

Robert L. Schiffman
1923–97



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Robert L. Schiffman, Professor Emeritus of Civil Engineering at the University of Colorado at Boulder, died in Atlanta, Georgia, on 10 August 1997.

Bob, as he was known, was born in New York City on 27 October 1923. He obtained a BCE from Cornell University in 1947. After graduation he worked for a time as an assistant civil engineer with the New York City Department of Hospitals, but he soon returned to academic life as a research associate and instructor at Columbia University, taking his MS in 1951. There he attended the stimulating lectures on applied mechanics given by R. D. Mindlin, which came to have a profound influence on his choice of a future career. After this he worked for a spell with the consultants Moran, Proctor, Meuser and Rutledge in their New York office.

Towards the end of 1955 he joined the staff of Lehigh University, but soon moved on to Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute as an assistant professor. Here he worked for his doctorate, which he obtained in 1960, becoming associate professor shortly after. During these years and until 1966 when he departed to become Professor of Theoretical Soil Mechanics at the University of Illinois at Chicago Circle, he was a Visiting Professor of Civil Engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Finally, in 1970 he joined the University of Colorado at Boulder, where he became both Associate Director for Research at the Computing Center until 1977 and Professor of Civil Engineering until his retirement in 1994.

Bob's research interests covered a wide field. He made significant contributions to the theory of consolidation, and solved a number of two- and three-dimensional problems in linear theory and explored the application of finite strain theory to important practical problems in soft soil engineering, with tailings dams, sedimentation, waste disposal and off-shore engineering problems being important examples.

As a pioneer in computer applications, he had been involved in various aspects of software development since the 1950s. In his work on Soil Engineering Problem Oriented Language (SEPOL) he was at the forefront of the development of interactive computer graphics. In the 1970s, he recognized the need to validate software and computer codes, and this concern led to the creation of Geotechnical Engineering Software Activity (GESA).

In 1969, Bob was elected to an Overseas Fellowship at Churchill College, Cambridge, but sadly this never came to fruition owing to Professor Roscoe's death the following year.

In 1977, the award of a Fulbright Fellowship allowed him to spend time at the University of Zagreb, and thereafter he maintained a close contact there and lectured from time to time at the Civil Engineering Institute, where he was awarded a Special Commendation in 1987. Then in 1980 he became a Visiting Professor of Soil Mechanics at the Ecole National des Ponts et Chaussées in Paris, which he visited on every available opportunity, staying with his daughter, who lived in Paris with her family. From this base, Bob, already estab-

lished as both an Anglophile and a Francophile, extended his overseas connections, and soon post-graduate students were coming to work with him from England, France, Italy, Yugoslavia, Spain, Norway and elsewhere. For many of these, he secured grants to attend masters and doctorate programs at the University of Colorado at Boulder, and these and many others will remember him with affection.

Bob was widowed in 1996 after nearly 50 years of married life with his wife Edith. Many will recall with pleasure and gratitude their warm hospitality over the years. He is survived by a son, James, and daughter, Winifred, and three grandchildren.

—R. E. Gibson

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