

OWEN L. WHITE (1926-2018)

By John F. Gartner and Doug VanDine



Owen Lister White passed away peacefully on June 23, 2018 at the age of 92.

Owen was born in Melbourne, Australia, and graduated with an Associate Diploma of Secondary Metallurgy from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology in 1950. After graduation, he worked in the strength of materials laboratory at the University of Melbourne and studied there part time towards a BSc in geology, mining and metallurgy, graduating in 1958. That year, Owen immigrated to Canada to pursue a Master's degree in geology and civil engineering at the University of Toronto, and that is where John Gartner first met him, while completing his BAsC.

Upon graduation in 1960, Owen worked as a soils engineer for Racey, McCallum & Associates, a geotechnical consulting engineering firm in Toronto. While drilling for the, then, new University of Waterloo engineering building, he met Doug Wright, Head of the Department of Civil Engineering, who offered him a job as lecturer. This led to his appointment as an Assistant Professor, then Associate Professor, then cross appointed with the Department of Earth Sciences. While at Waterloo, Owen also attended the University of Illinois where he completed a Ph.D. in engineering geology under Prof. Don Deere, graduating in 1970.

Among other accomplishments while at Waterloo, Owen organized an engineering geology field trip for students to Jamaica. In 1973, he founded the Engineering Geology Division of the Canadian Geotechnical Society (the CGS's first division), and served as its chair until 1979.

In 1977, Owen joined the Ontario Geological Survey as Chief, Engineering and Terrain Geology Section and worked in that capacity until he retired in 1991. One of his first initiatives was the Northern Ontario Engineering Geology Terrain Study project, which mapped much of northern Ontario. In 1981, he led a delegation of Canadian engineers and geoscientists to China—the first of many such trips.

While at the OGS, Owen was elected Vice President North America of the International Association of Engineering Geology and Environment, and served as the IAEG President from 1986-1990. Among other things, this position allowed him to follow his passion for travel

to countries including Greece, Thailand and Russia. Owen was awarded the IAEG's most senior award, the Hans Cloos Medal, in 1998.

During his career, Owen gave back to his profession and the community by serving on more than 40 committees and task forces, and by authoring or co-authoring more than 70 publications—including geological maps and technical papers.

Besides the Hans Cloos Medal, Owen's awards and honours were many: Fellow of the Geological Society of London (1975); Fellow of the Engineering Institute of Canada (1980); the Thomas Roy Award from the CGS's Engineering Geology Division (1996); the EB Burwell Jr. Award from the Geological Society of America's Engineering Geology Division (1998); a Special Achievement Award from the Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada (2003); and the RF Legget Medal, the CGS's highest award, for his contributions to the geotechnical community, in particular, engineering geology (2006).

In retirement, Owen continued doing some lecturing, in Canada and abroad, some consulting and some research and writing. In 1998, he co-edited along with Dr. PF Karrow, a 500-page Geological Association of Canada special paper on "Urban Geology of Canadian Cities". Also in retirement, Owen spearheaded a book and journal donation project, through the Association of Geoscientists for International Development (Canada), which collected and distributed geology books and journals to universities and libraries in developing countries.

Owen's other interests included stamp and postmark collecting, and the military. He was a Fellow of the Royal Philatelic Society of Canada, was attached to the Royal Australian Engineers in Melbourne and the 2 Field Engineer Regiment in Toronto, and was a member of the Military Engineers Association of Canada until his death.

Owen was a taciturn man with bushy eyebrows and a quiet Australian voice. During his career and in retirement he accomplished a great deal, and had a profound effect on engineering geology in Canada and abroad. He will be missed.

He is survived by his wife of 58 years, Elizabeth, their two children, one grandson and his brother.