River job was finished I went to Shell Oil in Burnaby where Vulcan Iron was erecting a small boiler as part of a refinery expansion by Flour Corporation. Next I went to Harmac on Vancouver Island where a recovery boiler was being erected by Combustion Engineering.

I received word from Harold Hallam to come to Edmonton. He was a general foreman on the building of the CIL plant east of the city and he wanted me to take over a crew building a furnace. Poole Construction was the contractor. It would mean being home every night, so my wife and I travelled up to Edmonton.

I heard a lot about Alberta from the boomers on the different jobs. Lodge 146 was established in 1948 to get in on the ground floor of the expected oil boom.

Lodge 146 had a standard collective agreement covering the province of Alberta. It was a bit below the par of the B.C. agreement and this problem would persist, causing some difficulty for the leadership. After that job was completed, we returned to B.C.

There was some dispatching coming out of Lodge 359 when I returned. I worked for Dave Haliday, a small contractor who eked out an existence doing week-end contract work in small operations and in sawmills. I first worked for him at the new Canada Dry plant.

I was dispatched to Kamloops where Lodge 359 had a crew building a tank farm at the new Royalite Refinery. I remember this job for the terrific heat and dust. The Trans Mountain Pipeline was coming down from Edmonton to tidewater that year. Horton Steel was building a tank farm on the hill overlooking the city, right on the pipeline. Down in the valley floor was the Royalite property.

We had to begin working at 6:00 a.m. to escape the heat of mid-afternoon. Hanging plate and jumping those green plants used for scaffolding would make for a tired boy in the evenings.

After Kamloops I went to Kemano, in October 1953, to work for Morrison–Knudsen (M-K), the huge American contractor responsible for the mammoth power installation. They had been digging tunnels and an underground powerhouse in solid granite, inside Mount Dubose, for nearly three years. Now it was ready for boilermakers to install the penstock.



*Figure 3 : 21-foot diameter hole in the mountain with the penstock in construction.*

There was a 10-mile tunnel driven right through the coastal range from a man-made lake to Mount Dubose. Deep inside the mountain the long tunnel would branch into two smaller tunnels (21-foot diameter) leading down to the underground powerhouse at sea level.

The branching into two began at 2600 feet

above the sea; they would plunge to the 1600-foot level, then out for a 500-foot stretch, and then plunge again to the sea level. The tunnels from the 2600-foot level to the powerhouse were all lined with heavy steel plate. The two raises were one-mile-long penstock tunnels on an incline of 48 degrees, making for very dangerous and uncomfortable working conditions.

We lined the tunnels one at a time — they were actually done in two phases. There were portals at the 2600 and 1600 levels where shops were built to prepare the prefabricated penstock sections before they went into the tunnels for installation. All materials, equipment and manpower used in the upper levels were transported up the mountainside by aerial tramway.

Kemano was to be the power-generation site for the huge aluminum smelter which ALCAN was building at Kitimat. This project was well known across the continent: it was billed as the largest underground powerhouse in the world at the time. Construction workers across Canada dreamed about going to Kitimat – Kemano — this was the age of boomers. They came from everywhere too — every province and nearly every state in the union were represented, and many others came

from Europe.

We travelled to the site on the SS Princess Norah, a CPR coastal vessel. It was an overnight trip with all the trimmings. They treated us as one would expect to be treated on an ocean liner: white linen, silverware, and bone china to make the good meals even more appealing.

The ship was loaded with construction workers bound for Kemano and Kitimat. It was on this trip that I first met Wally Davis; he was my roommate. I also met Don Vinloy on board for the first time.

Kemano was a money-maker. We worked seven days a week and racked up some real good pay cheques for the time. Ed Linder was our foreman. Some of the crew included Paul Petruk, Paul Termansen, Mike Moyles,



*Figure 4: The tramway that carried material, supplies and crews up to the work stations.*

Fern Girard, Helmut Standke, and many others. I was the job steward on our shift.

