

The Dean of Canadian Industrial Traffic Management

by Alan Major

Charles Laferle was president of the Canadian Industrial Traffic League in 1938-39. Often referred to as the “Dean” of Canadian industrial traffic management” by those who worked with him, Charles was so revered within industry circles that a CITT award was later named in his honour.



The [Charles Laferle Memorial Award](#) is presented by the Canadian Industrial Transportation Association to the CITT student with the highest combined grade in the two logistics fundamentals courses - Transportation Systems and Logistics Processes (formerly known as Distribution I and Distribution II).

Charles LaFerle was born in 1896 on the island of Malta in the Mediterranean Sea where his family had lived for generations. Later, the LaFerle's emigrated to Detroit, Michigan. At age 16, Charles then moved to Winnipeg to join the Canadian Armed Forces where he lied about his age in order to enlist.

During World War I, Charles enlisted with the Winnipeg Rifles and headed overseas to Europe with the first contingent of soldiers in 1914. While serving his country, Charles was wounded and gassed at Ypres. Ypres is a Belgian municipality located in the Flemish province of West Flanders and was a strategic position during the war. For his efforts during the war, Charles was received in England by Her Majesty, the late Queen Alexandra, the late King George V, the late Queen Mary and other members of the Royal Family.

After recovering from his injuries in England, Charles' celebrated career in the Canadian transportation industry began at the age of 18 when he went

to work for the Canadian Northern Railways in Winnipeg. After his transfer East in 1923, he became traffic manager of the Maple Leaf Milling Company in Toronto. And in August of 1929, he joined The Robert Simpson Company Ltd., and would soon become responsible for the reorganization of their traffic department. It was here where Charles spent the bulk of his logistics career.

In 1925, Charles married Jessie Mildred Somerville. They had one son, David. He received his Canadian citizenship in 1957.

Charles was active in many traffic and civic services that extended beyond his regular employment. They included: The National Chairman of the Transportation Committee of the Canadian Red Cross Society; vice-president of the Crippled Children's Foundation Fund; a director of the Ontario Safety League of the Health League of Canada of the Canadian Industrial Traffic League and of the Toronto Traffic Conference; a founding member of the American Society of Traffic and Transportation; a lecturer on transportation at the University of Toronto's Extension School and a trustee of the Canadian Legion and honorary comptroller and counsellor of the Canadian Red Cross Society.

His past activities include the position of president of: the Canadian Importers and Traders Association; the Downtown Club of the Canadian Legion; of the Canadian Industrial Traffic League and of the Transportation Club of Toronto. He had been chairman of the traffic committee of the Canadian Millers' Association; of the charitable and service fund of the employees at Simpsons-Sears; of the transportation and customs committee of the Toronto Board of Trade and of the transportation and customs committee, Canadian International Trade Fair.

During World War II, Charles was chairman of the Toronto Sea Cadets of the Navy League of Canada and of the transportation committee of the Citizens' Committee for Troops in Training. He was also national director of the Conservation Division of the Department of the National War Services in Ottawa to aid the war effort. Charles was initially asked for two-month commitment, but it eventually grew to a two-year, full-time job. Two-years

later, the federal government and the City of Toronto honoured him for his tireless efforts during the hectic war period.

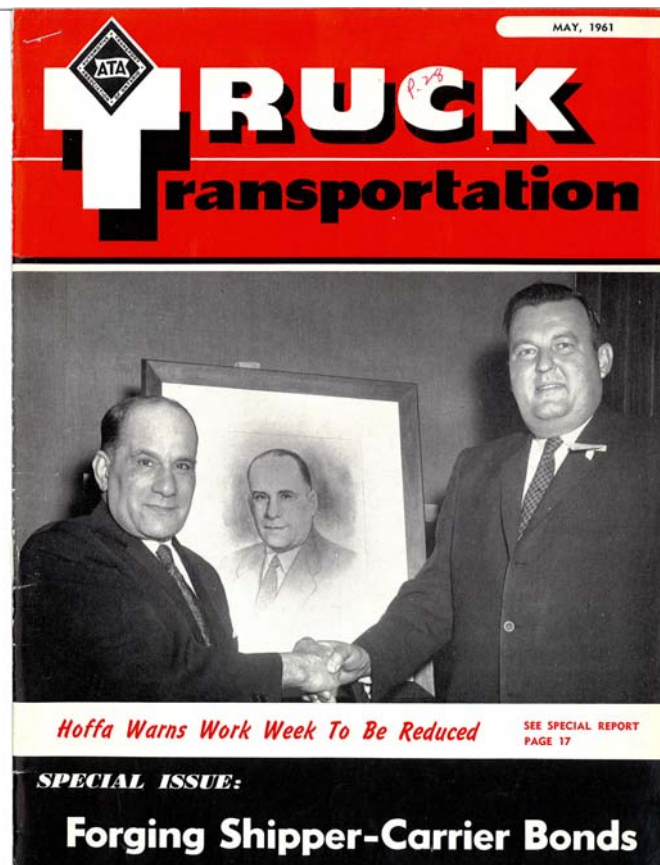
Among his large circle of business associates in Canada, the U.S. and overseas, Charles is affectionately known as the “Dean of Canadian industrial traffic management.” His stellar reputation preceded him in 1953 when the Governor General of Canada, the Right Honourable Charles Vincent Massey, appointed him the honorary Secretary of the Canadian National European Flood Relief Fund.

His impact was even felt within the academic circles of the traffic and transportation profession. His industry related lectures were often reprinted by the University of Toronto under the sponsorship of the Canadian Industrial Traffic League. His other industry research papers were heavily referenced.

But perhaps Charles’ most defining character trait came in the form of his ability to see his many goals through to fruition while with the CITL.

Throughout the years, Charles carried on with his self-imposed task of achieving all of the ten major business objectives he had set for himself some 30 years previously. By the time he retired, Charles saw all of them through to completion.

As one fellow member said of him: "When Charlie takes over the microphone, I sit back. I know I'm going to learn something."



Perhaps the greatest measure of the respect and adulation Charles earned over the years came at the end of his career. On May 31, 1961 his friends and associates gathered to wish him well upon his retirement at a special dinner at the Royal York Hotel in Toronto. The "Friends of Charles Laferle Committee," headed by Eric Gracey (general secretary of the CITL) hosted a \$10-a-plate testimonial dinner in his honour attended by an astonishing 250 people.

In all of the speeches Charles made throughout his career, both formal and informal, he always left his audience with one parting thought.

"Nothing is impossible. There are ways which lead to everything. And if we have sufficient will we should always have sufficient means."

As the CITT's 50th anniversary celebrations conclude during Reposition 2008 in Winnipeg, which also happens to be the birthplace of Charles' Canadian connection, we should take a moment to remember the valuable contributions the early logistic pioneers like Charles Laferle made.