

A Brief History of the Vancouver Geotechnical Society

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The Vancouver Geotechnical Society (VGS) was formed in 1953 under the original name of the "Vancouver Soils Group" by Charles F. Ripley, P. Eng., founder of one of the first geotechnical engineering consultant companies in Vancouver. He formed the group at the urging of Dr. Robert F. Legget of the National Research Council of Canada. Starting in 1947, Dr. Legget organized an annual meeting of professionals involved in soil, ice, and snow mechanics that was sponsored by the Division of Building Research under the National Research Council of Canada. These annual meetings were first held in Ottawa and later at various locations across the country. Mr. Ripley was asked to represent British Columbia at the annual meetings when he moved to British Columbia in 1951.

The 9th Canadian Soil Mechanics Conference (later known as the Canadian Geotechnical Society (CGS) Conference, was the first national conference that was held in Vancouver in December, 1955. The conference was organized by the Vancouver Group and chaired by Charles Ripley. In time, the annual conferences have evolved to become part of a national organization, the CGS, which continues to have an annual general meeting each fall, combined with a three-day technical conference. Vancouver has also hosted the annual CGS Conferences in 1966, 1976, 1983, 1995 and 2006.

The original participants in the VGS included practitioners in engineering, soil mechanics, agronomy and geology. Initially informal meetings were typically held several times a year at the University of British Columbia. Today, the VGS membership includes geotechnical engineers, engineering geologists, geoscientists, and others interested in the many facets of geotechnical engineering. Members include professionals employed by consulting firms, local and provincial governments and agencies, industry, academics and students of geotechnical engineering.

Currently, the VGS meetings are held in the evenings approximately 8 to 9 times a year, with presentations by local practitioners and visitors. Themes range from engineering of foundations, dams, slope stability of both soil and rock slopes, tunnelling, as well as earthquake engineering, geology, and environmental engineering. The meetings also include the distinguished Cross-Canada Lectures supported by the Canadian Foundation for Géotechnique - a charitable organization independent of the CGS. One of the highlights of the year for the VGS is an annual one-day symposium, which typically attracts well over 100 registrants and is held in the late spring. Proceedings of the symposium are published and distributed to all registrants, with additional copies made available to the public through BiTech Publishers Ltd. of Richmond, British Columbia. Nowadays, most of the VGS Symposium proceedings are available freely in the VGS web site. Available archives indicate that the "Peat Symposium" held on February 27, 1967 may be the first of such events.

In 1996 the VGS replaced the annual \$400 Vancouver Geotechnical Society Prize at the University of British Columbia, and instituted an annual \$1,000 Vancouver Geotechnical Society Scholarship at the University of British Columbia for a post graduate student studying in the field of geotechnical engineering. Also, in 1996 the VGS initiated the Vancouver Geotechnical Society Award, which is given annually to a VGS member that has contributed significantly to the Vancouver Geotechnical Society, and the practice of géotechnique in the

Vancouver area. The VGS Award is accompanied with a lifetime VGS membership for the recipient.

Another major initiative by the VGS was the coordination and sponsorship of the Commemorative Issue of the Geotechnical News magazine as part of the Jubilee celebrations at the 50th CGS Conference held in Ottawa in 1997. The Commemorative Issue featured the history of geotechnical engineering in Canada and was entitled "Geotechnical Engineering in Canada – An Historical Review". The articles on the history of geotechnical engineering in the 150 page Commemorative Issue were written by eminent Canadian geotechnical engineers, and the document was edited by Cyril E. Leonoff, P. Eng. The Commemorative Issue was sent, free of charge, to all members of the CGS in 1997 as a contribution by the VGS in recognition of the 50th anniversary of the CGS Conferences.

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