

In Memoriam

Ralph B. Peck (1912-2008)



Ralph B. Peck, Professor Emeritus of Foundation Engineering at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign died of congestive heart failure on February 18, 2008, at his home in Albuquerque, New Mexico. He was born in Winnipeg, Canada, to his American parents, Orwin K and Ethel Huyck Peck on June 23, 1912.

Ralph Peck earned a Civil Engineering Degree in 1934 and Doctor of Civil Engineering Degree in 1937, both from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York. In 1938-39 he attended the Soil Mechanics course at Harvard University and was a laboratory assistant to Arthur Casagrande. From 1939 to 1942 Peck was an assistant subway engineer for the City of Chicago, representing Karl Terzaghi who was a consultant on the Chicago Subway Project. He joined the University of Illinois in 1942, and was a Professor of Foundation Engineering from 1948 to 1974. Since 1974, Professor Peck was a Professor Emeritus at the University of Illinois, and a consultant in geotechnical engineering. In 1948, together with Karl Terzaghi, Ralph Peck co-authored the most influential text book in geotechnical engineering, /Soil Mechanics in Engineering Practice/. In 1953 with Walt Hanson and Tom Thornburn, Ralph Peck co-authored the widely used text book /Foundation Engineering./

In 1942, Dr. Peck joined the Civil Engineering Department of the University of Illinois, where he remained as a teacher and mentor until his retirement as Professor Emeritus in 1974. After moving to Albuquerque, Dr. Peck continued his active consulting practice which included jobs in forty-four states in the USA and twenty-eight countries on five continents. His more than one thousand consulting projects include: the rapid transit systems in Chicago, San Francisco, and Washington; the Alaskan Pipeline System; the James Bay Project in Quebec; and the Dead Sea dikes. He authored over 250 technical publications, and served as the President of the International Society of Soil Mechanics and Foundation Engineering from 1969 to 1973. In 1974, he was awarded the National Medal of Science by President Ford. A few of his many honors include the Norman Medal, The Wellington Prize, and the Outstanding Lifetime Achievement Award in Education from the American Society of Engineers. His last project was the Rion-Antirion Bridge in Greece. It received the ASCE's OPAL Outstanding Civil Engineering Award for 2005, and is the only project outside the United States to be so honored. Ralph Peck married Marjorie E. Truby on June 14, 1937. He is survived by his daughter and son-in-law, Nancy Peck (Allen) Young, and son and daughter-in-law, James (Laurie) Peck, and grandchildren, Michael Young and Maia Peck.

In lieu of flowers, contributions can be made to:
 Ralph B. Peck Geotechnical Engineering Fund
 Univ. of Illinois Foundation
 1305 West Green Street, MC-386
 Urbana, Illinois, 61801.

In Memoriam of Professor Ralph B. Peck

By Professor Pedro Sêco e Pinto, The President of ISSMGE

To Mrs. Nancy Peck Young and Family

It is a great loss for the entire geotechnical world the physical disappearance of Ralph B. Peck. In this moment of great sadness I convey my condolences and deep sympathy in my personal name and on behalf of the International Society for Soil Mechanics and Geotechnical to Nancy Peck Young and Family.

Ralph Peck was a man of prodigious energy and fine intellect, an outstanding geotechnical engineer, an extraordinary master, a distinguished citizen and a twinkling light for all of us. A genial thinker, Ralph Peck was one the bright talents that have enlighten the Geotechnical Engineering road. We are indebted for his outstanding contribution for the advancement of knowledge in soil mechanics and geotechnical engineering and his legacy will maintain for many generations and will always be a source of great inspiration for all geotechnical engineers.

Prof. Ralph B. Peck was a frequent Keynote Speaker at International Conferences of geotechnical engineering and we were always listening to his fascinating lectures with great interest and pleasure, as they were challenging and opening new avenues of research. In the treatment with people, in the devotion and patience in interacting and educating the young generation, in the strength of his character, in the sensitiveness and affability of his behavior, we can discover a Man coated for a special mission.

Ralph Peck has oriented his existence for a great and noble ideal and has always taught us that the correct method to learn science is to pursue the discovery of the scientific truth.

His legacies where the Scientist, the Professor and the Engineer are integrated in one soul, where the beauty and the truth give friendly their hands, totally justify the applause and the debt of gratitude of the current and next generations.

With best regards.