

MURRAY C. HARRIS (1930–2000)

By P.K. Chatterji, Heinrich Heinz and Robin Tweedie



Murray Harris was born in Cranbrook, B.C. He graduated in 1953 with a BSc in Civil Engineering from the University of British Columbia, and obtained his MSc in Geotechnical Engineering in 1964 from the University of Alberta. He started his engineering career with CP Rail in Western Canada, then moved to Underwood McLellan (now AECOM) in Saskatoon, and later joined International Power and Engineering on the design and construction of the W.A.C. Bennett Dam on the Peace River.

He later worked at R.M. Hardy and Associates, and in 1978 joined Thurber Engineering in Edmonton as Chief Engineer. He served as President of the company from 1983 to 1990 and then remained with Thurber as a Specialist Consultant until his retirement in 2000.

Murray Harris worked on many major projects such as the Syncrude Oilsands Plant and the Mildred Lake Tailings Pond; the Big Horn Hydroelectric Project; major thermal plants that included Sundance, Battle River, and Sheerness; the Genesee Power Station Cooling Pond; Paddle River Dam; and LRT tunnels and stations in Edmonton. He was responsible for the foundation design of several major buildings in Edmonton such as the CN Tower and the Edmonton Centre.

Murray was instrumental in establishing the Geotechnical Society of Edmonton (GSE) in 1969. His efforts in forming the GSE were recognized by an award from the Society in 1983. He authored numerous papers on earth dams, foundation engineering, oil sands and pipelines. One of his notable contributions was an article on the life of his mentor Dr. R.M. Hardy, published in the commemorative edition of *Geotechnical News* in 1997. The article can be found in the CGS website's Canadian Geotechnical Virtual Archives under *Geotechnical Engineering in Canada: an Historical Review, 1997*. Murray served as an Associate Editor of the *Canadian Geotechnical Journal* from 1992 to 1996.

In 1985 Murray received the Frank Spragins Award from APEGGA in recognition of his integrity, expertise and outstanding accomplishments in the field of Engineering, Geology and Geophysics. He became a Fellow of the Engineering Institute of Canada in 1990.

Murray was married to Georgina (Jo) and together they raised four children. He enjoyed time

with family on his acreage outside Edmonton. Senior engineers at Thurber Engineering who had the privilege of working with Murray remember his quick wit, dry sense of humor, and the level of camaraderie he brought to all his projects. He was always an advocate for innovation, and was quick to adopt desktop computers, spreadsheets and the Internet when these 'novelties' first surfaced in the 1980s and 1990s. Murray's outstanding technical leadership and mentorship of young engineers contributed immensely to Thurber's success through the years.