

2013: CARLTON K. MACK (1911-1995)

Over the course of forty-two days in 1932, Carlton K. Mack made his way from Hong Kong to Vancouver, Canada, crossing the Pacific by ship, then travelling by rail to Montreal before boarding another ship to Trinidad.

It was a world away from Hock San in the Chinese province of Guangdong where he was born on July 30, 1911 and given the name Mack Chuck Kwong by his parents Mack Wah Pui and Hui Shee. By the time he got to Trinidad, he already possessed the focused self-reliance born of early adversity. His parents had died just years apart while he was still a child, leaving him, older brother James and sister Hong Choy under their grandmother's care. At age 13, he left school to follow James to Hong Kong where he laboured as a porter, carrying heavy goods from the port for a company owned by the Allum family – distant relatives who also had commercial interests in Trinidad, half way around the world.

On evenings, after a hard day's work, he took English classes at the YMCA which would later prove invaluable when he moved to Trinidad.

His first job in Trinidad was as a grocery attendant at the Allum-owned Kwong Hing Company Limited at #31 Charlotte Street, Port of Spain, working for \$15-\$25 a month. Within two years, his intelligence and work ethic had convinced the Allum family that he was the right person to manage the newly purchased, wholesale dry goods store at #100 High Street, San Fernando. The acquisition marked the birth of J.T Allum which he managed until 1943, as a minority partner with a one-ninth share.

During this period, Carlton K. Mack married Iris Aching, a young accountant. Their happiness was short-lived however when Iris died in 1938 during child-birth, along with their twin daughters.

The year 1943 was propitious for him, in business and in love. He married Elaine Assing, a shop-owner's daughter from Chaguaramas, and was appointed Managing Director of the newly incorporated J.T. Allum and Company Limited. One of his first decisions was to accept Caroni Limited's offer to operate its food commissary in the sugar community of Couva. Five years later, Couva became the location for his first supermarket. In 1955, with the business growing and his

family expanding to welcome four children - Carl, Carol, Carlyle and Cyril - Carlton K. Mack agreed to buy J.T. Allum & Co. from the Allums under an onerous ten-year payment arrangement by which he would lose everything if he missed a single payment. Despite the stringent terms, he kept the J.T. Allum name out of respect for its founder, John Thomas Allum, and retained a relative, Eric Allum Poon, as Chairman until his death in 1961.

In 1961, with four years left on his loan and a notice to vacate hanging over his head from the landlord at 100 High Street, Carlton K. Mack assumed the Chairmanship of J.T. Allum & Co. Ltd. With no margin for error, he struck out courageously into property development. By then he had already begun investing in land, with purchases at Cross Crossing in San Fernando and at Marabella, scoffed at by many as swamp land. A year later, he confounded the critics with the opening of Allum's Shopping Centre, south Trinidad's first mini-mall.

Located at Marabella, and christened Allum's Supermarket, this third branch location introduced to the south a novel, modern concept in supermarkets - the self-service supermarket, inspired by his visit to Dorothy Lane Market in Ohio during a trip to the United States.

Throughout this intense period, he painstakingly negotiated the purchase of several plots of land from small property owners between High Street and St. James Street in San Fernando, astutely recognising the commercial potential of the location.

In 1964, he dazzled south Trinidad with the launch of the sprawling Carlton Centre, which connected High Street and St. James Street. Then the largest shopping mall in the country, it was equipped with a branch of Allum's Supermarket. Carlton Centre was his proudest commercial achievement. In 1976, he commissioned his third mall, Cross Crossing Shopping Complex, with a fourth branch of Allum's Supermarket. Gone was the old swampland, unrecognisable under the tons of landfill ferried from the Marabella and Carlton Centre locations.

In 1981, the Couva branch of Allum's was relocated to the Anglican Church-owned Couva Shopping Complex to which, as a committed Anglican, Carlton K. Mack provided financial advice and support.

Following this period of expansion and diversification, Carlton K. Mack restructured and streamlined the business. In 1967, his supermarket interests were placed under a new company, Allum's Supermarket Ltd., allowing J.T. Allum & Co. Ltd. to focus on real estate and investments.

In 1978, he entered a ten-year arrangement with the McEneaney Alstons Group under which the operations of Allum's Supermarket Ltd. were sold to the conglomerate, while remaining a tenant of J.T. Allum & Co. Ltd. The agreement ended in 1988 when the parties could not settle on new terms. On December 1, 1988, at age 77, Carlton K. Mack returned to the supermarket business under the name J.T.A. Supermarkets. By then, the second generation had assumed a leadership role with his son Carl as Managing Director.

Until his passing at age 84 in April 1995, Carlton K. Mack held the reins as Chairman of J.T. Allum & Co. Ltd. and J.T.A. Supermarkets Ltd., thence ceding the reins to eldest son Carl. In building his commercial empire, he also built the country that had become his home while never forgetting the one he had left behind. He made several trips to China, twice visiting his home village, and dedicated time, money and energy to building the China Society in Trinidad and Tobago, which he served as President from 1968 to 1991.

He was a founding investor and director in such indigenous institutions as the Point Lisas Industrial Port Development Co. Ltd. (1971-1982), Trinidad Express Newspapers Ltd. (1967-1995), West Indian National Insurance Ltd. (WINSURE) (1958-1969) and Royal Bank of Trinidad and Tobago (1972-1981). He served on the Board of Governors of the Academy of Insurance and was President of the South Trinidad Chamber of Commerce (1970-1971). He thrived on competition, investing and serving on the boards of new entrants in monopoly markets such as the National Brewing Company Ltd. and Bestcrete Ltd.

He gave willingly to the Red Cross, Family Planning Association and, above all, to the YMCA, in gratitude for the English classes he received there as a teenager in Hong Kong. He received many honours for his contribution to national development including the Hummingbird Medal (Gold) in 1975 and the Scarlet Ibis Medal in 1971 for his support of the Boy Scouts.

Outside of business, he was passionate about farming his 25-acre agricultural holdings at St. Croix, Princes Town. For the man who had been orphaned as a boy of seven, it was a cherished preserve for family weekends and holidays. Through his hard work and vision, Carlton K. Mack has left a solid legacy for his family, community and nation. His four children, five grandchildren and six great-grand children (and counting) keep faith with his ideals. Son Carl remains Chairman of the group of companies, while grandson Christopher Mack has been the Managing Director of J.T. Allum & Co. Ltd. since 2009, working with the support of his father, uncles, brother and cousin.

Today, the second and third generation of Macks are preparing for the 2015 launch of the ambitious C3 Centre, a shopping and entertainment complex in Corinth, San Fernando. When it rises across the southern skyline, the C3 Centre will stand as testimony of the enduring legacy of Carlton K. Mack, entrepreneur, nation-builder and man of grace.

The Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce is indeed pleased to induct Mr. Carlton K. Mack into the Business Hall of Fame on this 16th November, 2013.