

WILLIAM A. (BILL) TROW, (1920–2012)

Revised from a notice by Nora Ryell in *The Globe and Mail*, 8 May 2012.



William (Bill) Trow was a pioneer in geotechnical engineering. When he founded William Trow Associates, a small firm in Brampton, Ont., in the 1950s, he didn't guess it would become one of North America's fastest-growing engineering consultancies.

What interested Bill Trow was the satisfaction he derived solving particularly difficult engineering problems. "There are two types of people in the world," he told his son Philip. "There are the watchers and the doers. I'm a doer."

William Albert Trow was born in England in 1920 to Canadian parents who had served in the British Army in India. Eventually, the family moved back to Ontario, where Bill attended North Toronto Collegiate Institute before serving in the Royal Canadian Air Force as a navigator. He flew as a navigator in 35 Lancaster bomber missions in which mortality rates were very high. For this service he received the Distinguished Flying Cross.

After a brief period in the intelligence corps, Bill Trow returned to Canada, and enrolled in the University of Toronto where he received his master's degree in civil engineering in 1948. After some years with Ontario Hydro's research division and then a small engineering firm, he had started his own company Trow, Soderman and Associates, which later became William Trow Associates.

Philip Trow remembers his father working tirelessly. "He'd be up at four in the morning to drive to Sudbury, do the sampling himself, drive back to Toronto, do the analysis and write up the report for the client, all in the same day."

Friend and colleague Chris Thompson, who joined the company in 1968, remembered that "Bill Trow inherently understood the properties of soils and ground water. By the time I first met him, he knew almost everything about geotechnical conditions in Ontario and probably elsewhere. He seemed to use geotechnical investigations to simply confirm what he already knew."

Bill Trow's real interest was in research and analysis. He soon hired a group of engineers, each with a particular specialty, to help manage the company and expand into areas such as concrete, asphalt and building sciences. The firm continued to grow and in the 1980s was considered a dominant geo-engineering firm in Ontario. It was closely involved in the

development of many high-profile buildings in Toronto's downtown core; notably, the CN Tower in 1973 and Roy Thomson Hall in 1978. The company was also involved in mine-site projects in Northern Ontario, and other projects in western Canada and the United States, Arabia and Oman. Trow's largest projects in the Middle East involved construction monitoring at the \$8-billion Riyadh International Airport and installation of water level gauges in wadis throughout Saudi Arabia.

Bill Trow officially retired in 1986 but continued working as a consultant for another 10 years. At the company he fostered a sense of fellowship and belonging. This sense of community extended to his active participation in the community of Thornhill. He and his wife Lucie were involved in the Society for the Preservation of Historic Thornhill and in the performing arts community in York Region.

Bill Trow's many contributions to geotechnical engineering were recognized by the award of the prestigious R.F. Legget Medal for outstanding, lifelong contributions to geotechnique and the G. Geoffrey Meyerhof Award for exceptional contributions to the art and science of foundation engineering.

Chris Thompson describes his contributions this way: "One of Bill Trow's greatest legacies is the large number of geotechnical engineers who gained experience working for him at Trow. In effect, Bill trained much of the Toronto geotechnical community."