

# JAMES EDWARD SLOSSON (1923-2007)

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Dr. James E. Slosson was a genuine Southern California geologist, having been born at the "old ranch house" in Van Nuys, California, on April 12, 1923. While still in high school, he witnessed the devastating effects of the March 1938 floods along the Los Angeles River. He went on to become an All American in track and field, graduating from high school on the eve of the Second World War, in June 1941. He

attended college for awhile then joined the Army, where he served as an athletic instructor and aerial observer before being commissioned as a Second Lieutenant of Infantry between 1943-45. After the war Jim enrolled himself at USC under the GI Bill. He was a true USC Trojan, receiving his AB in 1949, a MS in 1950, and a Ph.D. in 1958, all in geology. A great middle distance runner, Jim coached several All Americans and Olympians on the USC track team between 1955-62.

After receiving his master's, he joined Los Angeles Valley College, where he chaired their Earth Science Department until 1965. During this period he also worked part time for Gulf Oil, which figured prominently in his Ph.D. dissertation work. Shortly after completing his doctorate, Slosson began a 50 year career in engineering geology, consulting on a wide array of projects: input for excavation and grading of potentially unstable slopes, seismic risk assessments, landslides, flood and debris flow hazards, and peer review for public agencies. He soon emerged as one of the principal spokesmen for engineering geology in the Los Angeles area, and, by 1961, was asked to sit on the City of Los Angeles Engineering Geologists Qualifications Board and the Hillside Planning Committee of the Department of Building & Safety. During the preceding decade one of every seven homes built in the United States was in the City of Los Angeles, and one in every four in Los Angeles County.

The following year (1962) Los Angeles was struck by a series of destructive storms and the stage was set for revising the City's basic grading code, which had been the nation's first such ordinance when adopted a decade earlier (1952). It was at this juncture in his life, at age 42, that Jim Slosson began to exert himself in the political arena, when he accepted prominent roles in crafting the modern grading code we know today, but also advocating statutory requirements for engineering geologic input in the grading

permit process. These new standards worked so well they were soon thereafter adopted as the grading and excavation appendix of the Uniform Building Code (1964). Jim also fought for professional registration for geologists, engineering geologists, and geophysicists in California, adopted in 1969, then served on the registration board between 1978-82. In 1973 Slosson was named Chief Deputy State Geologist for 6 months, then elevated to State Geologist by Governor Ronald Reagan. He served in that position for two years, taking a leave of absence from Valley College. As State Geologist he introduced a series of *Guidelines for Practice*, which raised the standard-of-care of engineering and environmental geologists, not only in California, but nation-wide.

He resigned in 1975, returned to Valley College, and started his own consulting firm, Slosson & Associates, in Van Nuys. At 55 years of age he began a new career as forensic expert working with attorneys, peer reviewer for government agencies and municipalities, and consultant to developers. He went on to complete over 4,000 projects over the next 32 years. He soon established himself as an effective expert, working on many high profile cases, including the Erin Brockovich case, which involved contamination of drinking water by chromium from a gas pumping station in the Mojave Desert near Barstow. The case settled in 1996 for \$333 million, the largest ever paid in a direct action lawsuit in America until that time.

Jim's honors included: being the first Richard H. Jahns Distinguished Lecturer in Engineering Geology in 1989; 1992 GSA Distinguished Practice Award; 1995 AEG Honorary Member Award; first awardee of the GSA Roy Shlemon Applied Geology Mentor (1996); and the 1997 AIPG John T. Gayley Memorial Public Service Award. In 1992 Slosson and civil engineer Gerald Shuirman collaborated to write *Forensic Engineering: Environmental Case Histories for Civil Engineers and Geologists*, which was recognized by GSA's Burwell Award in 1997. It remains one of the classic texts on forensic engineering.

Jim was a registered geologist in 12 states, Certified Professional Geologist No. 1109 in the American Institute of Professional Geologists, and Certified Professional Hydrologist No. 933 in the American Institute of Hydrology. He published more than 100 articles, abstracts, and presentations at society meetings. He also served as a guest lecturer at Caltech; USC; UCLA; U.C. Berkeley; Cal State Universities at Los Angeles, Northridge, Fullerton, and Long Beach; Harvard; Occidental College; University of Arizona; Portland State University; Texas A&M University; and the University of Wisconsin.

Jim passed away in Los Angeles on April 28, 2007, at the age of 84, having struggled with a number of ailments for an extended period of time. His lifelong love was his wife, Nancy, who died two days before Jim's passing.