

THE CHITTENDEN AWARD: ITS CONCEPTION AND GESTATION

By Rick Magee

The Hiram M. Chittenden Award for Excellence in Interpretation in the Corps of Engineers was inspired by the Freeman Tilden Award of the National Park Service.

Back in 1986 and 1987 the Tilden Awards were presented at the Association of Interpretive Naturalists in the Delaware Water Gap and the National Interpreters Workshop in St. Louis respectively by the Director of the National Park Service, William Penn Mott. At both events the presentation was off-site and food for the entire conference was part of the deal. You might say that we from other agencies felt like captive audience. At the St. Louis Botanical Garden Amy Galperin, Debby Chenoweth, and yours truly sat together and said, "We should do this for the Corps." We brainstormed ideas for a namesake. Debby Chenoweth suggested Chittenden.

I attended Antioch/New England Graduate School, now renamed Antioch University/New England. A Masters Project was a major requirement for a Master of Science in Resource Management and Administration (now also renamed.) I selected the topic of recognizing excellence in resource interpretation. My Masters Project, about 100 pages, summarized research into professional recognition, into the NPS Tilden Award and how it was then set up, and a proposal for an Award for the Corps of Engineers. I received my degree in May 1992.

Hiram Chittenden was the namesake because of his reputation within our agency as a highly regarded Army Engineer, his work in Yellowstone and other National Parks, studies of water resources in the Rocky Mountain West and of possible flood control in the Ohio River basin, and his design and construction of the Lake Washington Ship Canal in Seattle. Also he was a published writer in many popular periodicals of his day and was successful as an advocate for the National Parks in the years before NPS was created. His books on the history of the American West are still highly sought resources. As a West Point graduate and former District Engineer he provides our program additional standing with our agency's higher leadership.

My Master's Committee included Gail Vander Stoep, PhD, then at U. Mass Amherst, George Tabb, and Maich Gardner, my advisor from Antioch, New England.

It took awhile from the time I submitted my proposal in early 1992 until the Corps adopted it. Dave Dutton, then at Sardis Lake, was the first recipient in 1995. In the meantime, Amy Galperin went to work for the Bureau of Land Management and started their Sense of Wonder Award. The U.S. Forest Service also added their Gifford Pinchot Award about the same time.

It has been heartening to me to see the Corps of Engineers reward excellence in interpretation each year. For one thing, it is great to have a Masters Thesis that is implemented, not just another dusty document on the shelf. And more often than not the recipient has been someone I know and have had the pleasure of working beside in my career with the Corps of Engineers.