Burns McKay Ross
1927-2008
Submitted by his family

Burns was born October 22, 1927 in Woodstock, Ontario. After his father lost his job in a Woodstock foundry during the Great Depression, his family moved to a 60-acre farm just outside town. Rising before dawn, Burns worked the farm with a team of Clydesdale horses before and after school while his father drove a township road grader to make ends meet.

As Burns was finishing high school, a neigBhbour's farm came up for sale and his father presented Burns with a bank book; all the while he had been working on the farm, seemingly without pay, his father had been secretly depositing a labourer's wages into the account. Burns had to decide between buying the farm or attending university and chose the latter, not an easy decision as he was always at heart part farmer.

He graduated in 1950 with a B.A.Sc. in civil engineering and an Ontario Land Surveyor designation. After completing the minimum work experience in Woodstock to obtain professional certification, he moved to Goderich to establish his own engineering and land surveying firm. He had always intended to be his own boss, whether on a farm or as an engineer/land surveyor. The beginning was not auspicious. Before starting out he had written to a number of local lawyers in Goderich and Walkerton about the possibility for success; all but one replied that he would likely starve. Friends were quick to point out the foolishness of his decision. With his back against Lake Huron, the Goderich location was only half a territory. However, the shoreline provided most of the survey work for Burns in the 1950s and 1960s as shoreline properties were being subdivided for cottage lots. To this date, a large portion of the company's work comes from the narrow strip of land between Highway 21 and the lakeshore. Starting with a staff consisting of a shared secretary and chainmen hired from the pool hall, the firm grew to 50 full

time employees at the time of his death. In 1976 Burns sold the survey portion of the business to Chris Kiar, OLS so that he could concentrate on providing civil engineering services to area municipalities.

Burns was an enlightened engineer and businessman and his firm became one of the longest-running, employee-owned engineering firms in Ontario. Many of the early staff spent their entire careers in the firm and were his lifelong friends. They provided engineering services to many of the small towns and municipalities in Southwestern Ontario and Burns' Scottish heritage was evident in his use of public money. He spent it as if it was his own and always ensured that the communities received the maximum infrastructure for money spent.

Other than work, the focus of Burns' life was his family, friends and community. Warmhearted, honest, and possessed of a remarkable modesty, he raised his four kids, was a surrogate father figure to several nephews, and was a pillar of the local volunteer community. Nearing retirement, with the firm successfully transitioned to a new generation of engineers (including his son Andrew), he and his wife, Ruth, moved to a nearby farm, and Burns changed the focus of his work to managing the property's forest, garden and ski trails. A tree lover his entire life, Burns was in his element. A Thanksgiving ritual was the family trip into the bush to measure the annual growth of 26 or so large maple and oak trees he had numbered.

The last decade of Burns' life was a challenge with the unexpected death of his middle son Ian being particularly difficult. Only too aware of his developing Alzheimer's, he bore its assault with grace and dignity and maintained his deep interest and concern for those around him far into the disease. As his memory failed, his community of family and friends rallied around him making his last years as fulfilling as possible. Burns died March 2, 2008 in Goderich, Ontario of Alzheimer's Disease, leaving behind his wife Ruth of fifty-five years, a daughter Beth, two sons David and Andrew, six grandchildren, and his sister Ruth Hanley, of Auchlochlan, Scotland.