

Clarkson Pinkham

A Lifetime of Contributions to Structural Engineering

With nearly 60 years in the profession, “Pinky” has spent a lifetime sharing his structural engineering expertise with others in the field.

Through a career in structural engineering that has spanned almost 60 years, Clarkson “Pinky” Pinkham has contributed his knowledge not only in his home state of California, but throughout the nation. An AISC Lifetime Achievement Award winner in 1999, Pinkham holds 15 engineering licenses in various states and has served on numerous technical committees. He continues to work and share his wisdom today.

A Bachelor of Science Degree in Civil Engineering in 1947 from the University of California at Berkeley laid the foundation for Pinkham’s broad experience in structural engineering. But he came into the field by what he describes as “quite a bit of happenstance.”

After serving in the Navy during World War II (eventually rising to the rank of Lieutenant Commander), he started looking for a job in Los Angeles. Pinkham did not want to limit himself to sanitary engineering, which he majored in at Berkeley. Through his father, who worked for the City of Los Angeles Building Department, he was asked to visit the offices of structural engineers S.B. Barnes and Associates. Before he knew it, he had accepted a job with the company without even knowing his salary.

Pinkham doesn’t remember his first project at S.B. Barnes. However, he says the firm’s founding principal, Stephen B. Barnes, had a lasting impact on his career.

“You would ask him a question, and if he thought you should figure it out, he would just walk away.” Pinkham remembers. “He wouldn’t tell you the answer so that you had to stop and figure it out yourself.”

Pinkham has remained with the firm for the whole of his career, serving as president from 1964 to the present. With

S.B. Barnes, Pinkham has worked on the design of elaborate buildings and air terminals, including high rise structures and terminals for Los Angeles International Airport. He also determined and formulated design capacities for metal decks now used as diaphragms for most major deck manufacturers.

Diaphragm testing and obtaining code approvals eventually became a major part of Pinkham’s work. In fact, he worked with William LeMessurier in obtaining steel deck approvals for the Citicorp Building in New York City, completed in 1990. Pinkham assured LeMessurier that, based upon actual site testing of the diaphragm, the steel deck would be adequate to provide the necessary integrity for the 658’ high rise.

He has been generous in sharing his abundance of structural engineering experience and knowledge with those who have requested it on subjects such as structural steel, concrete and masonry design, cold formed steel structures, and timber. By providing solutions and recommendations to those requesting his expertise, the integrity of numerous structures has been significantly improved, in particular the capacity to resist seismic generated forces. But as he says, “I just do what I can to help someone with a puzzle.”

Though Pinkham is now 85 years old, he is still working and using his skills and experience to improve structural design and knowledge. He says he is slowing down due to health factors, but he continues to work most of the week at his downtown office. As to retirement, he says, “If you like what you’re doing, what’s to retire?”

Pinkham is currently working on several projects, including diaphragm capacity and code approvals of metal decks for several manufacturers, as well

as evaluations of existing buildings to resist the effects of both seismic and gravity loads.

Pinkham served as president of the Structural Engineers Association of Southern California (SEAOSC) in 1971 and later served as president of the Structural Engineers Association of California (SEAOC) in 1975. He also acted as technical secretary of AISC Task Committee 9 on Seismic Design for 12 years.

“Pinkham made tireless efforts in his contributions to the committee,” said incoming AISC president Roger Ferch, who served with Pinkham on the seismic design task committee. “He combined everyday English with the technology of the specifications to end up with a document with one meaning. He rises above the norm,” Ferch continued.

On the forthcoming 2005 AISC *Seismic Provisions for Structural Steel Buildings*, Pinkham says, “If done properly, Buckling Restrained Braced Frames (BRBF), as defined in the 2005 AISC *Seismic Provisions*, will probably perform better than Eccentrically Braced Frames (EBF).”

Pinkham also urges engineers to increase their understanding of weldments and how they perform, particularly De-



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mand Critical Welds as identified in the 2005 provisions.

Pinkham still serves on many other important technical committees involved in structural design, such as the AISC Committee on Specifications (emeritus), the American Iron and Steel Institute (AISI) Committee on Specifications for the Design of Cold-Formed Steel Structural Members, the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) Committee 7 on Minimum Design Loads for Buildings and Other Structures, and the Building Seismic Safety Council (BSSC) Steel Committee.

Over the past 50 years, Clarkson Pinkham has devoted tireless effort serving on more than 30 other diversified technical committees and boards of directors serving the structural engineering community, including:

- Seismology Committee of the SEAOC
- Earthquake Engineering Research Institute (EERI) Board of Directors
- American Society of Testing and Materials (ASTM) Committee on Metri-cation
- American Concrete Institute (ACI) Board of Directors
- American Welding Society (AWS) Committee on Light Gage Steel
- The Masonry Society (TMS) Board of Directors

In appreciation of his service to the profession, Pinkham has received many honors, including:

- ASCE-Fellow (1983) and Lifetime Member (1991)
- ACI-Fellow (1983) and Kennedy Award (1986)
- SEAOC-Fellow (1994-1995)
- SEAOSC-Honorary Member (1984)
- SEAOSC-Stephenson B. Barnes Award for Research (1985 and 1990)

Based on his observations and experience, Pinky has many recommendations for structural engineers actively engaged in the design of buildings. He urges engineers to understand structural materials like steel, wood, and concrete so they can better use them for effective construction drawings. They should not just blindly rely on computers.

“The computer is not the solution,” he says, “It is only a tool.” ★

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