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Technology / Technologie

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Although the Engineering Institute of Canada had opened a branch in St. John's just before Newfoundland became a part of Canada in 1948, the province had no regulatory body to oversee the practice of professional engineering until 1952 when the Association of Professional Engineers of Newfoundland was founded. From its 27 charter members the organization has now grown to 2,325 members (2001 figures), changing its name in 1989 to the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Newfoundland (AEPGN). This book was published on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of its creation but, as its title declares, it is not really a history of the association, which occupies a modest final chapter—half of which consists of photographs of past presidents.

Instead, the book is a history of engineering projects in Newfoundland and Labrador divided according to different fields of engineering:

Early Engineering, Communications, Electricity, Transportation, Mining, Pulp and Paper, Construction, Marine Engineering and Fisheries, Oil and Gas, Education, and the concluding history of the AEPGN to the present. It is of limited use to the scholar with a modest bibliography and index and no citations of sources. The current list of members of the association and the past presidents is included with no analysis or even mention of issues such as the lawsuit over the use of the term “software engineering” that recently attracted the attention of professional engineers in Canada. It is, however, a useful book for the general public, as well as engineering and high school students, because it gives a good, not particularly technical, overview of engineering in Newfoundland and Labrador. It is thus a necessary addition to general histories of Newfoundland and an attempt to raise the general consciousness of the public about engineering activity in the province. Sidebars give statistical information such as lists of airports and lengths of runways, major mines in production, and noteworthy bridges and their spans. The black and white illustrations seem to be evenly divided between views of early engineering sites and personalities.

The author, who is a practicing engineer in the communications industry, has two books to his credit on the transatlantic cable and Marconi’s successful attempt to bridge the Atlantic with wireless. This strikes me as fitting since Newfoundland’s entry into the world of modern engineering came in the field of communications in these two internationally significant projects because of its unique location far into the Atlantic. There then followed the development of its natural resources: its minerals for mining, its forests for pulp and paper, its abundant waterpower for electricity, and, more recently, its offshore oil and gas. Initially, much of the initiative and capital, as well as the personnel for development came from outside but by now Newfoundland has a solid basis of engineering talent trained in its own educational institutions, some of which, in the fields of marine engineering and fisheries are world leaders. If much of the Hibernia oil drilling platform was fabricated in Italy and Korea, most of the projected White Rose project is to be built in Newfoundland.

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