

**Dr. Ralph B. Peck
(1912-2008)
Professor Emeritus of
Foundation Engineering,
University of Illinois
at Urbana-Champaign**

In Memory of Ralph B. Peck

Teacher, mentor, engineer, colleague, and friend – Ralph was all of these to all of us who benefitted by his sharing of knowledge and experiences, insights and wisdom. He was a leader in advancing our geotechnical engineering discipline to what it is today. He showed by example the true meaning of “professional engineer.” It was truly a privilege and honor to work alongside him on several projects, to see the “observational method” in action, and to learn by example at the feet of the master.

(Jim Mitchell)

We miss terribly not being able to see you and talk to you at geotechnical engineering conferences on case histories. However, we know that you will always be with us in the books that you have written and the papers that you have written that help guide us in our professional careers.

Even though I did not study at the University of Illinois and thus, was not one of your direct students, over my 56 year career I have always looked to you as a very special teacher and mentor. From the experiences that you have shared with our profession, we have learned the observational method and how to use it appropriately. We who follow you will try our best to follow your example of sharing our experiences, offering only construction advice and doing so with appropriate respect for all involved.

(Clyde N. Baker, Jr.)

Remembering Ralph B. Peck

Ralph Peck was our link to the early years of soil mechanics and engineering practice, and for over 60 years he served as our guide to its future. He was a practicing engineer and an educator; the two were inseparable. He believed that judgment, or its foundations, could be taught, and wrote: “There is actually such a thing as engineering judgment and it is indispensable to the successful practice of engineering,” and “Theory and calculations are not substitute for judgment but are the basis for sounder judgment.”

We thank his family, Nancy Peck Young and Allen Young, who, in recent years, traveled with him and made it possible for him to continue to participate in professional activities. The book that Nancy co-authored with John Dunnycliff has sharpened our memories and given us new insights on Ralph Peck’s life and practice.

It is hard to realize that Ralph will not be here; he played a pivotal part in a number of milestones in my own life when I was a student, and later a teacher and practitioner. He educated us at Illinois, and he educated the profession, so we will carry on, but he leaves a large, unfilled space in our profession and our hearts.

(Ed Cording)



Ralph B. Peck, Professor Emeritus of Foundation Engineering at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, died of congestive heart failure on Feb. 18, 2008, at his home in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Ralph was born in Winnipeg, Canada, to his American parents, Orwin K. and Ethel Huyck Peck on June 23, 1912. He married Marjorie E. Truby on June 14, 1937. He and Marjorie have a 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.

Perhaps more than any other individual, Dr. Ralph B. Peck has served as a guide and leader in the maturing of geotechnical engineering as it has grown in the past 50 years. He has led by example, by the logic of his arguments, clearly transmitting his judgment to student and practitioner alike. He has spoken and written consistently and eloquently on the application of art and science to the practice of subsurface engineering.

Throughout his career, he has been firmly committed to engineering education and engineering practice, applying them liberally in both the classroom and on the job site.

Ralph B. Peck was a longtime supporter of our Case Histories Conferences and presented keynote lectures to the First (1984), Second (1988), Third (1993), Fourth (1998) and Fifth (2004) Conferences. He was to present a special message to the Sixth Conference, but it was not to be! Such is the will of God.

I joined UIUC for my graduate work in the fall of 1959. My dream was to work with Prof. Peck, and I was happy that he accepted me, without question.

He was a human being of Godly qualities and a wonderful instructor. I adopted his admonition in one of his classes, as my guiding principle: **“ONE YEAR’S EXPERIENCE REPEATED OVER THIRTY YEARS DOES NOT CONSTITUTE THIRTY YEARS’ EXPERIENCE.”**

I like to describe Ralph as:

**“SOIL MECHANICS AND ITS LAWS LAY HID IN NIGHT,
GOD SAID, ‘LET RALPH BE,’ AND THERE WAS LIGHT.”**

It is our sincere desire and honor to dedicate the proceedings of the Sixth International Conference on Case Histories in Geotechnical Engineering to the memory of Ralph B. Peck.

(Shamsher Prakash)