

# Family of Engineer David Steinman Awed by Visit to Mackinac Bridge

By Karen Gould

"It's beautiful, huge, impressive," said Eric Steinman of the Mackinac Bridge. "I'm a builder.

I'm a construction guy, and that's so beyond me."

He and his brother, Michael, are grandsons of engineer David

B. Steinman, designer of the Mackinac Bridge. The men, along with their mother, were spending a few days in the area and Wednesday, July 11, took their first bridge tour. They visited with Larry Rubin, the first executive secretary of the Mackinac Bridge Authority, to get his autograph and learn a little more about their grandfather, who died before they were born.

A few years ago, Eric, who lives in Colorado, was driving across Canada and took a detour to St. Ignace "to see the family legacy."

"Dr. Steinman took a gamble," Mr. Rubin told the family. "He risked about \$250,000 in payroll to draw up [bridge] plans. He wanted the job pretty badly."

The gamble paid off, said Mr. Rubin.

"The first check written by the Mackinac Bridge Authority was to Dr. Steinman. It was check number one."

Dr. Steinman died in 1960, three years after the bridge was completed. Helen Steinman married Dr. Steinman's son, David, but never met the famous architect, who died shortly after they started dating. This was her first trip to see the bridge, and it was Michael's first visit to the area, too. She and her late husband, who died in 1988, also have a daughter, Amy.

"He was a poet," said Mr. Rubin of Dr. Steinman. "He was a master of words."

The two grandsons and their mother arrived in the Straits area unannounced, but their last name rang a bell with a Star Line ticket agent when they signed up for a sunset cruise under the bridge. That encounter led to the meeting with Mr. Rubin, who knew their grandfather, and a visit to the Mackinac Bridge Authority with Executive Secretary Bob Sweeney. For Michael and Eric, that stop meant a trip to the top of a bridge tower.

"I think it is absolutely gorgeous, and partially because of the setting. The setting makes it breathtaking," said Mrs.

## Dr. Steinman To Be Honored With Bridge Token July 26

A new Mackinac Bridge token honoring Mackinac Bridge designer Dr. David B. Steinman will be dedicated Thursday, July 26, at 10 a.m. at Bridge View Park. Dr. Steinman will be featured on one side of the commuter token and the Mackinac Bridge 50th Anniversary logo will be on the reverse side.

Dr. Steinman was an American engineer who built bridges in the United States, Thailand, England, Italy, Haiti, Puerto Rico, Canada, Korea, and Iraq. His design of the Mackinac Bridge is considered by many to be his most significant work.

In addition to the bridges he designed, he was consulted on several other projects, including the famous Tacoma Narrows Bridge, known as "Galloping Gertie," which later failed. He wrote of his frustration with the design that was chosen, and predicted a failure of the bridge, which did occur. By the mid 1930s, Dr. Steinman was known as one of the pre-eminent American bridge builders, particularly for long span suspension bridges.

Dr. Steinman was a published author with several books, articles, and works of poetry to his credit. He founded the National Society of Professional Engineers in 1934, and served as its first president.

Dr. Steinman died in 1960.



Dr. David B. Steinman's grandsons and daughter-in-law visited Larry Rubin Tuesday, July 10, and asked him to autograph a copy of his book, "Mighty Mac, The Official Picture History of the Mackinac Bridge." The late Dr. Steinman was the engineer for the bridge and worked with Mr. Rubin, who was the first executive secretary of the Mackinac Bridge Authority. From left are Michael Steinman, Mr. Rubin, Eric Steinman, and Helen Steinman.

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Steinman, looking at the bridge as she and her sons rode the ferry to St. Ignace Wednesday morning. While in the area, they stayed at Grand Hotel on Mackinac Island.

Michael, a special education teacher in a suburb of New York City, said he has seen other bridges his grandfather built, including the Henry Hudson Bridge in New York. That bridge connects the Bronx to Manhattan.

"It doesn't have the majesty of this bridge," he said.

Dr. Steinman received his doctorate before he was 20 years old. In addition to designing the Mackinac Bridge, he was a consulting engineer or the designer for nearly 400 bridges. He helped establish the National Society of Professional Engineers, of which he was the first president, he wrote several books, and he was a poet. In 1933, he founded and was the first president of the American Bridge, Tunnel and Turnpike Association.

Thirty-two years later, Mr. Rubin was elected president of the organization and was instru-

mental in changing the name to the International Bridge, Tunnel and Turnpike Association.

Michael and Eric Steinman's father, David, began his career as an engineer working at his father's engineering company, although later he left to become a psychiatrist, said Mrs. Steinman.

With a copy of Mr. Rubin's book, "Mighty Mac, The Official Picture History of The Mackinac Bridge," the Steinman family was welcomed into the St. Ignace home of Mr. Rubin and his wife, Elma.

The grandsons said they had just watched the History Channel's movie, "Modern Marvels: The Mackinac Bridge," which showed Dr. Steinman on the top of the tower when the catwalk was in place. They asked Mr. Rubin if that was something their grandfather had done just once.

He was up there often, said Mr. Rubin.

Eric wanted to confirm that their grandfather was not tall.

"He had a small stature, but a great voice," said Mr. Rubin. "He spoke with authority."

Mr. Rubin recalled a story he used in his book, "Bridging the Straits," about the persuasive power of Dr. Steinman.

He told the Steinman family about a meeting he had attended with their grandfather in the Ann Arbor office of Dr. Kenneth Landes, chairman of the University of Michigan Geology Department.

"Landes was sure that the [bridge] foundations would collapse because the material under it was caves and hollow places," said Mr. Rubin.

"He was wrong," said Michael, jumping to the defense of his grandfather.

"He was wrong," agreed Mr. Rubin.

"We were all sitting around the table in Landes' office," said Mr. Rubin. "Your grandfather just simply said, 'The pressure of those foundations is equivalent to the pressure of my thumb on this tabletop,'" remembered Mr. Rubin.

"Everyone got the point," he added.

"Wow," replied Michael.

"I guess every bridge and every project has their naysayers," said Mr. Rubin.

Getting funding to build the bridge also proved difficult, Mr. Rubin told the Steinmans. Even

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