It would be, at the time, the largest crew of Boilermakers on one job at one time in the history of the lodge. The Americans were M-K supervision — each shift had one. The Europeans came from the United Kingdom and the Continent. Most were war veterans, many still wearing their uniform tunics.

There were three different crews of Boilermakers at Kemano. There were three shifts at three different levels: sea level, the 1600-foot level, and the 2600-foot level. Each shift had a job steward, and there was a chief steward, Ken Dawson.



*Figure 5: Robert MacIntosh, standing in the back, and crew going to work.*

Ken was a sincere and dedicated individual who worked tirelessly to keep peace in all three camps. There were no walking stewards on this job — he was a welder, and union work was done on his own time.

Kemano was noted for gambling, and rightly so! There was a gambling tent that went 24 hours a day. Blackjack and poker were the only games played. The RCMP policed the camp and they never had any trouble to contend with, not in the

gaming tent at least. Everything was on the up and up, but there were some professional gamblers from Vancouver and elsewhere who would hire on at some menial job just to be present in the gaming tent. So it was not exactly a level playing field.

There were some terrific wins and some horrific losses at Kemano. There were people from all trades, working in the camps for many months, building a stake until they had made enough to go back out to civilization. They had to go through Camp 5 to terminate and pick up the ship.



*Figure 6 - Some won and some lost big at the gaming tent*

While waiting for the ship home, they would take

a look in the gaming tent. For some, it would be a fatal mistake. After spending all night at the gaming table, they'd be broke in the morning. There was nothing to do but to sign on again and go back to work inside Mount Dubose. Civilization would have to wait.

At Christmas, I left for home. My wife and I were expecting our first child. Susan was born on January 7, 1954.

I never did return to Kemano. Instead I was offered a dispatch to a job in Vancouver. Alymer Can was building a food processing plant out on Marine Drive near the foot of Main Street in 1954. Blaine Boiler Works had contracted with Vancouver Iron Works to erect two boilers which had been fabricated under licence from Combustion Engineering.

It was great to be working at home. There was a small crew which included Jimmy Sneddon, who was bit of a legend. He had been a Boilermaker around B.C. since 1905, when he emigrated from Scotland. He used say, "I worked every nook and cranny in the province." He installed and repaired boilers at lumber camps, saw mills, canneries, and on lake boats in the interior.

Another old-timer was Paul Benner, who came over from Russia around the time that the railway was being built to Prince Rupert in 1912. A blacksmith by trade, he was a welder on this job. After the job was completed, Blaine Boiler Works took us to another site at the new provincial jail at Haney, just east of Vancouver. We erected two John Inglis Boilers.

### **Internal Problems**

Working in the city allowed me to attend union meetings and it was there that I got some inkling as to how Lodge 359 operated. The meetings were usually fairly well attended. Jim Downie was the chairman and he sat at the podium along with the secretary-treasurer.

After the opening ceremony the chair would call for the reading of the previous meeting's minutes. Problems would begin almost immediately in the assembly. It was generally Art Linbergh or one of his comrades who would call for a point of order and from then on the meeting would become turmoil. The deeper we moved into the agenda, the worse it got. Downie would shut off his hearing aid and rap his gavel while the politicians shouted. Soon the newer members would shrug their shoulders and begin

to drift out of the meeting hall, heading toward the “Snakepit.” This was Unit #20 of the Army & Navy Club, located on the main floor at 529 Beatty Street. It was a British-style pub serving draft beer, with a juke-box, a piano, dart boards and cards. It served as a gathering place for Lodge 359 members.

I had not had a lot of Boilermakers union meeting experience before this — only a few meetings in Edmonton, which were pretty wild too, so I thought this was normal behaviour. But trouble was brewing in both lodges; the new International Vice-President had his work cut out for him.

