



*Robert L. Smith*

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1923-1995

By Ross E. McKinney

Robert L. Smith, professor emeritus of Water Resources Engineering at the University of Kansas, died on December 9, 1995, at the age of seventy-two.

Bob was born on October 31, 1923, and raised in Schaller, Iowa. Growing up in Iowa gave Bob a strong work ethic and a sense of responsibility. He graduated from Schaller High School as valedictorian in 1941 and began his college education at the University of Iowa. World War II interrupted his education. Bob served with the United States Army in the South Pacific. He was a staff sergeant in the 756th Field Artillery Battalion. After the war Bob completed his B.S. in civil engineering with honors at the University of Iowa and went on to obtain his M.S. in civil engineering while working at the Iowa Institute of Hydraulic Research under the watchful eye of Hunter Rouse in 1948.

With his M.S. degree in hand, Bob Smith moved to Lawrence, Kansas, and joined the Kansas University Engineering School faculty as an assistant professor of applied mechanics. He remained on the faculty from 1948 to 1952 during the brunt of the World War II veterans enrollment.

In 1952 Bob was appointed executive director of the Iowa Natural Resources Council. Over the next four years Bob gained an insight into some of the water problems that faced the Midwest. He also began to learn that political solutions to

water problems were not always the same as engineering solutions. As a young engineer, he found that real-world problems were not as simple to solve as the problems in engineering textbooks. His success in Iowa attracted attention in Kansas. In 1956 Bob Smith was appointed as executive secretary and chief engineer of the Kansas Water Resources Board. For Bob this was a perfect opportunity. Kansas had suffered through periodic floods and droughts and needed a sound water resources policy. With great effort Bob was able to help develop the Kansas Water Plan and to get the Kansas legislature to accept it.

As Bob Smith stepped back to look at his accomplishments at the Kansas Water Resource Board, the University of Kansas decided to establish a new graduate program in Water Resources Engineering and Water Resources Science. Dean John McNown persuaded Bob to join the civil engineering faculty at the University of Kansas and develop this new graduate program in water resources. It was a perfect opportunity to put his knowledge of water resources into teaching to help a new generation of engineers gain a better understanding of how the public and policymakers view engineering decisions concerning water resources issues. The new program was interdisciplinary drawing upon engineering, liberal arts, and the law.

Emphasis on water research at the federal level resulted in the establishment of Water Resources Research Institutes at land-grant universities across the country. Because of Bob's Water Resources Program at the University of Kansas, the state of Kansas established its Water Resources Research Institute at both Kansas State University and the University of Kansas. It was only natural that Bob Smith was appointed the director of the Water Resources Research Institute at the University of Kansas. In 1966 Bob was appointed chairman of the Civil Engineering Department at the University of Kansas as well as being invited to serve as special assistant to the director, Office of Science and Technology, under President Lyndon B. Johnson. This gave Bob an opportunity to help influence critical water resource decisions at the national level and gave

him new insight into how engineering decisions are made in Washington. He served as chairman of the Committee on Water Resources Research for the Federal Council for Science and Technology. After a year in Washington, Bob returned to the University of Kansas as chairman of civil engineering and helped the department to grow and mature as a major engineering research department. He stepped down as department chairman in 1972 to devote more time to teaching and research.

Bob's water resources research dealt with the development of quantitative methods for evaluation of floods and droughts. His midwestern experience had shown him that periodic floods were followed by periodic droughts and that engineers should understand both extremes. It was important for young engineers to be able to measure the normal water cycles and to predict the consequences.

Bob Smith was elected to the National Academy of Engineering in 1975 in recognition of his contributions to water resources planning and engineering. Over the years he served on a number of committees for the Academy and the National Research Council. His last committee assignment was for the Commission on Geosciences, Environment, and Resources, Committee to Evaluate the Hazardous Materials Management Program of the Bureau of Land Management, March 1989 through December 1992.

Bob was also very active in the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE). He was chairman of the Water Resources Planning Committee of the Hydraulics Division in 1962 and president of the Kansas Section in 1963. At the University of Kansas Bob served as faculty adviser to the student chapter of ASCE from 1967 to 1969. In 1972 he chaired the Committee on Water Resources Education and in 1976 the Water Resources Planning Committee. He served as chairman of a Special Inter-Divisional Committee on Federal Policies in Water Resources Planning from 1981 to 1985, and he chaired the Local Arrangements Committee from the ASCE National Specialty Conference, Division of Water Resources Planning and Management in 1987. Bob was very proud to be a member of the

ASCE and strongly believed that all civil engineers should be members of ASCE and actively participate in the society's activities at all levels.

It is not surprising that Bob was willing to serve on other committees at the state and federal levels. He was a member of the United States Geological Survey (USGS) Advisory Committee on Public Use of Water Data from 1965 to 1988. He served on the Office of Water Research and Technology Advisory Panel on Water Resources Research in 1976. From 1956 to 1965 Bob was chairman of the Kansas Negotiating Team for the Kansas-Oklahoma Compact on the Arkansas River Basin. He was a member of the Governor's Economic Research Advisory Committee in Kansas from 1964 to 1966; and vice-chairman of the Governor's Task Force on Water Resources, 1977 to 1978. He never turned down a request for assistance if he could help.

In addition to serving as chairman of the Civil Engineering Department and director of the Water Resources Research Institute at the University of Kansas, Bob Smith was an active participant in committee assignments at the university level, the engineering school level, and at the department level. Bob's greatest academic concern was always for his students. He attracted the best students and challenged them to rise above the accepted standards to reach their highest potential. One of his greatest rewards was working with his students on special projects after they had graduated and had entered professional engineering.

Bob received a number of awards in recognition of his accomplishments over the years. In 1967 the Kansas Engineering Society recognized him as the "Outstanding Engineer of the Year." He received the USGS Centennial Plaque in 1980 and the Kansas University, School of Engineering, Miller Award for Professional Service in 1985. The Water Resources and Management Division of ASCE gave him its Julian Hinds Award in 1988. The University of Iowa gave him its Distinguished Alumni Achievement Award in 1990; while the University of Kansas gave him its Distinguished Engineering Service Award in 1993. The American Institute of Hydrology bestowed on Bob its Ray K. Linsley Award in 1991.

At the University of Kansas, Bob served as the Glen Parker Distinguished Professor of Water Resources and as the Deane Ackers Distinguished Professor of Civil Engineering, retiring in 1989 as professor emeritus. During the course of his teaching, he was an inspiration not only to his students but also to younger faculty members. He always gave his best and expected everyone around him to do the same.

A major part of Bob Smith's success came from the loving support he always received from his wife, Lucy. Bob Smith and Lucille Johnson were married in Rochester, New York, in 1947. They had two lovely daughters, Barbara and Deborah. Both daughters went on to become medical doctors and raise their own families. For Bob, the most fun in the summer came when he was fishing with his five grandchildren in Minnesota.

Bob Smith was a teacher, a researcher, and an engineer's engineer. He was a leader in developing engineering water resource policies that made life better for everyone.