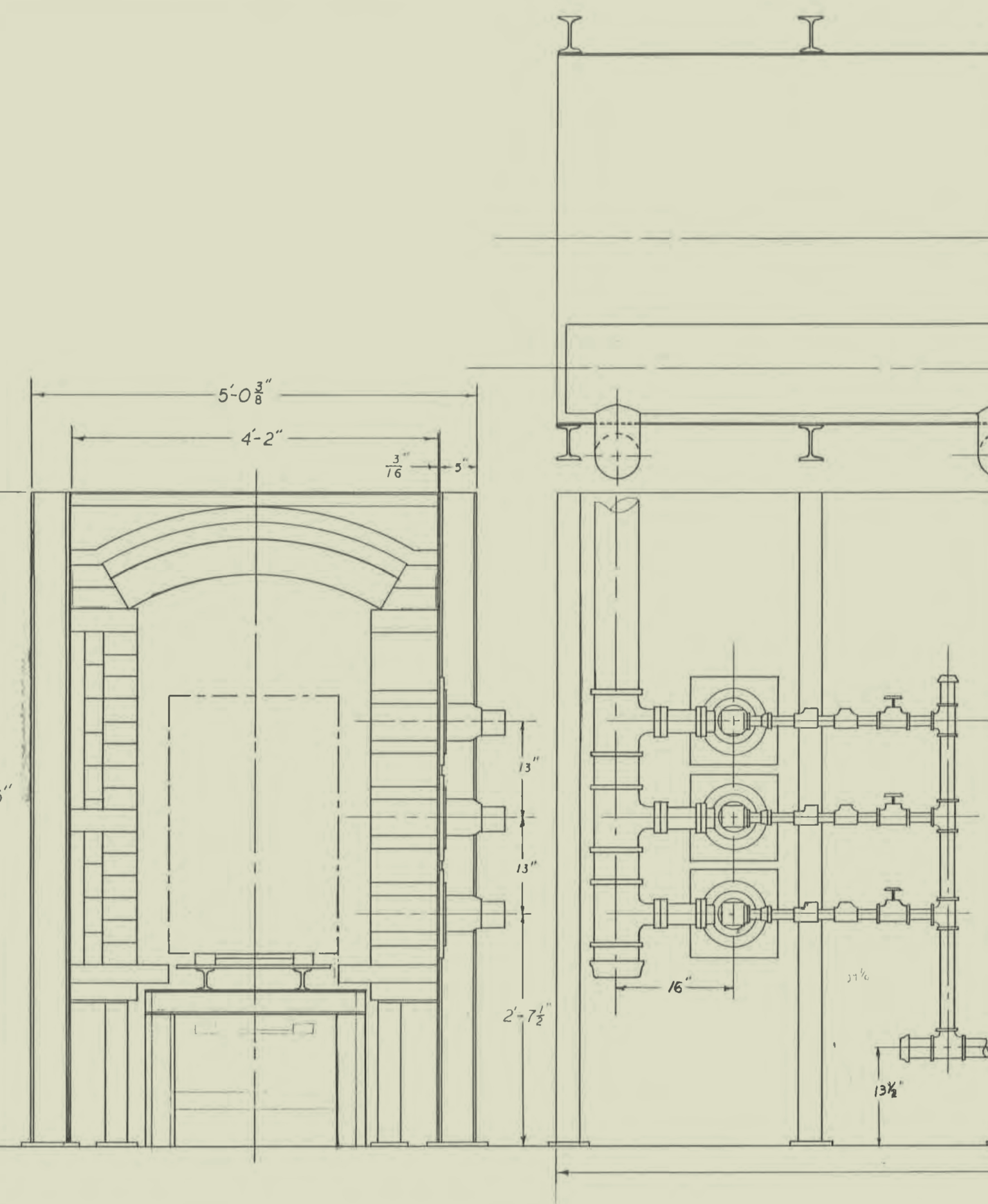




Taking the Heat for Fifty Years: The Zampell Story

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CHAPTER 1

Tom Zampell, Building It to Last



“See that wall,” Tom Zampell would point out to his teenage grandson Brian, as they took their weekly drives on the back roads of Boston’s North Shore. “That’s the right way to build a wall—with the five-point stones facing out.” Brian was learning to drive, but he was absorbing much more than the rules of the road. Tom, now in the twilight of his life, seemed to enjoy these drives, the conversations, and remembrances of the past. He would identify the walls that he had built in the early years of his life, alongside his father and brothers. “Build something that lasts—that’s what you always work towards,” Tom told his grandson. That’s the way his father had done it, and he was proud that he could still tell which walls they built. To this day, in yards and along roadsides of the North Shore, these sturdy stone walls still stand.



Stone walls built by Paul Zampell and his sons still stand on Boston’s North Shore.

Unwavering Focus

While this detail of a stonemason's work may seem insignificant to most people, it is a hallmark of quality craftsmanship. This type of masonry is hard work and tedious but yields impressive results. The mason spends a lot of time sorting through piles of stones to find just the right ones, planning exactly how each one will be laid into the wall to ensure beauty, longevity, and strength. And this image of the stonemason's craft perfectly reflects the life of Thomas J. Zampell—a man who took pride in building things right: his distinguished career at General Electric and in the military; his family, along with his wife, Helen; his company, Zampell Refractories; and countless personal and professional relationships.

A Builder from the Start

From his humble beginnings, as the son of Italian immigrants, to the founding and continued growth of the company that bears his name, Tom Zampell was a builder at his core. And he took great pride in crafting things the right way. If it didn't hold up to his standards, Tom would start all over again.

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There's an often-told family story about his nephews who were in the process of building a patio at his niece's house. Well aware of his skill as a mason, they asked Tom to check on the progress of the project. When Tom arrived with his sons to look over the job, he smiled and congratulated the men,



