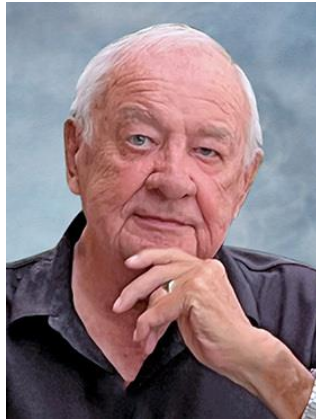


John "Jack" Crooks (1947–2024)

By Dennis Becker, with input from Jim Graham



John "Jack" Henry Archer Crooks was born in Magherafelt, Northern Ireland, on June 6, 1947, and passed away on May 6, 2024, at the age of 76. He completed his PhD in soil mechanics at Queen's University in Belfast in 1973, under the supervision of Professor Jim Graham, who is well-known to the Canadian Geotechnical Society and the geotechnical community. Jack was Jim's first PhD student, who remembers well *"Jack being a hard worker and great young colleague, with a willingness to learn, and the ability to stimulate others."*

Jack and Jim, and their spouses, immigrated to Canada within a year of each other in 1972/1973. Although Jim stayed in academia and Jack joined the consulting firm of H.Q. Golder and Associates (as known at that time) in Mississauga, Ontario, they maintained contact, including Jim inviting Jack to present well-received special lectures at the University of Manitoba.

Jack worked with Golder for over 40 years, becoming a senior partner; he was deeply passionate about the company and inspirational to his colleagues who viewed him as a wonderful friend and exceptional mentor. Throughout his career, he was engaged in consulting world-wide. He relocated from Mississauga to Calgary in 1982, becoming President of Golder Associates Western Canada Ltd. from 1983 to 1986. Between 1989 and 1995, Jack worked for Golder in Asia and Europe in both technical and management roles. Returning to Calgary in 1995, he focused on technical projects as well as business development in the oilsands, environmental remediation, pipelines, mining, and ground engineering. Jack retired from full time employment in 2012 and continued to work as a consultant to Golder for a few years thereafter.

Jack's PhD involved characterizing the soft marine clays in Belfast. That experience and knowledge served Jack and his colleagues well, in successfully delivering many challenging projects undertaken by Golder. Through Jack's vision, leadership and high capacity for work, Golder contributed substantially to advance the forefront of technology and the understanding of fundamental soil behaviour, and in transferring the knowledge gained to the geotechnical community. Jack promoted and encouraged colleagues to not only read and keep abreast of the developments published in technical papers, but to also publish their work as case records.

Jack and his colleagues pioneered yield envelope and effective stress path framework for enhanced understanding of fundamental clay behaviour and pioneered the development of state parameter as key in characterizing sand behaviour. Additional achievements include advanced CPT interpretation and innovative liquefaction assessment technologies, pipeline soil-structure interaction, and offshore island construction in the Beaufort Sea, using hydraulically placed sand and spray ice as construction materials. Jack was at the helm of it all, encouraging and guiding us 'young bucks' (at that time) with

his zealous nature to be the best that one can. For those interested, Jack's article on the work in the Beaufort Sea in the 1980s is an interesting and worthwhile read; it is posted on the CGS Virtual Archives (see [The Challenge of the Beaufort Sea](#)).

Jack was very proud of his and his colleagues' achievements, and rightfully so, saying (quoting from his 'Beaufort Sea' article), *"while I had an excellent technical career in Mississauga, the work we did in Calgary was incredible – "the best of times". And we had fun – perhaps we were too young to appreciate the maelstrom we had entered and survived. We certainly were young and in desperate need of personal security, but we were always reaching – so we tried harder. We were very committed to learning and advancing the state of the art in geotechnique. What also comes with youth is arrogance which led to us to the belief that we could do anything better than any of our competitors or anyone else for that matter. Spirit by itself always takes care of at least half the battle."* These positive and confident statements stuck with us and have been repeated to our colleagues when faced with challenging projects.

Jack was a firm believer of the importance of testing in geotechnical engineering and design. He knew the value of trust-worthy clients and being confident that we were delivering quality products and insights. It truly was the implementation of 'build it and they will come.'

Jack had the innate ability to quickly identify the key aspects of the problem, and to formulate a practical approach towards effective solutions, based on fundamental theoretical considerations and scientific principles. One of Jack's many talents and attributes was his ability to articulate complex issues in a simple manner. He also had the capability of effectively communicating with professional colleagues and laypersons. Personally speaking, in difficult and challenging projects, I would often pause and say, "what would Jack do?" – that always helped so very much and led to positive outcomes.

Jack was held in extremely high regard by all and had a tremendous influence on those he met. He was an exceptional and special mentor to many. He always found time to discuss issues, answer questions or direct colleagues to sources that would provide the information and guidance required.

Jack was a leader in how to apply basic honesty in one's life. He said what he believed in and lived by it – he knew what was right and wrong. He fully practiced his values during his personal and professional life.

One of Jack's favourite saying was, *"Let me speak words"*, and he often did. He also started many conversations with younger colleagues saying, *"I want to get into your head"* – his trademark meaning of "I want to better understand you". Jack and his loving wife, Sheila, graciously and generously opened their home to colleagues and friends. There were many good nights of Irish hospitality and drink, "speaking words" and listening to Jack play guitar.

Jack will be greatly missed and remembered for his love of life and zealous nature to be the best that one can. He is survived by his his wife Sheila, daughter Sarah, sons Alan and Brendan, and three grandchildren.