

Mark Theodore Olsen

1926 – 1997

Mark Olsen, P.Eng., died on June 22, 1997 at Lions Gate Hospital, North Vancouver, after a valiant year-long fight with brain cancer. Born and raised in Calgary, Olsen received his civil engineering degree from the University of British Columbia in 1951 and took post-graduate studies in soil mechanics and geology at the University of Illinois in 1960-61.

He was a long-time member of the International Society for Soil Mechanics and Foundation Engineering and of the Canadian Geotechnical Society.

When Charles Ripley founded the consulting soil mechanics firm, Ripley and Associates (later Ripley, Klohn & Leonoff) in Vancouver in 1951, Mark Olsen became Ripley's first engineering employee, and spent his entire forty-five year geotechnical career with the company. His principal area of expertise lay in the design and construction supervision of hydroelectric, water supply, and tailings storage dams. In this field Olsen was active on numerous projects in British Columbia, northern Canada, Manitoba, Quebec, the United States, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Papua New Guinea, and Venezuela. His additional areas of expertise were in surficial geological evaluation, industrial site development, and foundation engineering.



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Mark Olsen began his career at Wahleach Dam of the British Columbia electric Company, as an engineering inspector of earthwork, being the first soil mechanics dam inspector in the province. Olsen continued this work through the 1950s, as the senior field representative of Dr. Karl Terzaghi on Cheakamus Dam and Terzaghi Dam, and

was commended by Terzaghi for his "faithful and invaluable services" on these projects.

For many years Olsen was a consultant on water supply dams for irrigation districts in the Okanagan. Starting in the 1960s, when open-pit copper mines proliferated in British Columbia, Olsen pioneered the practical application of innovative techniques to the construction of large tailings dams at Afton, Bell Copper, Brenda, Gibraltar, Granisle, Lornex, Valley Copper, and for Inco at Thompson, Manitoba.

In later years Mark Olsen acted as a senior engineer on the review of major geotechnical and mining projects, domestically and internationally. He continued on this work until ill-health forced his retirement in 1996. As a mentor his knowledge, integrity, and dedication to excellence in engineering were an inspiration of younger colleagues.

Cyril Leonoff