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95 years young next week

Gordon Jackson: a lifetime of action

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Staff Writer

There aren't many people who can look back on a lifetime of 95 years and count accomplishments as many and as varied as those of Gordon Jackson.

Jackson, the guiding force behind the original construction of Mississauga Hospital and one of the movers in locating Toronto International Airport in what then was Toronto Township can look back with pride on many more than these two accomplishments when he turns 95 next week.

Add to these two important credentials the fact that Jackson almost single-handedly formed the Canadian Navy and has spent more than 50 years actively involved with the Masonic Lodge and you begin to get a picture that Gordon Jackson was not a man to spend his life waiting for things to happen.

"It's been a very busy 95 years," said Jackson from his Stavebank Rd. home where he still lives, along with one of his twin daughters, Mary Elizabeth.

Other daughter Ruth de Beorr keeps a careful eye on dad who is inclined to overwork himself tending to gardens or by enjoying long walks through Port Credit.

Jackson is enjoying retirement, but finds it hard to sit still since retiring only five years ago.

"I retired the first time when I was 70 and got fed up with doing nothing, so I went back for another 15 years or so with the McLaughlin Group," explained Jackson. "I finally quit when I was about 90."

Jackson was born on a small farm just outside Bala, Muskoka, but soon decided farm life wasn't for him.

After graduating from Gravenhurst High School, the young Jackson made his way to Toronto where he obtained his BA from the University of Toronto and his LLB degree from Osgoode Hall. While at Trinity College, Jackson won the gold medal for oratory.

World War I interrupted this promising law career and saw Jackson travel overseas to Britain as an ordinary seaman in the Royal Navy Canadian Volunteer Reserve (RNCVR).

As one of 1,800 Canadians serving overseas, Jackson soon had completed his officer's training, gunnery control and was stationed at Devonport, England, as a lieutenant.

It was at this point he was requested by the British Admiralty to gather together

the dispersed Canadian troops into one naval unit to be known as the Royal Canadian Navy Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR) with Jackson installed as commanding officer.

On return to Canada at the completion of the war, Jackson remained in the service, becoming Lieutenant Commander and later Commanding Officer of the HMCS York which he staffed and put into operation.

"There was no ship, no equipment and no men," said Jackson. "It was my job to go coast to coast speaking in all cities to form a navy."

In 1923, Jackson returned to his law career, moving to a tiny mud road in Toronto Township that is today known as Highway 10.

"The area then was all farming," remembers Jackson. "Our house was just four walls and a roof. There was no running water or electricity in the house and no sewage or watermains."

Jackson cites the battle over locating the new airport as one of his major cases.

"It was quite a battle to get it settled and built in Toronto Township," Jackson recalls. "There were five or six municipalities that wanted to take over the part of Malton the airport would be built on."

At that time, Malton was located in Toronto Gore Township, a township that could not afford to service the large project. Through the actions of Jackson, Toronto Township absorbed a piece of Toronto Gore Township and construction of the airport began.

Becoming the first chairman of the board of Mississauga Hospital is another of Jackson's prides in life.

"That hospital is the result of a lot of hard work and plugging — and plenty of it," said Jackson who was chairman of the hospital from 1953 to 1965. "Today that hospital is one of the finest in Ontario, with the finest equipment and very fine doctors and high standards — and it's all paid for."

Jackson's involvement with the hospital began when it was "just a potato patch" and his interest in its expansion and well-being continues today.

As if these accomplishments alone did not keep Jackson a busy man, he has been involved with the Masonic Order for more than 50 years. In this time he has been a District Deputy Grand Master of Toronto, District A and has been honored for 50 years of service as a Grand Superintendent.

Jackson's late son, Robert Jackson, was also involved in the Masonic Lodge and at one time father and son served together as Deputy Grand Master and Past Deputy Grand Master of Toronto District A — a feat never before achieved by any Mason.

Throughout his life, Jackson has also been extremely involved in church and choirs. He currently attends Clarkson Presbyterian Church, but has also been a tenor soloist at many other Mississauga churches.

"I remember once I was singing in the Charleottetown Cathedral and just after the organ prelude I had opened my mouth to sing and the lights went out and the organ stopped," reminisced Jackson of his singing career.

Today Jackson keeps himself busy attending luncheon meetings of the Ontario Club, maintains his connection with the naval reserve and is an active member of the Port Credit Eat and Argue Club.

Jackson's wife of almost 60 years, Florence, died in 1979. He has three grandchildren and keeps busy with his hobbies of reading, walking and gardening.

Celebrations for his 95th birthday will be held only for the immediate family at the Ontario Club.

When queried on his advice to the upcoming generation, Jackson stated that he had none.

"My advice would be built on experience gained through a background that no longer exists," he said. "They'll have to barge through themselves. No one gave me any advice. They'll just have to fight it out."

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Being involved with Mississauga Hospital over its 25-year history is just one of the highlights of 94-year-old Gordon Jackson's life. Jackson celebrates his 95th birthday next week. (Staff photo by Rob Beintema)