

LAWRENCE G. (LARRY) SODERMAN (1927-1969)



Professor Larry Soderman was raised in Minaki, Ontario, and served with the Royal Canadian Navy as a stoker on Atlantic Convoys during World War II. He graduated in Civil Engineering from the University of Manitoba in 1952, and then worked on the St. Lawrence Power Project.

In 1955, as an Athlone Fellow, he carried out postgraduate work in soil mechanics at Imperial College in London, England. He returned to Canada two years later. While working as an engineer with Ontario Hydro, he set up the consulting company, Trow-Soderman, with Bill Trow. Larry sold his interest in that company in 1959, and was then appointed Chief Geotechnical Engineer for the Ontario Department of Highways, where he was responsible for pre-engineering studies and foundation design on developments for major highways and expressways.

Larry knew both Dr. Hugh Golder and Victor Milligan. At a dinner party at the Soderman's in early 1960, Larry put the case for a new company to Dr. Golder. "I've thought this through and you two fellows should start a company," adding, "If it does well, and I hope it does, I'll join it." The company was incorporated on July 12, 1960. Although he was the driving force behind the founding of Golder Associates, he was never a full-time employee.

Victor Milligan recalled Larry as "a delightful man – a very good shot, good athlete, good skater, good snowshoer, good man, warm, generous, thoughtful."

In 1961, Larry was appointed Associate Professor in Engineering Sciences at the University of Western Ontario (now Western University) in London, Ontario. In 1962, he joined Golder Associates as a Principal and was instrumental in establishing a Golder office in London. He brought local contacts and a well-deserved reputation for integrity. He acted as a Chief Engineer with technical excellence and served as a moral model. He authored some 13 papers, mainly on the properties of clays in Eastern Canada, but also on the design of pavements in Kuwait and on geophysics. Some papers were co-authored with Victor Milligan, and one with Hugh Golder.

Larry was an original Associate Editor of the Canadian Geotechnical Journal from 1965–1969, during the period when Victor Milligan was the initial Editor.

The listing of the facts of his experience - that he published some eleven technical papers covering various aspects of soil mechanics; that he earned the highest respect of his fellows -

gives but an inadequate picture of the man. His life had many facets. Whether as a member of technical committees or as a trapper, hunting guide, engineer, teacher, or as hockey coach, his enthusiasm was intense and his curiosity boundless. He was never timid of the unconventional nor hesitant to attack dogma where it clashed with his alert mind and logical reasoning. He sought new ways to do old things better. He engendered the Canadian Geotechnical Journal and stimulated others to make it a reality. He brought affection and zest to life. His balance of intelligence, technical ability and sound practical judgment brought him wide respect in his profession. His deep interest and compassion brought him the lasting affection of all who knew him.

Larry Soderman had a congenital heart disorder and consequently, he never slept more than four hours each night. He died at the age of 42 in 1969. While he died young, he was nevertheless an influential voice during the important early growth of geotechnical engineering in Canada – the first soil mechanics courses at the University of Western Ontario, the beginnings of the Geotechnical Research Centre, the founding of Golder Associates, and first years of the Canadian Geotechnical Journal,

To this day, the L.G. Soderman Award is awarded annually to an engineer to assist with pursuing graduate studies in Civil Engineering at Western University.

By John Seychuk

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Larry Soderman was born on 7th December 1927 in Winnipeg, Manitoba, but from an early age was brought up in Minaki, a small community in the Lake of the Woods area in North Western Ontario. It was there that he developed his great love of the outdoors. For several of those years, he trapped and acted as a guide to fishermen and hunters.

Following service as a stoker in the Royal Canadian Navy from 1944 – 1946, he graduated in civil engineering from the University of Manitoba in 1952, winning a gold medal as the top student in his final year. He then joined Ontario Hydro and in a period of great activity caused by construction of the St. Lawrence Seaway, he became attracted to the study of soil mechanics. In 1955, as an Athlone Fellow, he carried out postgraduate work in London, England, where he was awarded a Diploma of the Imperial College of Science and Technology. Returning to Canada in 1957, he was initially employed by Racey, MacCallum Associates Ltd. in Toronto, and practised as a consulting engineer in partnership with W.A. Trow, specializing in foundation engineering.

In 1959, he was appointed Principal Foundation Engineer for the Ontario Department of Highways, where he was responsible for pre-engineering studies and foundation design for major highway and expressway development. In September 1961, he was appointed to the staff of the University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario as Associate Professor in Engineering Sciences. He later was raised to the rank of Professor and in 1962, also became a Principal of H.Q. Golder and Associates Ltd. As a consultant, he was associated with a variety of projects, not only in Canada but also in the Middle East and Thailand.

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