

Stanley (Stan) Thomson (1923-2016)

By David Cruden, 2016



After service as a bomb aimer for the Royal Canadian Air Force during the Second World War, Stan Thomson studied Civil Engineering at the University of Toronto, graduating in 1950. He was recruited by the Royal Canadian Engineers in 1949. His 1954 posting as Soils Engineer for the Alaska Highway brought him into contact with Professor R.M. Hardy. Their collaboration on the first tests of the shear strength of muskeg resulted in Thomson's M.Sc thesis in 1955. He joined the staff of the University of Alberta in 1959 and was awarded the University's first Ph.D in Soil Mechanics in 1963. A first class honours degree in Geology followed in 1971.

To his research interests along the Highway and in the Northwest Territories, Stan Thomson added investigations of movements of river valley slopes throughout Alberta. Support for this work, from the Government of Alberta and the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, continued long past his formal retirement in 1984. Some of his contributions were to safety guidelines for siting construction above valley slopes, a textbook of terrain analysis, a first synthesis of landsliding in Canada and guides to Edmonton's geology. His insights, published in more than 80 papers, continue to stimulate his many students and co-workers.

He was a founding member of the Geotechnical Society of Edmonton, his service recognized by the Society's creation of the Stan Thomson Service Award. In 2008 the Society numbered him among 8 Leaders in Geotechnical Engineering in the Province. He was the Engineering Institute of Canada's CPR Medallist in 1990.

Stan was predeceased by his wife (of 70 years), Doreen, and his elder son. He is survived by three daughters and a son, nine grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren