

CYRIL EDEL LEONOFF (1925-2016)

By Alex Sy, 2016



Cyril E. Leonoff, P.Eng. died in Vancouver, British Columbia on April 7, 2016, in his ninety-first year. Cyril was one of the earliest pioneer practitioners of soil mechanics and foundation engineering in British Columbia, now known as geotechnical engineering.

Cyril was born 1925 in Winnipeg, Manitoba. He enlisted in the Canadian Armed Forces in 1944 and served until the war ended in 1945. He then attended the University of Manitoba and studied civil engineering. There he met his future wife, Faye Matlin, who was taking an Arts degree program. Both graduated at the same time in 1949, married, and moved to British Columbia, where Cyril took up an engineering position with the Rivers and Harbours Branch of Public Works Canada in New Westminster.

In early 1951, Cyril accepted a postgraduate fellowship at the Engineering Experimental Station at the University of Washington (UofW) in Seattle, under Professor Robert Hennes, who had studied soil mechanics with Karl Terzaghi at MIT. Cyril went on to study wave forces on breakwaters and received an MSc degree in civil engineering in 1952.

After graduating from UofW, Cyril and his family returned to Vancouver, British Columbia and joined the one-year old geotechnical engineering firm of Ripley and Associates. Together with Charles F. Ripley (1922-2007) and Earle J. Klohn (1927-2013), Cyril co-founded Ripley, Klohn and Leonoff Ltd., which grew nationally in the 1950s and 1960s, and internationally in the 1970s, to become Klohn Leonoff Ltd. Cyril was a specialist in marine, pavement and soft ground engineering, and worked on many industrial projects in British Columbia and Canada. He retired from engineering practice 1985 as Executive Vice President of Klohn Leonoff Ltd. At the time of writing, today's successor to that firm is known as Klohn Crippen Berger Ltd.

On retirement, Cyril pursued his love of history, particularly the Jewish history of Western Canada. As part of these interests, he completed the Public History Program at Simon Fraser University to become a researcher and writer. He authored articles and books on historical topics, and received several awards for his literary contributions.

Cyril also wrote *A Dedicated Team: Klohn Leonoff Consulting Engineers, 1951-1991*, that chronicled the 40-year history of the Company he founded. Projects undertaken by Klohn Leonoff coincided with the major post-war industrial development of British Columbia, as well

as national and international developments. The Company participated in site development for the Alcan Kitimat smelter, water supply dams and sewage treatment plants for Greater Vancouver, pulp and paper mills, hydro-electric power projects, oil refinery and mining plant sites and tailings dams.

Throughout his 33-year engineering career, Cyril Leonoff made significant contributions to the profession, participated in engineering societies, and authored several technical papers. In 1995, he was recognized with the Community Service Award of the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of British Columbia. In 1997, he was guest editor of the Canadian Geotechnical Society's special 50th year commemorative publication on *Geotechnical Engineering in Canada: a Historical Review*, published by BiTech Publishers, Richmond BC, 1997. [This document can be found elsewhere in the Canadian Geotechnical Virtual Archives on the CGS website]. In 2000, Cyril received the Vancouver Geotechnical Society Award for significant contributions to the local practice of geotechnical engineering. Also in 2000, he was inducted as Fellow of the Engineering Institute of Canada for excellence in engineering and services to the profession and to society.