In Vancouver, the problem was largely political. The Local Lodge administration supported centre-line politics while Lindbergh and his supporter’s were communist, and they enjoyed rocking the boat. It was the time of the Cold War, McCarthyism, the French in Vietnam, and Local 1 was a dominant force in the B.C. labour movement where Lodge 359 was just trying to get established.

Harry Gomm became IVP in 1951. He came out of a railway lodge in Winnipeg and construction was new to him. Turmoil was not, however, as railway Boilermakers were not easy to handle either. He moved to Vancouver in 1954 and maintained a desk at Lodge 359 from which he kept an eye on Lodges 359 & 146.

Gomm had a tough row to hoe. He inherited the position from the unpopular Archie Milligan, who had been in ill health in his later years and had relied on his eastern counterpart too much, almost to the point where Sam Finlay was the recognized Brotherhood boss of Canada.

Sam Finlay and B&W were finally able to get a collective agreement in Ontario. Sam was attempting to expand that agreement across Canada. B&W had a boiler to erect in the Edmonton Power House using workers who were not Lodge 146 members.

Jack Dickens, the District Rep, got wind of it and attempted to discuss it with the erector — with no success. Soon a Boilermakers picket line appeared at the plant. B&W cried foul to Sam Finlay, over the head of Harry Gomm. At the end of it, Lodge 146 got an agreement. The erector and Dickens were out of a job. As far as Sam was concerned, district reps were expendable.

## Out in the Field

After the Haney job was completed, I was dispatched by Lodge 359 to Combustion Engineering (CE) and a saw mill at Chemainus on Vancouver Island. We were replacing a tired old Wickes boiler with a CE boiler. Joe Losier was the erector, Alex Mussick was the general foremen and Harry Walters was the job steward. We erected the structural work and then started to rivet the members together. Ben Lansburg drove and I bucked up. It was hot work in July, with two steaming Wickes boilers leaking sparks and flames all over.

Losier would push us hard all day and we'd curse him under our breath. But when the day's work was done, we'd rush back to the Horseshoe Bay Inn with our tongues dragging, where Joe would have a bunch of tables pushed together, all loaded with cold beer. He'd spring for the first round; after that it was a community kitty and sometimes the house would buy a round.

After that job, I worked some shutdowns in the fall of 1954, at Chevron Refinery with Marwell. There were a couple of breweries where we did a boiler repair at Carling on 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and Capilano Breweries on Burrard Street with CC Moore. I was transferred by CC Moore to Granville Island to work on the completion of marine boilers for a naval shipbuilding program in Vancouver and Victoria. The boilers were made in Ontario, but we did the final completion and they were installed by the shipyard's crew.

Early in 1955 I was dispatched to Kamloops to work for Foster Wheeler on the erection of a boiler in the provincial jail. The erector was Angus Gillis and the general foreman was Gordon Mackay. John Robertson was job steward. When this job was done I travelled to Edmonton, as I'd heard there was work there. Lodge 359 had slowed down considerably.

The business manager of 146, Ray Weeden, didn't exactly welcome me with open arms. I'm not sure that I was the first Lodge 359 member to make the mistake of bragging about how good the wages and conditions were in B.C., but I am sure I was not the last.

I learned that my friend Stan Petronski was elected the first business manager of Lodge 128 at this time.

Once, while waiting for a dispatch, I was at a beer parlour with Harold Hallam along with a couple other Boilermakers. It turned out a GF had quit a job in Moose Jaw and taken some men with him. Ray was in need of Harold taking the GF position and he knew that. Harold said he'd take the job, but "only if these guys get to come with me." Ray knew he was being blackmailed, but he agreed.

I worked at the project till the long weekend in May. During my absence Lodge 359 suffered the loss of its autonomy and was now operated by a Governing Board — twelve members appointed by the International President to govern the operation of the Lodge. The same thing happened in Lodge 146.

I had a short repair job at Capilano Breweries with CC Moore. After that I was off to Kitimat with Horton Steel to build three huge aluminum ore silos.

There was a new project agreement in effect now, similar to the standard agreement except for a \$2.00 per day board charge. This was the beginning of the project agreements in B.C.

Kitimat was less isolated than Kemano. It was serviced by boat and a railway that reached the boomtown. The highway was yet to arrive; cars came by boat. The Kitimat hotel and beer parlour had just opened, heralding the arrival of civilization. A new town site was already occupied by the families of the smelter works.

Charlie Chambers was the GF and Tony Zagar his assistant. John Robertson was the job steward. We worked six days a week, so despite the board charge, we made money. It took five months to complete the three silos. We would have finished sooner but for a mishap on the third one, when the self-supporting roof collapsed. Luckily, there were no fatalities but Lorne Hathaway received a bad knee injury, giving him a stiff leg for the rest of his life.

Early in 1956 I went to Elk Falls for a new boiler job. I stayed till March, when I quit so I could be home for the birth of my second daughter, Janis.

After that I was dispatched to Port Mellon for CE, working on a new recovery boiler. Gordon McKay was the erector and Harry Casemore was general foreman. We worked five 10-hour shifts per week all summer.

In the fall I was dispatched to Hooker Chemical in North Vancouver for Foster Wheeler. Angus Gillis was the erector, Jimmy Hamilton was the foreman. They took a crew from this site to Prince Rupert to work on boiler repairs at the Cellulose plant.

After that job, it was back to the hall. CE was building two power boilers and a recovery boiler at Port Alberni and I was dispatched to this job. I stayed on the job till the spring of 1957.

I was dispatched to IOCO for the expansion of the refinery with Canadian Bechtel as the general contractor. Bill Edger was the general foreman, Bill Lee was foreman, and Fred Butler was the job steward.

The Ironworkers were making a big play for the rigging of our vessels. Their work was about finished and they envisioned spending the summer in town at IOCO, standing up our vessels. The Ironworker contractor had convinced Bechtel Super that Boilermakers did not rig vessels in these parts. I remembered the green book and started to talk that up.



*Figure 7: Robert MacIntosh on the left at one of the refinery jobs in Vancouver.*

After a call to the hall, Maurice Hadley appeared on site with a dog-eared copy of the green book and he quickly straightened the issue out. The ironworkers hung around as Bill Edger directed the raising of the first vessel, and then they left the site — they were terminated.

To the best of my knowledge the Boilermakers raised all refinery vessels in the province after that. IOCO was the Ironworkers' last gasp on their claim to our refinery work. Contractors recognized that oil refinery vessels were within the Boilermakers' jurisdiction. The pre-job conference became the way of the future.

During that job my first son, Charles, was born on May 13, 1957.

### **Autonomy Returns**

This was an important year for Lodge 359. There was a huge job going on at Taylor Flats in the Peace River country, a gas processing plant and an oil refinery were being built and there were overtime hours. The

membership was flush. Kemano was going strong too, along with the IOCO job.

That year also saw that autonomy was restored to the Lodge. An election of officers took place, and Fred Butler had run successfully against Jim Downie for president.



*Figure 8: Smoky Harris leading Lodge 359 at a Labour Day Parade.*

Maurice Hadley and Smoky Harris had a contest over the business manager's job, which Maurice won. The meetings took on new meaning for me and others after that. Most of the members had family responsibilities. This Lodge was our bread and butter, and we had to

look after it. No more would we tolerate some member or other under the influence upsetting the decorum. When the parliamentarians started to disrupt, the chairman knew he had the support of the membership. Fred ran a tight meeting.

There was a new breed of Boilermakers all across the country by this time. Construction became an industry where a Boilermaker could put down roots, accept responsibility to meet mortgage payments on a home, and have a decent family life just like regular folks. The mid-fifties was the turning point. The days of open shops for Boilermakers in the field in Canada had passed into history.

Fred was after me to be a delegate to the central labour bodies like the Vancouver and District Labour Council and the B.C. Federation of Labour. I also went to Night school to learn about parliamentary procedure.

On the job, a new refinery project was starting up at BA Oil in Port Moody as IOCO was winding down. Canadian Kellogg was the general contractor and Toronto Iron Works (TIW) was building the new tank farm.

The steel plate for the tanks was to be prepared at a site in downtown Vancouver at the foot of Carroll Street on False Creek. Merchant Cartage had leased the property from the BC Electric Company who sublet it to TIW.

It was here, rain or shine, that we unloaded raw plate, cut it to dimensions, rolled it and shipped it to Port Moody for erection. Al Woglemouth was superintendent, Louie Yeo was the foreman and Fred Butler was job steward. In charge of the whole TIW show at both sides was none other than Ray Weeden, the former business manager of Lodge 146.

Others on the job included; Reg and Tony Lavature, Fred McKinney, Erin Klon, Nick Rudy, Bill Thompson, Ed Lee, Ed Ingram and a host of others who were automatic burner operators from the shipyard.

It was Fred Butler who urged me to run. I agreed to do it and I made it. I was also elected to the negotiating committee along with Ken Dawson. We were interested in contract negotiations which were coming up with the Steel Erector's Association. We sat in on the negotiating meetings along with Fred Butler, Maurice Hadley, and the IVP Harry Gomm.

The employers' representatives were from Dominion Bridge, Bickerton Bridge & Tank, Coast Steel and Horton Steel. We heard predictions about there being tough times ahead, that the ALCAN project was fast coming to an end, that there were no other projects on the drawing boards, etc. The talks were ongoing.

Another project Fred Butler and I worked on was education for Boilermakers at the executive board level. The business manager arranged a meeting between the Boilermakers and Colonel Inglis, President of the Pacific Vocational Institute in Burnaby. He arranged for us to take rigging training at the Pacific National Exhibition Grounds. Jack Fraser, a tough old Ironworker who was a superb instructor, taught the six-week-long, twice-a-week night school course. He followed up with two more classes for Boilermakers who wanted to upgrade their skills and to learn more.

By the fall of 1958 the BA project came to end. I joined a long list of unemployed Boilermakers back at Lodge 359. Management's predictions proved to be right and not just rhetoric: things did get tough. We did get an agreement with a modest settlement. Ken and I were disappointed that we did not get health and welfare, but we did support the agreement.

1958 – 1963 were pretty grim years. The membership in Lodge 359 melted away to just over 200 members. Expenses remained the same for the

Lodge but income was drastically reduced. Most of those who stood by the Lodge paid full dues, realizing that if the Lodge went under, we were sunk too.

The school came through again, offering more courses in blueprint reading and layout, along with rigging classes. Getting these classes was as much to boost morale and beat despair as it was for learning. UIC also worked with us, so no members were penalized for upgrading their skills so they could be better employed.

There was always the hope for a repair job coming up, but in the meantime we had to get out to hustle up something. I had a variety of odd jobs I found by looking at the want ads every morning: stacking beer, working for junk dealers salvaging scrap iron, carry away debris in a wheelbarrow, washing light fixtures in gas stations, pumping gas, and other things that paid a buck. I always accepted any dispatch from Lodge 359 which was offered, but these were few and far between.

I used to keep in contact with other members. We would help each other find these jobs, and it was Paul Petruk who helped me get a job on the waterfront, scrapping a former cruiser.

Boilermakers would meet up on Saturdays at the "Snake Pit," while wives were shopping, to get caught up on news about jobs, etc. The union hall was open on Saturdays so members could paid their union dues. Maurice Hadley would come in just after the noon closing on Saturday and give us an update on things.

I went to BA Oil in the prep-crew for a shutdown. I got a couple extra weeks, and we worked on a new contract maintenance agreement with Catalytic Construction.

I was dispatched next to B.C. Electric Company, for the completion of the Bridge River Project. In 1959, the last of the penstocks was to be installed. There were two of them that ran parallel on the surface for about a mile, all downhill on a steep incline.

Dominion Bridge had the installation and a large crew was required (40 – 50 men) who were under the directions of Fred Cardwell. Fred was a competent but very demanding individual. He got work out of his crew that one never thought possible. He drove them hard and everyone produced,

because “there are four men in the hall ready and eager to take your spot.” The foreman was the level-headed, hardworking Hank Laser. I worked for Northern Construction as a foreman; they had the contract to install a few hundred feet of tunnel liner. Ed Linder was in charge of this job.

Shalath was one of the few jobs going out of Lodge 359 and the revenue coming in was such that we were going broke. I, along with Ike Dixon and Paul Benner, were the three trustees of the Lodge and we became concerned. It was discussed at the executive board meeting and we settled on seeking a field dues structure from the members to carry us over until the good times came back.

At a special meeting, we made a presentation to get the members’ support for field dues. We used a blackboard to show the numbers that were needed to make it work. This was my first presentation on the podium in front of the members. We succeeded in getting the members’ support for field dues at \$5.00 per month, provided one worked ten days or more during that month. This was in addition to regular dues of six dollars. A majority of the members were anxious to save the Lodge in 1959, and we were able to survive as a brotherhood.

There were a few other jobs in 1959, short-term and spaced out between CE at Crofton, C.C. Moore at Ocean Falls, both for boiler repairs, and shutdown at Chevron with Marwell. There were a few weeks with Industrial Contractors Ltd., working on a new gas turbine generation station for B.C. Electric in Port Mann.

In 1960 I went to work for CE at the Burrard Thermal. They had the contract to supply and erect six huge boilers. There was a big crew of us and we mostly knew each other, as the Lodge had shrunk a lot. We were all optimistic about the future; this could be a six-year project. My wife and I bought our first home that year in Richmond.

Among those working on the early crew at that thermal plant were Mickey Ross (the GF), Art Christie, Norm Howatt, Frank Puskas (supervisors), and Fed Butler (job steward). Some of the crew were John Kerr, Jack Prentice, Bill Lee, Larry Gaudette, Jimmy Sneddon (who was 80 years old and walked to the stream drum level and back twice a day, 210 feet above sea level), and Bruce Power, Davor Tomsic, Don Vinoly, Dave Novak, Robbie Regan, Dusty Ristau, Helmut, Helmut Standke, George Last, Dave Knight,

Fudge Lamoureux, Tom Ferrier, Leon Flummerfelt, Paul Petruk, the McKay brothers and the Zess brothers. Bill Hagenbuck and Tom Vanasses were the expeditors. Al Prendergast was in charge of the rigging, Smoky Harris was a pusher, and there were many more.

All went well on the job, even better than planned. CE used the thermal plant to operate as a boiler-repair depot. Often on long weekends, there would be shutdowns at pulp mills on the island — even up to Hinton, Alberta.

CE's construction manager was Stewart McKnight. He ran his department from the head office in Montreal. He was the boss and everyone who was on permanent payroll knew that. He was a true legend. He liked his scotch and had an unquestionable knowledge of boilers.

When I got to me Stewie personally for the first time, I was having a beer on a Saturday afternoon with Tom Vanasses. We were invited to meet Stewie at the Georgia Hotel. We hit it off, both of us being from the Maritimes, and he know a lot about Trenton Industries. We were having a great time telling stories when George Legault came in. He was surprised to see one of his crew there chatting away with the boss. McKnight knew this and played it up, telling George that we were old friends. Every time McKnight was on the job he would ask for me and come over to catch up.

On July 29, 1961 our second son, Richard, was born.

