

## **CANADIAN GEOTECHNICAL SOCIETY – A BRIEF HISTORY<sup>1</sup>**

The Canadian Geotechnical Society is a 'Learned Society' in Canada. Its mandate and purpose was and remains "To provide for its members opportunities for updating and upgrading their technical knowledge and skills and to present results of their research and other technical achievements". The Society is an excellent, varied and broadly-based forum for lifelong continuing education for its members.

The Canadian Geotechnical Society was formally organized as a Constituent Society of The Engineering Institute of Canada in 1972. The origins of the Society go back to 1946 when the National Research Council of Canada established the Associate Committee on Soil and Snow Mechanics (later to be called the Associate Committee on Geotechnical Research), with Dr. Legget as Chairman. Dr. Legget, at that time, was a Professor of Civil Engineering at the University of Toronto and was giving instruction in soil mechanics. In 1947, Dr. Karl Terzaghi, an acquaintance of Dr. Legget, and President of the International Society for Soil Mechanics and Foundation Engineering (ISSMFE), acting on Resolution No. 3 adopted at the First International Conference of ISSMFE in 1936 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA. called upon Dr. Legget to organize a Canadian Section of ISSMFE and to be the Canadian delegate to the International Executive Meeting which would be held in Rotterdam in 1948, at the time of the Second (first post-war) ISSMFE Conference. (The ISSMFE is now called the International Society for Soil Mechanics and Geotechnical Engineering ISSMGE.)

Dr. Legget, in his capacity as Chairman of the Associate Committee for Geotechnical Research (ACGR), convened a conference in Ottawa on April 28-29, 1947 of all those persons known to be interested in Soil Mechanics in Canada. Some 40 individuals attended this meeting, which was really the first Canadian Soil Mechanics and Foundation Engineering (Geotechnical) Conference. This marked the beginning of organized geotechnical activity in Canada. The Conference established a Subcommittee on Soil Mechanics comprising a Chairman and six regional representatives. This small group acted as the Canadian National Committee at the Second International ISSMFE Conference in Rotterdam. The individual members established local groups in larger centers, which, as time progressed, in most cases evolved into local Sections or Groups of the Canadian Geotechnical Society. The original establishment of local groups laid the foundation for organized geotechnical activities all across the country, Activity grew steadily during the 1950's, with a conference held annually. By 1960, the Engineering Institute of Canada began organizing an Engineering Geology Division, which worked closely with the Associate Committee, and in 1962 assumed the organization of the annual Geotechnical conference. From 1972, though, the responsibility for the organization of annual conferences has rested exclusively with the Society. In 1997 the Society organized its 50th Jubilee Conference in Ottawa, where it all began 50 years ago. To the best of our knowledge that is the longest continuous organization of Geotechnical Conferences in the world. It is also interesting to note that the distinguished Society member Gordon McRostie from Ottawa who was the Chair of the Organizing Committee for the 50th-Jubilee Conference, has attended all Canadian Geotechnical Conferences except one when he attended a conference in Mexico instead of in Canada.

---

<sup>1</sup> Part of the above text has been excerpted from the article "Canadian Geotechnical Society" by W.J. Eden, published in *Geotechnical News*, June 1985. Additions and updating in 1998 are by A.G. Stermac. Further updates on a recurring basis are by J.Graham

The main activities of the Society take place at grassroots level, in the local organizations, Sections and Groups. For many years, more than 100 technical lectures have been presented annually in local organizations across the country. In addition, since 1965, the Society has organized one or two Cross Canada Lecture Tours annually. Invited lecturers tour the country and lecture in 8 to 10 centres in a two-week period. Up to 2001, there had been a total of 70 speakers, 38 prominent Canadian experts and 32 outstanding foreign specialist from all over the world.

In 1963, a group of enthusiasts in the Southern Ontario Section, under the leadership of Victor Milligan began publishing the Canadian Geotechnical Journal. The journal was initially published independently, but in 1970 became one of the scientific Journals published by the National Research Council. Victor Milligan was the first Editor and served for five years.

In 1965, Canada acted as host for the Sixth International Conference of the ISSMFE, held in Montreal. Again, the Conference was organized by a Committee established by the Associate Committee and involved many individuals. The Montreal Conference was in all respects very successful and was considered by many to be one of the best organized conferences of its kind. It demonstrated to the world that Canadian geotechnique had come of age.

