

An Architect's Architect

Last month, the profession lost one of its dearest and most accomplished members. Chris Fillingham, whose contribution to the profession and culture of architecture in Canada was exceptional, passed away suddenly on September 19th. As a practising architect for half a century, he led teams that created many notable buildings in Canada. But his major contribution extends beyond geographical boundaries and beyond the normal services of an architect, to the advancement of the profession itself. He is fondly remembered by Pro-Demnity in this tribute as we extend our deepest sympathies to his family.



Chris Fillingham B.ARCH, OAA, FRAIC, AIA (HON), RAIA (HON)

1943-2021

Chris was born in England in 1943 and moved with his family to Canada, at the age of three, settling finally in Toronto. His interest in architecture was evident from an early age, so it was no surprise when he entered the University of Toronto architecture program in 1962. Classmates

from those years – several of whom remained friends and colleagues for the next 59 years – remember Chris as a smart, witty, dependable and considerate person with a remarkable range of interests.

Any architect who graduated during the mid-sixties with proficiency in the game of bridge probably owes those skills to Chris Fillingham. Little did any of us know that, aside from our prescribed courses, those card-playing skills – negotiation, rationality tinged with optimism, teamwork, calmness, and a sense of humour – would be required in architectural practice and would distinguish Chris as an exceptional professional.

Graduating in 1968, Chris embarked on a professional career that thrust him quickly into organizational and managerial roles: from 1972 to 2004 with Dunlop Farrow Architects in Toronto, ultimately as principal; from 2004 to 2021 with Stantec, Toronto, as senior principal, vice president and consultant. His wisdom, warmth and generosity affected all those who worked with him.

There was no time in Chris's career when he wasn't somehow engaged in furthering the profession. Almost immediately after registering, he became a Member of the Standing Committee on Fire Safety in Buildings (1976), a position he held for 10 years. After this, he was appointed a director of the Ontario Urban Development Institute. This was followed by an impressive number of professional and community appointments and activities, including: Director, Building Industry Strategy Board of Ontario (1985-1988); consultant to External Affairs Canada and Presenting Canadian Experience in Wood Frame Construction to the Japanese Government as it Relates to Fire and Structural Safety (1987); First Vice President, Construction Industry Advisory Committee to Minister of Economic Development and Trade, Ontario (1989); ... and, most notably, OAA president (1999-2000), RAIC president (2004-2005) and Board Chair of Pro-Demnity Insurance and its predecessor (2001-2015).

Chris's participation in OAA governance came at a particularly challenging and precarious time for Ontario architects. Coming on board when the profession was still suffering from the effects of the early-1990s recession, he was instrumental in nurturing a resurgence that has continued to this day. Beginning as a councillor in 1997, followed by a vice presidency in 1998 and culminating in presidency in 1999-2000, Chris's contributions were numerous and significant.

During his presidential year, Chris assumed the task of restoring optimism to a profession that had suffered through a debilitating decade. During his tenure, the OAA undertook a number of major initiatives:

- a Regulatory Review
- the first annual OAA Conference (held in Windsor, 1999)

- the first Celebration of Excellence, consisting of a gala black-tie dinner, attended by 600
- initiation of the Continuing Education Program – a feature of the Conference – in order that “The public will benefit by knowing that Ontario architects are the best: committed to keeping current and following a path of life-long learning.”
- the OAA’s first website
- a new and, for its time, radically progressive OAA marketing identity
- commissioning of two CAUSE projects, reaching into two Ontario communities to highlight the public value of architectural services.

Addressing the OAA membership in his quarterly President’s Message, Chris outlined his larger objectives and aspirations for the profession – echoing the goals he strived for in his own professional life:

“One of my goals for ’99 is to establish and foster relationships with others in the building industry, government and related organizations. This, combined with a stronger connection to the public, is key to strengthening the architectural profession.”

Perspectives, SPRING ’99

“Leadership in the building industry is enhanced by networking with other associations and allied organizations. This interaction is imperative to the strengthening of our profession. ... By creating an extended team, we can benefit from the realization that we’re all in this together.”

Perspectives, Autumn ’99

“More than ever, we cannot think of ourselves solely as architectural practitioners in Ontario. We need to recognize and take advantage of the opportunities that exist in the broader world market.”

Perspectives, WINTER ’99

In 2004, Chris was elected president of Canada’s national body, the RAIC. In his year-end message

to architects across the country, Chris reiterated his ideals of reaching out as a profession, beyond international borders:

“As president of the RAIC, I have emphasized these [national and international] relationships over the past year – this means building solid foundations with our architectural colleagues across the country and with others in the design and construction industry. All in all, I believe good relationships reap untold dividends and this relationship building is more than worth the time and resources invested.”

