

**Dr. Alexander 'Alec' Campbell McEwen, LL.M., PhD, CGeog, OLS# 784
August 22, 1926 – March 29, 2015**



Alec McEwen was born under a travelling star. As a youth, he listened to his father recount adventures of his years aboard steamships and cargo liners sailing around the world, and these stories inspired him to cast a wider net in his own long and varied career. By his retirement in 2014 at the age of 86, he had worked in an alphabet soup of 25 countries.

Alec got his start surveying in Ontario. After immigrating to Canada from England he articulated to become an Ontario Land Surveyor, receiving this commission in 1952 and the Dominion Land Surveyor commission the following year. In 1954 he left a job as Director of Town Planning with the city of Sault St Marie to take a two-year assignment in North Borneo under the Colombo Plan, an unconventional career move at the time. Upon returning to Toronto he was engaged in a variety of urban and rural land development projects, including Chief Surveyor for the Toronto Transit Commission and consultant for subway route surveys. From 1958-1961 he provided technical assistance in the Seychelles on behalf of the United Nations, taking his young family with him to this island paradise. Subsequently he worked in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania for the Canadian government from 1964-1970. During this time he taught surveying at the Survey Training Centre, and qualified as a certified land surveyor in East Africa as well as a licenced Tanzanian land surveyor. A student of law, he completed his Masters' degree and his thesis, *International Boundaries of East Africa*, was published by Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Returning to Canada in 1970, he engaged in private practice as a surveying and land administration consultant to governments and the private sector. In 1972 he was appointed Director of Lands and Surveys for the Government of Newfoundland, a position he held for four years. From 1976-1990 he held the position of Commissioner, Canada/United States International Boundary Commission, Ottawa, Canada and Washington, DC. This Cabinet-appointed post included responsibility for surveying and mapping the land and water boundary area; maintenance of the boundary vista and demarcation; regulation of transboundary construction; submission of joint reports to the two national governments; and gathering, storing and disseminating technical and other data. Additionally he liaised with the land surveying profession. During this period he also found time to finish his Ph.D.

Retiring from his position with the federal government, in 1991 he began a full Professorship of Cadastral Studies in the Geomatics department, Faculty of Engineering at the University of Calgary. From 1991-1995 he taught many of today's Alberta Land Surveyors and in 2008 was made an honorary member of the ALSA. It was during this time he met and married his second wife, Sherry. After his retirement from the university in 1996 he was appointed Professor Emeritus in recognition of his contributions. While at the university and following his retirement, Alec consulted all over the world in matters of land tenure, land title registration, and geomatics. His assignments included donor-sponsored projects for the World Bank in Tunisia, Moldova, Mongolia, Uzbekistan; for the European

Union in Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Algeria; for the African Development Bank in Tunisia; for the Asian Development Bank in Uzbekistan and Mongolia; for the Inter-American Development Bank in Trinidad and Tobago; for CIDA/CESO in Bolivia and Peru; for CIDA/York University in the Ukraine; for CIDA/GIZ/FINNIDA in Cambodia; for private donors in Nigeria; for USAID in the Russian Federation and Palestine (West Bank); for the Government of Canada in the Ukraine; for the Government of Finland in Zanzibar. Along with fluency in English and French, during his travels he learned to read, write and speak Malay, along with a smattering of Kiswahili. A lover of languages, for his own enjoyment he gained a working knowledge of Italian and Spanish.

Alec was active as a member in a number of societies:

- Canadian Institute of Geomatics, Canada
- Commonwealth Association of Surveying and Land Economy (CASLE)
- Association of Canada Lands Surveyors
- Association of Newfoundland Land Surveyors, Canada
- Alberta Land Surveyors' Association (Honorary Member)
- Royal Geographical Society, UK
- Writers' Union of Canada
- Global Land Tool Network (GLTN)
- Member, Expert Roster, UN Commission on Legal Empowerment of the Poor

He was published in books, and many articles and reports. Some readers may be familiar with his long-running column in Geomatica, "Geomatics and the Law". Upon his passing the president of the University of Calgary praised his 'dedication, knowledge and vision' which 'still serve as an inspiring model of success in cadastral surveying' and whose 'leadership in the community and significant contributions in land tenure systems across the world has made a true difference'.