



IN MEMORIAM

Hugh Donald McNiven
Professor of Engineering Science, Emeritus
UC Berkeley
1922 – 2009

Hugh Donald McNiven, professor emeritus of engineering science in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, died peacefully of heart failure in his sleep at his home in Berkeley on December 7, 2009. He was 87.

Hugh McNiven was born in Toronto, Ontario, Canada on August 6, 1922. He was the second of three children born to James McNiven and Pearl Beatrice Mary (Jackson) McNiven. He graduated from Etobicoke High School and from the University of Toronto, where he received the degree of Bachelor of Applied Science in Civil Engineering in 1944. Following graduation he served in the Canadian Army, rising to the rank of lieutenant. On completion of his army service he enrolled at Cornell University, where he served as instructor while working for the degree of Master of Civil Engineering in mechanics and structural engineering, which he obtained in 1947. He then worked as a structural design engineer with firms in Boston and Toronto, until in 1953 he entered Columbia University in pursuit of a doctoral degree.

At Columbia, Hugh's research was conducted on mechanical wave propagation in elastic rods under the direction of Professor Ray D. Mindlin, and he pursued research in this area throughout his subsequent career. This work was of great importance, both theoretical and practical, especially in the field of acoustics, and led to his being named a fellow of the Acoustical Society of America.

Hugh completed his doctoral research in 1957 and accepted a faculty position in what was then the Division of Structural Engineering and Structural Mechanics (SESM) in the Department of Civil Engineering at the University of California, Berkeley, where he served as lecturer pending completion of the formal requirements for the degree of Ph.D. in engineering mechanics from Columbia. At the beginning of 1959 he was appointed associate professor of civil engineering, becoming professor in 1964.

Shortly after coming to Berkeley, Hugh met Marion Elizabeth ("Chip") Fitzhugh, an architecture student, who became his wife on September 12, 1959.

On becoming established as a Berkeley faculty member, Hugh became active in University affairs, both on the Berkeley campus and statewide. He served on the Academic Senate's Special Committee on Public Relations, the Berkeley Division's Representative Assembly, and the Committee on the University Extension. He also served on the President's Commission on ROTC.

Hugh's appreciation of the arts led him to active involvement in the planning of the University Art Museum (now the Berkeley Art Museum), helping in the acquisition of important works for the museum's collection.

He served on the Museum Council from its formation, and was its president during 1969-70, the year leading up to the museum's inauguration.

Around the same time, Hugh served as chairman of the Special Committee on Mathematics of the Berkeley Unified School District Board of Education.

In the 1970s, when Berkeley came to be one of the world's foremost centers of research in earthquake engineering, Hugh McNiven became active in this area of research in addition to his work on wave propagation. He was particularly interested in using the technique of systems identification for the analysis of structures subject to earthquake excitation, and published, together with several former and current doctoral students, numerous papers relating to structures made of steel, reinforced concrete, and especially masonry. His activity in this area of research led to his being named, in 1980, director of the Earthquake Engineering Research Center (EERC), a position that he held until 1985.

As a classroom teacher, Professor McNiven was greatly appreciated both for his thoroughness and for his witty informality. He taught classes not only in his specialty of theoretical solid mechanics but also in engineering mathematics and in structures for architects.

Panos Papadopoulos, professor of mechanical engineering at UC Berkeley and a former student in SESM, writes: "Hugh was a wonderfully engaging lecturer with an effortless delivery and a disarming sense of humor, even when lecturing on highly technical matters. His lectures were filled with the same deep humanity that permeated the rest of his life. As he was approaching retirement, Hugh often joked in class about the travails of old age, although his students remember him as both mentally sharp and quick-witted."

Hugh McNiven retired in 1991. The number of his research publications is in excess of 100. His colleagues fondly remember his good-natured wit and his gift for exchanging informed opinions on all kinds of subjects.

After retirement, Hugh pursued his major hobby, that of antiquarian book collecting.

He is survived by his wife, Marion; his daughter, Carolyn Fitzhugh McNiven; his grandsons, Charles Lee Sohn and James Henry Sohn; and his sister, Kathleen Compton.

Jacob Lubliner

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