RAIC President's message, 2004

Chris's efforts toward collaboration and effective communication with the construction industry were recognized by his being named 2003 recipient of the Jock Tindale Memorial Award and the 2010 Donald P. Giffen Construction Industry Achievement Award – the first architect so recognized. The criteria for these honours include: “an individual who has demonstrated a high standard of ethics and integrity in dealings with industry participants” and “distinguished by the exemplary dedication and leadership they have shown in pursuing the construction industry's common goals and interests.” There is no argument that Chris met these criteria.

In recognition of his efforts toward international professional understanding, Chris was awarded honorary membership in both the American and Australian architectural associations, two organizations whose medallions Chris wore with great pride.

In 1987, the OAA initiated its Indemnity Plan, a professional liability program, whose intent was to make mandatory liability insurance available to all architects at a reasonable cost. During his years on OAA Council, Chris had become involved with the evolution of the Plan and held to the belief that a stronger, more secure insurance plan was essential to the health of the profession. In 2001, in pursuit of this belief, he joined the Indemnity Plan development committee and, with the transformation to Pro-Demnity Insurance Company in 2003, became the first board chair – a position he held for the next 12 years. After ceding the chair to his successor Bill Birdsell, Chris stayed on the board to ease the transition. Amid the uncertainty that he must have experienced during that year, Bill described Chris's demeanor in two words: “*calm and focused.*”

Past Pro-Demnity President & CEO Byron Treves had this to say about Chris's contribution to Pro-Demnity and to the profession:

“Chris brought a high level of overview of the profession, from both an association

and a practice perspective. His charisma and calm manner were invaluable in the years leading up to the transition to an insurance company, involving negotiations with the government, the red tape commission and the change in relationship with the OAA. His collegial approach as the Board Chair was a blessing in those challenging times, to both the board members and senior management.

Many important changes occurred during his time as Chair of Pro-Demnity, including the introduction of the increased limits program, catastrophic reinsurance protection, the water ingress issues involving wall design, Bill 124 relating to the Building Code Act and its insurance requirements, and the pressure from FSCO (Financial Services Commission of Ontario) to transfer the regulation of solvency to OSFI (Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions). His calming influence cannot be over-emphasized. He intuitively understood the role of the Chair, the Board and Management."

In the last year of his chairmanship, Chris helped to initiate Pro-Demnity's own newsletter, *The Straight Line*, now in its 17th issue. In his Board Chairman's Message, Issue No. 1, December 1, 2015, Chris wrote:

"This is the inaugural issue of The Straight Line. ... Articles will cover a broad range of topics that will engage Ontario architects—whether in practice or not—and others with an interest in the profession.

The Straight Line will provide a forum for commentary from experts outside the profession whose special knowledge can assist us by explaining areas of law and business that lie beyond our daily experience but could affect us in unanticipated ways."

As always, Chris's interest was in strengthening the profession by ensuring that it remained a complete entity – one that looked outward as well as inward.

Chris's professional mantra was "We're all in this together." We owe it to him, in his absence, to adhere to this ideal as best we can. And, as suggested in his published obituary, ["Raise a glass to this extraordinary man and a life well lived."](#)

CHRISTOPHER FILLINGHAM SCHOLARSHIP FUND

Chris's legacy to the profession he loved is profound, evidenced not only through the impact

achieved through his project work and governance roles, but more important, through the many architects he

mentored and taught throughout his career. In his memory, The John. H. Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape, and Design, Chris's alma mater, has established a scholarship fund to assist students at the faculty.

In light of Chris's contribution to the profession, in particular his long service to Pro-Demnity, we have provided support to the fund. We are sharing information about how to contribute to the fund for those who may wish to designate a personal or corporate gift in Chris's memory.

MAKING A DONATION

1. Make a secure gift via credit card over the telephone by calling Stacey Charles, Alumni and Development Officer at (416) 978-4340; OR
2. Make your cheque payable to: "University of Toronto." Indicate designation of the gift "In memory of Christopher Fillingham" in the notation field or in a note accompanying the donation, and mail to: John H. Daniels Faculty of Architecture Landscape and Design, Office of Advancement, 1 Spadina Crescent, Toronto, ON M5S 2J5, Canada

Donations will be acknowledged with a charitable tax receipt. BN 1081 62330 - RR0001.

Thank you for considering support of the Christopher Fillingham Scholarship Fund.