

Roy G. Johnston

1914 – 2008



Roy G. Johnston, a structural engineer who helped to shape the Los Angeles skyline and to develop the seismic requirements in our building codes that protect us from the devastating effects of earthquakes, has died. A founding partner of the structural and civil engineering firm, Brandow & Johnston Inc., he practiced the profession he loved for 67 years, retiring in 2002 at the age of 88.

In September 1945, Johnston joined forces with George E. Brandow, a fellow U.S.C. Trojan, to found their firm which went on to design the skeletons of over 20,000 projects throughout Southern California. Their work included high-rise office buildings, hospitals, convention centers, universities, airports, schools, and industrial facilities. The most notable in the 1940s was the Los Angeles County Courthouse and Administration Building; in the 1950s were the Los Angeles Sports Arena, the California Bank (first building over the previous 12-story height limit), and the Superior Oil Building (first all-welded structural steel building in Los Angeles). In the 60s, Brandow & Johnston designed the TransAmerica Tower (built as the Occidental Tower), the University of California Irvine Campus, the Lockheed L1011 Palmdale Facility, and much of the modern USC campus (with work continuing up to the present); in the 1970s were the Pepperdine University Campus, the Los Angeles Convention Center, the Broadway Plaza, and the Getty Museum in Malibu; in

the 1980s were the Bradley International Terminal at LAX, the MCA Hilton Hotel, the 400 South Hope Office Building, and the Los Angeles Central Library Renovation and Expansion; and in the 1990s were the 550 South Hope Office Building, the Kaiser Baldwin Park Medical Center (one of many such facilities for Kaiser), and the Palm Springs Airport.

Johnston was dedicated to the advancement of structural engineering, especially the seismic design of buildings in support of earthquake safety. He was President of the Structural Engineers of Southern California in 1961 and President of the Structural Engineers of California in 1962. A Director of the Earthquake Engineering Research Institute (EERI) from 1979 to 1981, Johnston was on the U.S. EERI delegation that went to mainland China in 1980 as an early guest of the Chinese government. A consultant to the National Science Foundation, he was also a member of the national Building Seismic Safety Council (BSSC) for more than a decade, serving as its chair from 1982 to 1985 while the National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program was being developed.

From 1970 to 1978 Johnston served on the California State Board of Registration for Professional Engineers and Land Surveyors and was its President in 1976 and 1977. After the 1971 San Fernando earthquake which killed 64 people at the VA hospital there, he was appointed as the structural engineering representative on a five-member Veterans Administration commission which established and implemented seismic safety standards for construction work on VA hospitals nationwide. Serving with the commission for

eighteen years, he helped guide the expenditure of over 2 billion dollars a year in retrofitting and construction projects. From 1986 until 1994, Johnston served on the State of California's Building Standards Commission, which during his tenure dealt with such issues as greater access for disabled persons, better energy conservation, and the implementation of a uniform building code.

Throughout his life, Johnston served as a "mentor, inspiration and role model for many engineers"¹. He was elected to the National Academy of Engineering in 1981. He was further recognized with the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce Construction Industries Committee Achievement Award in 1981, the USC Engineering Alumnus Award for Outstanding Achievement in 1982, the Institute for the Advancement of Engineering's Southern California Engineer of the Year in 1985, and the Structural Engineering Association of Southern California's Engineer of the Year in 1990. In 2000, the Institute for the Advancement of Engineering presented Johnston its Lifetime Achievement Award, the only time this award has been given.

Born in Chicago in 1914, Johnston attended U.S.C. during the depression on an alumni scholarship and was a member of the debate team. Deeply appreciative of the opportunity for higher education that had been granted him, he later served for twenty five years on the Board of Trustees at Westmont College in Santa Barbara, being chairman from 1972-1988. During this time (1973-1977), he also served as a Director of the Independent Colleges of Southern California. A member of the Pasadena Covenant Church, Johnston served on that church's council for over fifty years.

Pre-deceased by his first wife Naomi, Johnston is survived by his wife Lucille; his daughter Judith; son Robert and wife Catherine; two granddaughters, Elizabeth and Margaret; and his brother Paul and wife Lillian and children. The family has asked that any memorial donations be made to the building fund of the Pasadena Covenant Church.

A memorial service will be held on Saturday, March 29, 2008 at 11 a.m. at the Pasadena Covenant Church, 539 N. Lake Ave., Pasadena, CA.

1. Hart, et al. "Conversation With a Master", *Structural Design of Tall Buildings*, Vol. 6, 1997.