Tom Zampell and Helen Friend on their wedding day

saying, “Not bad.” Then Tom, noting in his mind all the problems with the construction, quietly turned to his sons and said, “Rip it out. Let’s do it right.”

With an unassuming, quiet strength, Tom loved to work with his hands, solve problems, and teach others to do the same. He was a craftsman at heart and happiest when working and building. But it had to be done the right way. And beyond doing it right, Tom was more than happy to pass on his knowledge to benefit others—both family members

and employees. He laid strong foundations that were passed on to his children and grandchildren, who have continued to expand upon them in their own ways and through the company he started.

Born Into It

Tom was born in 1916, in Beverly Farms, Massachusetts, to Paul and Angelina Zampello, who were from the coastal Italian village of Fondi. (Soon after arriving in America, Paul changed the name to



Tom, Tom Jr, Jim



Tom (standing, second from right) with his Beverly Farms Athletic Club baseball team, 1930s

Zampell.) Tom was one of eleven brothers and sisters, a lifelong resident of Beverly, and attended Beverly public schools and Lowell Institute (now UMass, Lowell). His working life started in masonry, helping his father, from an early age. During the summers, he worked with his father building stone and brick walls across the North Shore. Tom always said that masonry was “second nature. I was born into it.”

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In 1935, at age nineteen, Tom’s professional career began as an apprentice bricklayer at General Electric in Lynn, Massachusetts. Much of Tom’s extensive knowledge was self-taught and gathered from learning on the job—a strong tradition of learning by doing that continues today at Zampell. Tom worked his way up, over the course of thirty years, to become supervisor of the construction department at the Lynn facility, which had more than 200 furnaces and boilers used in the process of manufacturing aircraft parts. Tom proudly stated that during his career at GE, “I never missed a day because of sickness.” In fact, the only time he missed work was while serving in World War II.

One of the Quiet Generation

Like many men of his generation, Tom rarely spoke about his experiences in the US Army Air Corps in World War II. However, he achieved the rank of Technical Sergeant in the 313th Bombardment Squadron, and he earned military citations as a radio gunner on B-25 Mitchell and B-26 Marauder bombers in the North African Theater, serving from 1942 to 1946.

