

NEWS

Donald M. Burmister's Soil Mechanics Laboratory Designated as Historical Geotechnical Heritage Laboratory

The Board of ISSMGE discussed during its meeting in Melbourne in 2012 a proposal to acknowledge the existence of some laboratories where significant contributions to geotechnical engineering had been made. As the first example to practice that decision, a plaque of recognition of Burmister Laboratory as a Historical Geotechnical Heritage Laboratory was made with the ISSMGE and Member Society logos inscribed on it.

The Donald M. Burmister Laboratory at Columbia University (New York, USA) has been recognized for its contributions to the advancement of soil mechanics by the ISSMGE and ASCE Geo-Institute. The current laboratory was constructed with the aid of an endowment by Prof. Burmister upon his retirement.

Prof. Askar Zhussupbekov, the Vice President of ISSMGE for Asia, during his occasion of delivering the 13th Burmister Lecture in the Department of Civil Engineering and Engineering Mechanics of Columbia University on April 22, 2013, presented the plaque to Prof. Hoe I. Ling, who is the Geotechnical Professor at Columbia University.

The late Prof. Donald M. Burmister (1895-1981) is one of the pioneers in the field of soil mechanics and geotechnical engineering. He received his B.A., B.S., C.E. and Ph.D. degrees from Columbia University. He joined the faculty as an instructor of civil engineering in 1929 and soon became involved in the field of soil mechanics. He established one of the first soil mechanics laboratories in the United States in 1933. He became world famous as a teacher, researcher and consultant in this area. He was on the faculty for 34 years before retiring in 1963. During his tenure at Columbia University, he investigated earthworks and foundations for over 400 projects. Most notably among these were the Brookhaven National Laboratory, the Throgs Neck, Tappan Zee and Verrazano Narrows Bridges, the First New York World Fairs at Flushing Meadows, and the reconstruction of the White House in 1950. Many of his graduate students gained important experiences through working with him on these projects and he provided financial supports to many of them from his own funds. He was a pioneer in the development of tests to determine the engineering properties of soil, and his soil classification system is still widely used. He also contributed to the first use of digital computer in conjunction with his theory of the layered pavement systems.

Photographs in this article show the detail of the plaque and its presentation ceremony.

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Detail of the plaque



From left: Prof. Emeritus Frank L. DiMaggio, Prof. Hoe I. Ling, and Prof. Askar Zhussupbekov