The Canadian Geotechnical community matured rapidly following the 1965 Montreal Conference. There were continuing efforts for the establishing of a self-governing Geotechnical Society. This was finally achieved in 1972 with Geoffrey G. Meyerhof as the first President of the Society. Since then the Society has had the following succeeding Presidents: T.C. Kenney, D.H. Shields, J.I. Clark, J.I. Adams, A.G. Stermac, D.W. Devenny, M. Bozozuk, N.R. Morgenstern, F. Tavenas, J.L. Seychuk, J.M. Laing, Jim Graham, Guy Lefebvre, R. Kerry Rowe, Suzanne Lacasse and Dennis E. Becker. The President for 2007, 2008 is Peter Wu, PEng. In 1985, the Canadian Geotechnical Society was formally federally incorporated as a financially independent and self-governing learned society. The following table lists the membership numbers of the Canadian Society at five-year intervals and indicates the growth of interest in geotechnical activities in Canada, since the first Conference in 1947. (Membership in September 2006 was 1178 and since then has remained in the range 1100 – 1200 each year.)

1950 -	50	1980 -	920
1955 -	130	1985 -	1200
1960 -	206	1990 -	1350
1965 -	313	1995 -	1438
1970 -	560	2000 -	1239
1975	583	2005 -	1140

The Society presently publishes its Newsletter as "CGS News" in the quarterly magazine Geotechnical News. The Newsletter has its origins in 1963 when it was the medium used to keep members of the Canadian Section of the ISSMFE informed of the planning for the 1965 International ISSMFE Conference in Montreal. The Newsletter was issued on a random basis. Following the Conference the mimeographed Newsletter was published three or four times a year. When the Society was established in 1972, the Newsletter was issued on a more regular basis with W.J. Eden from the National Research Council as Editor. In 1976, through the efforts of John Gadsby of BiTech Publishers in Vancouver, a regular quarterly publication called "CGS News" began. In 1983 the US National Committee of the ISSMFE joined and the production of "Geotechnical News" magazine started. Both "CGS News" and "USNS News" became part of the Geotechnical News magazine. In 1984 the Mexican National Society was invited to become also part of the magazine to make it a truly North American communications medium. Unfortunately this did not materialize. CGS News is now also made available on the CGS

Website [www.cgs.ca](http://www.cgs.ca). On a monthly basis, information about coming events is distributed by email to all members of the Society through CGS e-News.

The Society regularly publishes Proceedings of its annual and other conferences. It also publishes the very successful and highly regarded *Canadian Foundation Engineering Manual*. In 1993 the 3rd edition was published. The French version of the 3rd Edition appeared in 1995. Work is currently in progress on a 4th edition of the *Canadian Foundation Engineering Manual* and on a new manual *Canadian Guidelines for Site Characterization*.

Since its formation, the Canadian Geotechnical Society has organized and co-sponsored a number of important specialty conferences in addition to the regular annual Geotechnical Conference. Examples are the Conferences on Marine Geotechnical Engineering held in 1979, 1982, 1986 and 1993, and a series of Canadian Permafrost Conferences. There have been seminars arranged on Geosynthetics, Urban Slope Stability, and Geo-Hazards. In the field of international activities the Canadian Geotechnical Society has acted as host for the VII Pan American Conference on Soil Mechanics and Foundation Engineering held in Vancouver in 1983, the IV International Symposium on Landslides in Toronto in 1984, the International Symposium on Environmental Geotechnics in 1994 in Edmonton, the International IAEG Congress in Vancouver in 1998 and others.

In 1990 the Society decided that as of 1991 the Society will organize, if possible, every year a Specialty Spring Conference. Such Conferences were organized in 1991 in Montreal, in 1992 in Vancouver, and in 1993 in St. John's. In 1994 Specialty Conference was the above mentioned Symposium in Edmonton. In 1996 the Spring event was the North American Rock Mechanics Symposium in Montreal, and in 1999, ARCSACC Edmonton '99 (Assessment and Remediation of Contaminated Sites in Arctic and Cold Climates). Events in 2002 included Computers in Geotechnique in Winnipeg, Physical and Centrifuge Modelling (with ISSMGE TC2) in St. John's, and the North American Rock Mechanics Symposium in Toronto. In 2003, the Society was involved with the 2nd International Symposium on Contaminated Sediments in Quebec City (with ISSMGE TC5, ASTM D-8, CSCE and IAEG); and with the 2003 GeoHazards Conference, to be held in Edmonton as an initiative of the Engineering Geology Division. In 2005, there was a conference in Vancouver on Landslide Risk Assessment in collaboration with the Vancouver Geotechnical Society and the International Joint Technical Committee of ISSMGE, IAEG and ISRM. In 2006, the CGS participated in a multidisciplinary Conference on Climate Change organized by the EIC and the Vancouver Geotechnical Society managed the 4th Int. Conference on Soft Soils Engineering. As can be seen from this list, Spring Specialty Conferences can be events co-sponsored with other local, national or international organizations.