Later on, when sitting outside of his garage with his fourteen-year-old grandson, Brian, Tom would recount some of the harrowing details of flying missions between Africa and Italy, and about how later he trained to go to the Pacific Theater, right before the end of the war. While he was relieved that he didn't end up going, should it have been necessary, Tom would have gone to help continue fighting to defend and build the country he loved.

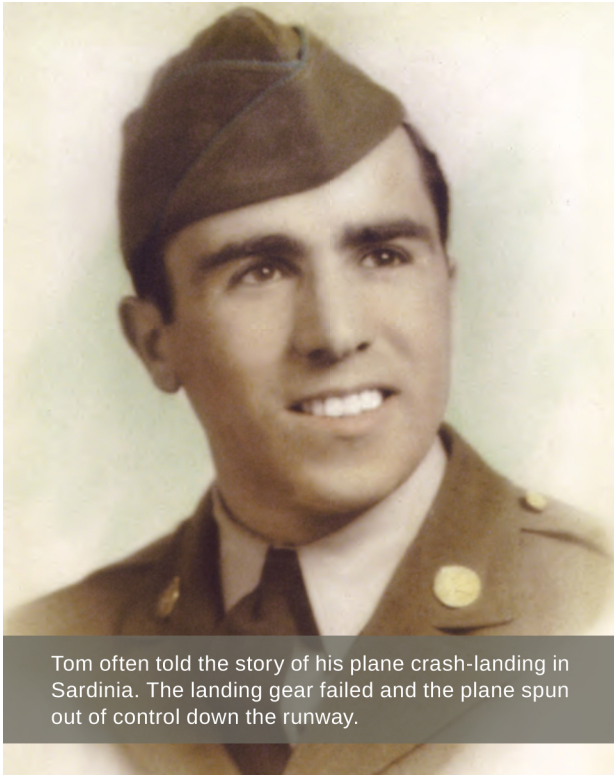
Raising a Family and Building a Business

Following his military service, Tom constructed a new foundation. He met his future wife, Helen Friend, while working at GE. It wasn't exactly love at first sight, however. While Tom expressed interest in her early on, Helen was a bit more hesitant. She was concerned about the differences in their backgrounds: she was Irish and he was Italian. As the story goes, when she heard Tom was coming into the office, she would hide in a storeroom to avoid him. But after a little coaxing from her father and persistence on Tom's part, she decided to give him a chance. Following a two-year courtship, Helen and Tom were married and began building a life and a steadfast partnership that would last for more than fifty years.

Their first endeavor was building a home, from the ground up. Helen was recruited for the project



A conveyor into the charge end of a roller hearth hardening furnace at GE's River Works plant in Lynn, Mass.



Tom often told the story of his plane crash-landing in Sardinia. The landing gear failed and the plane spun out of control down the runway.



Tom served as a radio gunner on B-25 Mitchell (pictured) and B-26 Marauder bombers

and recounted memories of helping with the tile in the bathroom, carrying loads up and down the stairs in a bucket. Ever the foreman, Tom reminded her that if she carried two buckets, her load would be more balanced and the effort more efficient. Over time, their partnership grew stronger. Tom and Helen raised their three children, Thomas Jr., James, and Maryann, in the red-brick home they built together.

On the weekends, Tom continued working at what he knew best: building and masonry. Chimneys were built and swimming pools tiled, often for extended family members and often for free. Like his father before him, Tom brought along his sons to help him.

And in 1966, after three decades with GE, Tom wanted to build something new. He wanted to use his technical and managerial skills learned at GE and

start his own refractory and construction company. However, GE wasn't very happy about losing such a valuable employee. They tried to keep Tom on staff, but with Helen's encouragement, he decided to leave GE and start out on his own.

When he retired from GE at age forty-nine to start this company, Tom knew that it wasn't a sure bet. But together, Tom and Helen forged ahead, and Tom built Zampell Refractories—contract by contract, brick by brick, relationship by relationship—into an institution in eastern Massachusetts, later expanding throughout the northeastern US.

In 1976, their son Jim joined the business full time, building on the foundation of the previous ten years, to focus on growing the refractory business and expanding into new areas.