The six-year project turned into a 15-year project for some of us. With the shortage of material we went on a one-week-on, one-week-off schedule. George did not want to lose any of his crew — everyone was needed for shutdowns. With the business manager's approval, everyone's earnings were cut in half, but it was something the crew thought was fair. On the off-weeks I was pumping gas in Richmond to keep the wolf away from the front door.

As the supplies became harder to get, the whole job was slowed down, and half the crew got laid off at the first round. I made it to the second round of lay-offs.

Through 1962, there were a few jobs — nothing big. A shutdown at BC Oil for a few weeks and that was it for me. Construction was just flat. Lodge

191 had work at the shipyard but there was no room and board. Some members took their families to Victoria and set up a life there.

I was able to get a job at Mackenzie Barge and Derrick's operation. There were 20 of us, mostly Lodge 359 guys trying to make a living. One day, as we were sitting down for lunch, a business rep for the Operating Engineers came along and stuck a check-off authorization card in our hands, which we all signed. Now we were paying dues to two different unions for the privilege of working on this job.

### **Career Change**

In July 1962 we got word that Maurice Hadley had been appointed an International Staff Representative. He was in the last year of a three-year term, so an election was held to finish off his term of office as business manager — nine months.

I was convinced I had the best qualifications for the job. I had been an Executive Board member since 1958, a delegate to the Labour Council, and I had taken several courses sponsored by the council. I had been a member for 12 years, 10 as a 359 member. The only concern about me was my age — 37.

Fred Butler also decided to put his name forward for the position and so did Clare Rowa. He was one of the tankies and had their support. He ran second, collecting half the votes I did. Fred came third (he did not try very hard) while Clare and I both canvassed for votes, as did my friends and supporters.

In preparation for nomination and election I made sure I couldn't be declared ineligible. I followed the International Constitution. I dragged up my pay from the shipyard. You either meet the criteria or not. Everyone in the yard knew why I was told by Art Mason, "Just in case you miss, your job will be waiting for you."

I had lined up John McAulay as my running mate for Local Lodge president, Fred resigned to run for business manager. He did a great job as president, and he also ran a tight ship at the meetings.

After the balloting committee report, Harry Gomm came over to me, shook my hand and said, "Congratulations Bob. So long as you abide by the

constitution you'll have my support." That was August 2, 1962, and the beginning of a reasonably good relationship with the International Vice-President.

This win induced me to go shopping for a decent car, so my old 1957 Vauxhall Velox was traded up for a '62 Chevy Biscayne. This was a basic model — not even a radio. I also had to dress the part as a representative of the union, and casual dress was not part of the job in those days. You wore a suit — the members expected nothing less back then. I picked up a couple of suits, shirts and ties for the job.

During my first two weeks in office, Maurice was a big help showing me how he did things in the office. Plus, he introduced me to many others within the construction industry and unions. In those days the Boilermakers involved themselves in local and provincial union affairs. This is how we grew the good name of Lodge 359: by making sure everyone knew who we were.

In those days a new face was watched closely by others in the central labour bodies to determine their politics — left wing versus right wing. I was approached by all parties within the labour movement to attend meetings. I did attend some meetings but I was busy with my job as business manager and with family life, so I was not invited after I started to say "no thank you."

### **Lodge 359**

In 1962 there was a crisis facing the new administration: too few members and too few dollars in the bank. There were 211 members remaining; by October that number was 195 and the bank account dropped below \$2,500.

Later that month we organized our first shop, D. Tidy Welders Ltd., with 30 new members. IVP Gomm came in to help with the first collective agreement. His knowledge at the negotiating table was the reason we achieved an agreement that both the members and employer could live with.

The pulp mill in Harmac was expanding with a new recovery boiler, and 359 was determined to do as much of the work as legitimately allowed. I

obtained the “Green Book” and shared copies with the executive board. We used our meetings as seminars on work jurisdiction.

