

The foreman had no humor

The quarter was screwed to the floor

The Acme Plumbing and Heating truck and the electricians' truck tore down the highway, engaged in their usual race to see which of the two would get back to the shop first.

In the lead truck, Art Cogdale opened the back door and uncapped a shaken bottle of Pepsi. The spray covered the windshield of the other vehicle and before its occupants could clear the glass, Cogdale tossed several handfuls of cement powder as well. The drink and cement mixed and the goo on

the windshield caused the trailing truck to slow down.

Once again Acme Plumbing and Heating had defeated the electricians and won the afternoon race back to the shop from Prince Edward County. It is not advised to attempt this kind of 'prank' today.

"For some reason, Picton seemed to bring out the worst in tradesmen," says Joel Trudeau. Trudeau began working for Acme Plumbing and Heating in 1956 and eventually became a sheet metal worker there. The company's roots go back to the early 1940s when Joe Raycroft started it. Henry Hatfield and Vincent Trudeau bought the company about 1960.

As a tradesman in the 1950s and '60s, Trudeau saw a lot of high jinks take place between members of different trades. In those days safety standards were almost non-existent and basic safety items such as hard hats were seldom used. Trudeau recalls plumbers making miniature cannons with copper pipes, a cap and acetylene gas. Some innocuous object like a milk carton would be placed inside and then the plumber would ignite the gas with his torch and boom!

"On today's job site you couldn't even think of anything like that," says Trudeau.

Each tradesman used his knowledge to play his own unique joke on fellow workers. While working on another site

in Picton, an electrician ran a live wire under the dirt to a pipe fitter's threading machine. When the plumber's helper, Gord Peavor, tried to use it, the electrician sent a small current through the wire. The young apprentice would complain to his foreman that there was short but when the foreman tried the equipment the current was shut off. Peavor was left confused and ready for another jolt while the foreman walked away shaking his head. Peavor eventually found the wire and exacted vengeance by attaching it to the electrician's scaffold.

"There was always a lot of fun-time wars between tradesmen. There was a lot of one upmanship."

Trudeau admits some of the

antics could have gone awry, but feels the workplace is more serious and less enjoyable than in the past.

Even perfectly harmless jokes had their repercussions. Trudeau recalls that a foreman, who he describes as "very, very Scottish," worked at Acme in the early '60s. One morning the guys took a quarter and screwed it to the concrete floor. The foreman arrived, saw the quarter and looked to see if anyone was watching. Then he tried to pick it up. It didn't move, so he kicked it with similar results. When the realization came to him, he cursed loudly and walked away. But, says Trudeau, he lacked a sense of humor and "life was hell for the next two weeks."

Acme Plumbing and Heating