

AN ELDER STATESMAN

By Martine Joly

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...an interview with George R. Heasman

A career diplomat who was successively Ambassador to Indonesia and High Commissioner to New Zealand, George R. Heasman is an elder statesman among Trade Commissioners. He was kind enough to allow *Trade Commissioner* to interview him at his home in Ottawa.

Mr. Heasman was born in Ottawa in December 1898. He studied Business at Queen's University, and landed his first job in the Export Sales Division of Consolidated Paper Co. in Trois-Rivières in 1923.

Mr. Heasman's diplomatic career began in July 1927. He was 29 when he entered the Service, having successfully completed the examination and interviews that are still a part of the lengthy screening process today. He then toured across Canada for a few months which was the main form of training for trade commissioners at that time.

His first posting was to Java in 1928 as Assistant Trade Commissioner. Subsequent years found him as Trade Commissioner in New Zealand, Africa, London, Chicago and finally Ottawa, with the Export Licensing Division. In 1946 he joined the Trade Commissioners Service Division, and remained there until 1953. He then became Ambassador to Indonesia and, in 1957, High Commissioner to New Zealand, a position which he held until his retirement.

While working in Trois-Rivières, Mr. Heasman met his future wife; they have a son in Vancouver and a daughter in Montreal. Mr. Heasman leads a relatively active life even today; he goes out regularly and has an excellent memory.

When asked what his favourite country was, he replied without hesitation, "New Zealand! The golf courses there are fantastic!"

His impressive diplomatic career notwithstanding, he has some amusing stories to tell about life abroad, with the inevitable misunderstandings that are part of living in another country with its cultural differences, communication problems and the many little occurrences that lend interest to being an expatriate.

One day, while posted to Singapore, Mr. Heasman received an urgent

message from a local importer of Canadian flour. He travelled to where the cargo was and saw that it was infested with vermin. However, much to his surprise, the importer was upset not with the vermin, but with the shape of the cotton bags containing the flour—he wanted square ones. It seems that the importer was recycling the bags making them into underwear, and only square bags would do the job! He was making more money out of the underwear than he was out of the flour.

Mr. Heasman insisted that if he had to do it again, he would choose exactly the same career. Life in the Foreign Service is exciting, he asserted, and teaches a person respect for other cultures.

Thank you, Mr. Heasman, for sharing memories of your career with us.