

FREDERICK LIONEL (PECK) PECKOVER (1921-2015)



Lionel Peckover was a pioneer in geotechnical engineering for transportation systems in Canada. He made major contributions to the design and construction of highways, seaways, canals, and railways. He died in Kingston on 8 February 2015 in his 93rd year, with his daughter by his side. He shared 65 years of marriage with his wife Sybil, who died shortly before.

Lionel graduated in Civil Engineering from the University of Toronto in 1944 and was then encouraged by Dr. Robert Legget to pursue studies in geotechnical engineering on scholarship at Harvard University, where he graduated with an S.M. degree in 1947.

Lionel had a distinguished career in applied geotechnical engineering. He served The St. Lawrence Seaway Authority in a senior capacity from 1953 to 1959. His work included supervision of design and construction of Seaway channels and dykes, and foundations for locks, bridges and other structures. He then joined Canadian National Railways and became Engineer of Geotechnical Services with coast-to-coast responsibility for issues such as the design of railway roadbeds on soft ground, improvement of ballast, reduction of frost heave, and treatment of unstable rock slopes. Many consider Lionel Peckover to be the 'father' of geotechnical engineering for railways in Canada. In 1976 he joined Canac Consulting Group, where he carried out terrain appraisal for a proposed high speed rail line from Montreal to Windsor. He retired in 1984.

As a young, recently-graduated geotechnical engineer, Lionel attended the "Conference on Civilian Soil Mechanics" in Ottawa in April, 1947, (now identified as the first Canadian Geotechnical Society Conference. This first conference developed into what is believed to be the longest series of national annual conferences in the world, now preparing for the 68th Canadian Geotechnical Conference in Quebec City in 2015.

Peck and Sybil lived in Ottawa, then in Senneville and Wildwood in Quebec, and finally moved to Kingston for their later 25 years. Peck's favorite activities were cross-country skiing and hiking with the Rideau Trail Association, curling, sailing and white-water canoeing – a true outdoorsman.

After retirement, he and Sybil travelled extensively, visiting every continent, traversing the Grand Canyon, and hiking in Canada's far north. Later they enjoyed canal cruises, weekend getaways, and sharing their travels with many groups by giving slide presentations.

Lionel remained interested in professional development and the Canadian Geotechnical Society throughout his career. He published over 40 technical papers and discussions in publications that included the Canadian Geotechnical Journal, the Journal of the American Railway Engineering Association, and a number of technical books and manuals. In 1982, as a co-author with the late Doug Piteau, he received the prestigious Burwell Award from the Engineering Geology Division of the Geological Society of America for the paper "Engineering of Rock Slopes".