

Jacques Dalibard (April 1935 – September 2007): A Pioneer and Leader of Heritage Conservation in Canada and Beyond

by Susan D. Bronson, Susan Buggie and Michael A. Tomlan

Jacques Dalibard, CM, FRAIC, FAPT, one of Canada's most respected leaders in heritage conservation, passed away on September 15, 2007.

Over the last 40 years, Jacques made a remarkable contribution to the field of heritage conservation in Canada and beyond through his pioneering and leadership as both an educator and practitioner.

"There are few professionals in the field of conservation who have had the influence that Jacques has had over the past four decades. There are even fewer still whose career has had such a deep impact ... in the governmental, non-governmental and educational sectors," says Gordon Fulton, Director of Historical Services at Parks Canada, one of many conservation professionals who began their careers working for Jacques Dalibard.



Jacques Dalibard
(April 1935 - September 2007)

Just prior to his death, in August 2007, Jacques was honoured by the Heritage Canada Foundation with the *Gabrielle Léger Award for Lifetime Achievement in Heritage Conservation*. This prestigious award recognizes individuals for their outstanding service to heritage conservation in Canada.

Inspiration

In recent interviews, Jacques identified the roots of his interest in heritage conservation. As a youth, he moved from his native France to England, where he taught French literature in a private school and French civilization at Bristol University. During this period he helped his mother-in-law restore heritage properties and gave a series of lectures on post-war construction in France.

After moving to Montréal in 1958, he studied at McGill University's School of Architecture. His curiosity about historic buildings was shaped by the rigorous architectural history courses of Peter Collins and John Bland's course on Canadian architecture, for which he analyzed warehouse buildings in Old Montréal.

Even at this young age, Jacques's interest extended beyond architecture to the natural environment and the impact of buildings on society. For a sociology course at McGill, he compared the quality of life of residents of a new social housing project, Habitations Jeanne-Mance, with that of families in a dense Montréal neighbourhood similar to the one that had been razed in order to build the project.



Jacques Dalibard at APT event

Photo: HCF

In his spare time, he explored the Québec countryside on a scooter. He was impressed by the integrity of the rural landscapes and villages, but deplored modern insertions such as shopping malls.

After completing his B.Arch., he was hired by the federal government to design the exhibits of the Canadian Pavilion of Expo '67. This was an opportunity not only to explore his new country further but, with the help of Canadians in every discipline, to determine how best to present Canada's accomplishments to the entire world.

From 1968-74, Jacques oversaw restoration work on Canada's national historic sites. Feeling the need to enhance his expertise in heritage conservation, he enrolled in the newly established Masters program at Columbia University. Here he studied with American pioneers in the conservation field, including James Marston Fitch, whom he considered his mentor, and Charles E. Peterson.

Conservation Education and Training

Education and training were always priorities for Jacques. His holistic, interdisciplinary approach to sharing knowledge and promoting awareness has benefited hundreds of conservation experts and ordinary citizens alike.

In 1968, he recognized the need for a forum for exchange of information and experience on the technical challenges of conservation. He organized a meeting with a handful of Canadian and American colleagues in New Richmond, Quebec to establish The Association for Preservation Technology (APT).

Barbara Campagna, APT's current president, notes that, at a time when "professionals involved in preservation often felt isolated," the Association gave practitioners "a place to feel welcome and a home to create a new field."

At the same time, Jacques became active in the International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and in 1969 played a leading role in the foundation of ICOMOS Canada.

"He contributed to the development of ICOMOS as a viable organization and an international network open to the diversity of practices, ways of thinking and actors," says Dinu Bumbaru, secretary general of ICOMOS.

He worked tirelessly to ensure the success of these two burgeoning volunteer organizations and his Ottawa home served as their headquarters.

In addition to ensuring that his staff joined both APT and ICOMOS Canada, Jacques oversaw conservation training for approximately 40 architects, engineers, technicians and tradespeople who worked under his direction.

Every Friday, an invited expert presented a specific project or issue, which was followed by a discussion. The program became so popular that employees from other branches of government also participated. Susan Buggiey, a Parks Canada historian at the time, recalls with fondness how inspiring and relevant these gatherings were for her colleagues.

In time, Jacques's responsibilities within the federal government shifted to larger scale education projects such as the creation of linear parks along transportation corridors, which required negotiation among different levels of government and citizens.

His federal career was followed by a brief stint as Director of Columbia University's historic preservation program, but it wasn't long before Jacques was lured back to his adopted country to direct the Heritage Canada Foundation.

From 1978 to 1995, his experience as an educator and mediator was shared with an ever-growing staff of promising young professionals. With their help, he implemented ambitious programs—such as Main Street and Heritage Regions—and he continued to write for *Heritage Canada* magazine, promoting awareness among Canadians, including developers and politicians.

Jacques returned to academia at the Faculté de l'aménagement of the Université de Montréal for the decade leading up to his retirement in 2005.

Dean Giovanni De Paoli points out that his teaching was appreciated for “the diversity and richness of his professional experience since the late 1960s, his willingness to share his wide knowledge with future practitioners in the field, and the way he provoked students to develop their own frame of reference and conservation philosophy.”

Conservation Practice

Jacques made a major contribution to the practice and management of heritage conservation in Canada.

When working for the federal government, he led a multidisciplinary team of specialists who developed and applied new technologies and philosophies to conserve national historic sites, including Louisbourg, N.S. and Dawson City, Yukon. He also worked with politicians and citizens to revitalize an extensive network of linear heritage corridors, notably the 700-kmlong Rideau-Trent-Severn canal system.

Jacques’s long-held view of heritage conservation as “the management of change,” as a “projet de société” or shared responsibility, and as an environmental concern, has not only provided invaluable inspiration to us all, but promises to continue to inspire the next generation of heritage conservation practitioners.

Susan D. Bronson, Susan Buggiey and Michael A. Tomlan are members of the College of Fellows of the Association for Preservation Technology International (APT). They interviewed Jacques Dalibard, as part of the APT Legacy Project, two weeks before he died.