

Arthur Casagrande gives counsel

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SYNOPSIS Before the Author and James F. Haley founded the consulting firm of Haley & Aldrich in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1957, we met with Dr. Arthur Casagrande at Harvard University to discuss the proposed firm and seek his counsel. Dr. Casagrande believed that a market for a private practice in soil mechanics and foundation engineering would develop and he offered his blessing and encouragement. As we left his office, he said with a wry smile, "Now, when dealing with your clients, don't make it look too easy."

In the fall of 1956, James F. Haley and I met for lunch to discuss the possibility of forming a partnership to practice soil mechanics and foundation engineering. Jim had been Deputy Chief of the Foundations and Materials Branch of the New England Division, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and I was an Assistant Professor of Soil Mechanics in the Department of Civil and Sanitary Engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

We recognized the financial risks involved since our professional practice would be the first in New England outside of consulting provided by members of the academic community. Jim and I were both married, each with five children. We agreed that our proposal and the risks of establishing a successful practice should be discussed with Dr. Arthur Casagrande, Professor of Soil Mechanics at Harvard University and the acknowledged leader in the discipline. We hoped that Dr. Casagrande would give us his blessing.

Jim Haley and I both knew Casagrande and had great admiration and respect for him. Jim had studied under Casagrande, receiving a Master of Science degree in the soils program at Harvard in 1940. I had taken Casagrande's course in seepage, and during the 1955-56 academic year, I was Visiting Lecturer on Soil Mechanics at Harvard when Casagrande took a sabbatical leave.

Dr. Casagrande agreed to meet with us, and our conference in his office at Harvard was very encouraging. He believed that a market for our services would develop and that our respective educational backgrounds and experience complimented one another.

With Dr. Casagrande's blessing and counsel, we founded the firm Haley & Aldrich, Consulting Soil Engineers, on 1 January 1957. At the time, few people knew what soil mechanics was, or what soil engineers did. The market was very lean. It took many years to establish the role of the geotechnical engineer as an important member of the design/construction team. Years later, Jim and I would realize that we were in the right place at the right time. New England, a region of complex geologic history with highly variable and challenging soil and rock conditions, was on the verge of major development.

And what was the counsel Dr. Casagrande gave us that day in 1956? As we left his office, he said with a wry smile, "Now, when dealing with your clients, don't make it look too easy."