



**Roger Tomlinson,
Honorary Member
November 17, 1933 - February 7, 2014**

“Roger had a profound influence on the surveying and mapping community. His pioneering work in GIS made it possible to analyze and derive information in ways never before imaginable. We owe Roger a debt of gratitude for his work in creating a solution that allows us to build a more sustainable and just world.”

- Alex Miller, President and Founder of Esri Canada
Dr. Roger Tomlinson, whom we fondly knew as the “father of GIS”, passed away on Friday, February 7, 2014 at the age of 80.

Dr. Tomlinson invented the first computerized GIS back in the ‘60s, when he developed the Canada Geographic Information System for use by the Canada Land Inventory.

Canada Land Inventory (CLI) was established in 1962. CLI set out to produce about 1,500 maps of land use and land capabilities at 1:50,000 and 1:250,000 scales. Though the maps were made by traditional manual methods, Roger Tomlinson (then employed by Spartan Air Services of Ottawa) convinced the head of CLI that computers could be used to automate map analysis. CLI invited Tomlinson to define the functional requirements of what would later be called the Canada Geographic Information System. His carefully considered use of the qualifier “geographic” caught on and has created opportunities and challenges for the discipline of geography ever since.

Thanks to Dr. Tomlinson’s innovation, we can now easily overlay unlimited amounts of data on dynamic, digital maps and analyze information in numerous ways previously not possible. From climate change, overpopulation, poverty, disease outbreaks and flooding, to managing power outages, emergencies and optimizing site selection, GIS is being used today in various industries to help solve virtually any location-based problem.

Dr. Tomlinson’s invention of GIS led to the development of today’s computerized mapping technology, digitizing tables and global positioning systems. As well, his work advanced mapping as a profession and established a thriving industry that employs thousands worldwide.

He was a great friend to Esri Canada and an inspiration to many geographers. His work spanned over five decades and has helped organizations worldwide apply GIS to increase efficiency in map production, provide fast and easy access to digital data, and improve decision-making through visual spatial analysis.

In 1963, Dr. Tomlinson established Tomlinson Associates, a geographic consulting firm that served international clients including the World Bank, and the US and Canadian Forest Services. He was a sought-after speaker at GIS events worldwide and presented at several Esri conferences.

For his outstanding work, he received the Esri Lifetime Achievement Award (1997), the Royal Canadian Geographical Society’s Gold Medal (2003) and the National Geographic Society’s Alexander Graham Bell Medal (2010). In 2005, he became the first recipient of the Association of American Geographers’ Robert T. Aangeenbrug Distinguished Career Award. He was made an Honorary Member of the Association of Ontario Land Surveyors in 2011 for his leadership in the area of GIS. In 2001, he was named a member of the Order of Canada, the country’s highest civilian honour, and was promoted in 2013 to an Officer of the Order of Canada for transforming the field of geography with his invention of GIS.

Sources:

Esri Canada. 2014. “Remembering the Father of GIS.” Esri Canada Blog.

Esri. 2012. “The 50th Anniversary of GIS.” In ArcNews. Esri Press.