GORDON C. McROSTIE (1922-2018)

By Michel W. St-Louis

Circa 1950

Circa 2015

It is with great sadness that we share the passing of Gordon Callander McRostie on June 9, 2018 at the age of 95. Gordon was born in Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue, Québec. His family moved 12 times before he was 18; his father was a professor of agriculture.

Gordon's career began when he graduated from the University of Toronto with a degree in Civil Engineering in 1944, and after serving briefly in the Canadian Army, he moved to Ottawa in 1945. After gaining a few years of practical experience, Gordon opened his own geotechnical engineering practice in 1950—one of the first geotechnical consulting firms in Canada. By 1960, he had a small staff, a soil testing laboratory, a drill rig, and was carrying out about 50 projects per year. For 73 years, Gordon contributed to the geotechnical aspects of many buildings and the infrastructure in the Ottawa-Gatineau region and worked on more than 5,000 projects during his career, mostly in eastern Canada, but several abroad, including the Canadian embassy in Berlin, Germany.

In 1961, Gordon helped form the Geotechnical Engineering Division of the Engineering Institute of Canada, which became the Canadian Geotechnical Society (CGS) in 1972. In 1963, Gordon was one of 10 geotechnical professionals who financially backed the first year of the *Canadian Geotechnical Journal*.

Gordon helped organize the 1st Civilian Soil Mechanics Conference (the forerunner of the CGS Annual Conference) in Ottawa in 1947, and was one of forty delegates to attend that event. Gordon attended 68 of the 70 CGS annual conferences in his lifetime, being on the organizing committees of a number of those conferences, including the 70th CGS Annual Conference held in Ottawa in 2017.

Among his many geotechnical consulting projects, in 1955 Gordon began work as the soils consultant for the Ottawa Queensway Highway; in 1983 he designed the unusual pile and spread footings support for the foundation of the Canadian Aviation and Space Museum; from 1982 until 1998 he studied the long-term corrosion of the steel pile foundations at the Rideau Centre in Ottawa; and in 2010 he consulted on the new glass tower at the Victoria Memorial Museum Building (Canadian Museum of Nature), where the architects required Gordon's

expertise on the addition of a glass tower without the building settling further due to the site's underlying compressible clay.

In April 2006, Gordon merged his company, McRostie, Genest, St-Louis & Associates, with Golder Associates' Ottawa office, where he continued to contribute to the profession. Gordon had a long-standing career in geotechnical engineering and will be remembered fondly for his willingness to share his knowledge and his many life adventures.

Gordon's exceptional work has been honored with a number of awards over the years. In 1997, Gordon received the R.F. Legget Award, the most senior and prestigious award presented by the Canadian Geotechnical Society. This award has been presented annually since 1970 to one geotechnical professional selected in recognition of his or her achievements and contributions to the geotechnical field in Canada. He received the Canadian Pacific Railway Award in 1995 from the Engineering Institute of Canada in recognition of his many years of service and leadership. In 1996, Gordon, L. Morissette and M.W. St-Louis were awarded the Gzowski Medal by the Canadian Society for Civil Engineering for best paper on a civil engineering subject in the area of surveying, structural engineering and heavy construction. The same three co-authors received the CGS's RM Quigley Award in 2002 for their outstanding contribution to the *Canadian Geotechnical Journal*. In 2015, Gordon received the first Honorary Life Membership from the CGS for his life-long contribution and dedication to the society and to the geotechnical profession in Canada.

Gordon's professional life was amplified by a personal life filled with adventure–from skydiving for his 90th birthday, and climbing to the base camp of Mount Everest and to Machu Picchu. He traveled the world and made sure to live his life to the fullest.

As an example, in 1972, Gordon and his wife, Madeleine, made their second trip to Antarctica. While seeking shelter near a rocky island, their ship, the MS Lindblad Explorer, struck unexpected rocks at 3:00 am and started to sink. It turned on its side but stayed half above water. All passengers and crew escaped into lifeboats. Their Mayday radio calls were heard by a Chilean supply vessel which was only one day's journey away. They shivered through the bitter day in lifeboats at risk of hypothermia, but finally were dragged aboard the small rescue ship. It was already full and the 140 new passengers on board caused tremendous problems. They had to suffer another eight days of hardship while the Chilean vessel delivered its vital supplies to Antarctic bases, then finally they returned to Punta Arenas in southern Chile.

Gordon was a pioneer in geotechnical engineering and above all a wonderful human being. His insurmountable generosity and lively spirit was infectious, and he was a great mentor to so many of his colleagues.