Membership expansion was the next consideration, and it was agreed to make a serious attempt at keeping out incompetent and unreliable workers. We simply couldn't afford to take a chance on dropping a lift with incompetent riggers. This matter was left to the dispatcher's (business manager's) discretion. At the same time the dispatcher was expected to exercise equal opportunity when it came to dispatching.

The executive board was made up of a group of individuals with strong ideas, so unanimity wasn't always in the cards when making a policy decision. But teamwork was, and when we went to the membership with a recommendation, we were united.

Probably more important was the support which the executive gave me on the decisions I made without their input. I always kept them aware of what I was doing and the decisions I was making. Keeping them in the loop made for a smooth relationship.

During my five years in office, a lot of progress was made thanks to this teamwork. At the executive board level, Lodge 359 established:

- Examining boards for riggers and fitters
- A dispatch system with a hiring board and a full-time dispatcher
- An apprenticeship plan
- Assistant business managers
- Paid holidays (stats & annual vacations)
- A pension plan
- Dues check-off and field dues
- A presence in the industrial shops through organizing committees
- Expanded work jurisdiction in construction
- Sub-contracting to union contractors only
- Weekend check-out allowance

The membership of Lodge 359 expected the business manager to represent the Lodge by getting involved in industry. That meant working with other unions on camp committees, organizing committees, construction trades councils, other Boilermaker lodges and the allied hydro council, for example.

In one organizing drive in Prince George B.C. the Boilermakers, along with the building trades council, swarmed Northwood Pulp just as the job started and demonstrated at every construction job in town that wasn't union.

There were members of the various unions working on the inside supporting the drives, talking up the union advantage to those men who were not union members. By the Saturday afternoon, contractors were standing in line at our motel waiting to sign agreements with the appropriate trades.

On the lower mainland, I was coordinating Lodge 359's organizing drive in the industrial shops. I would go to potential members' homes and explain what the union could do for them.

When B&W came into the province, they had done a job in Port Mellon before I took office. Their second job was Harmac pulp mill. They did not have an agreement with 359, and their erector called a couple of 359 members to come to Harmac for work — without going through the business manager.

I called the members to a meeting in front of the executive board, where we explained very clearly to these members the problems they were creating by going to work without a dispatch. They were fined \$25.00 each and left the job. I then went to the Labour Relations Board (LRB) to make the company signatory to the collective agreement. I could not enforce the contract if the employer did not sign it. When a representative of the LRB tacked a notice of application on the job site, the phone began to ring in International President Russel Berg's office and B&W was not happy.

I was called up on the carpet in front of President Berg, along with the two Canadian IVP's and couple of B&W representatives. I explained very clearly Lodge 359's position in this affair, then B&W gave their side of the story. After a few minutes President Berg said, "I'll tell you what we're going to do on this one. Bob is not going to force the contractor to sign an agreement in which they had no part in negotiations, but the employer will sign a letter of understanding to the effect that they will live up to the agreement. When that agreement expires they will be expected to negotiate with Lodge 359."

I had a letter of understanding a few days later on my desk, but B&W was not happy. They constantly put their own interpretations on the agreement. We had to service their jobs frequently in order to keep peace.

In 1964, after Harry Gomm retired, Don Whan, the business manager of Lodge 146, became the International Vice-President for Western Canada. Jack Dickens was rehired back as an international representative.

I became an international representative in 1967. I worked closely with Lodge 359 as a trustee of the Pension Plan and the apprentices' committee, plus I worked with Lodges 191, 146, 555, 532, 580, and 600. I worked with the UA in developing the Quality Control Council of Canada. Jurisdiction was one of my strong points and I would help the construction lodges across Canada whenever there was a dispute between trades. I conducted steward training to the next generation of leaders in the Union.

One appointment I was given by Don Whan to get the Boilermaker Red Seal certification across Canada, we achieved that with the first Red Seal being granted in 1974.

*Robert MacIntosh retired in the early 1990's and passed away in 1999.*