Soon after its incorporation, the Society realized that the geotechnical field encompasses more than just soil mechanics and foundation engineering. Engineering Geologists and Rock Mechanics professionals were just as much part of the geotechnical team as the soil mechanics and foundation engineering professionals. To accommodate these professionals appropriately, the Society organized first the Engineering Geology Division. This was the beginning of the Society becoming a true 'Geo' Society encompassing not only Soil Mechanics but also other disciplines in earth engineering and earth science. Subsequently the Rock Mechanics Division was formed and soon thereafter the Cold Region Geotechnology Division was formed. The Society had thus three specialized Divisions while those interested in soil mechanics and foundation engineering were left just as Society members. To appropriately accommodate these professionals the Society organized its fourth specialized Division, the Soil Mechanics and Foundations Division which, so far, remains the most numerous Division.

The concern about the protection and remediation of the environment in the late 80's and early 90's assumed center stage. Of the three elements, soil/rock, water and air, the first two are within the geotechnical domain. In order to respond to, and effectively deal with the

identified geoenvironmental issues, needs and problems the Society has organized the Geoenvironmental Division, its fifth.

Geotextiles or Geosynthetics, although relatively new materials, have a most important place in activities of geotechnical professionals, especially in the area of environment protection. The Society had for many years an extremely active Geosynthetics Committee. In order to provide the Geosynthetics a well-deserved high national profile the Society has organized, in 1993, the Geosynthetics Division, its sixth. In 1995 the Society welcomed as members an appreciable number of hydrogeologist who created the seventh technical Division the Hydrogeology Division. This latter group has developed a working relationship with the Canadian National Chapter of the International Association of Hydrogeologists (IAH-CNC).

From the above it is obvious that the Canadian Geotechnical Society has indeed become, at the beginning of the 21st century, the home of the majority of Canadian professionals active in geotechnical, civil engineering, and other related fields. In this way, the Society enables closer cooperation and cross-fertilization between these professionals. All of them have equal rights and responsibilities in the Society, and the Society speaks with one voice for all of them both nationally and internationally.

To address and deal with issues that are of importance and/or interest to all Divisions, the Society has organized Standing Committees. There are presently six Technical Committees (Computing, Education, Heritage, Landslides, Professional Practice and Transportation Geotechnique) and one Administrative Committee (Membership).

The Canadian Geotechnical Society has demonstrated that it is above all a very useful forum for continuing education of its members, and that it is progressive, flexible and adaptable. As the environment changed, the Society changed. Whatever changes took, place they were introduced with one and only one objective in mind. This objective is, and we trust will always remain:

"To better serve the needs of Society members, the profession and the country"

#### **PRESIDENTS OF THE CANADIAN GEOTECHNICAL SOCIETY**

1.	<b>G.G. MEYERHOF</b>	<b>1972-1974</b>
2.	<b>D.H. SHIELDS</b>	<b>1975-1976</b>
3.	<b>T.C. KENNEY</b>	<b>1977-1978</b>
4.	<b>J.I. CLARK</b>	<b>1979-1980</b>
5.	<b>J.I. ADAMS</b>	<b>1981-1982</b>
6.	<b>A.G. STERMAC</b>	<b>1983-1984</b>
7.	<b>D.W. DEVENNY</b>	<b>1985-1986</b>
8.	<b>M. BOZOUK</b>	<b>1987-1988</b>
9.	<b>N.R. MORGENSTERN</b>	<b>1989-1990</b>
10.	<b>F. TAVENAS</b>	<b>1991-1992</b>
11.	<b>J.L. SEYCHUK</b>	<b>1993-1994</b>
12.	<b>J.M. LAING</b>	<b>1995-1996</b>
13.	<b>J. GRAHAM</b>	<b>1997-1998</b>
14.	<b>G. LEFEBVRE</b>	<b>1999-2000</b>
15.	<b>R.K. ROWE</b>	<b>2001-2002</b>
16.	<b>S. LACASSE</b>	<b>2003-2004</b>
17.	<b>D.E. BECKER</b>	<b>2005-2006</b>
18.	<b>P. WU</b>	<b>2007-2008</b>
19.	<b>M. AUBERTIN</b>	<b>2009-2010</b>